Beacon Lights

For Protestant Reformed Youth

DECEMBER — 1942

There shall come a Star out of Jacob ...

Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the
Glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

And there were shepherds abiding in the
field ...
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War creates its own problems, particularly for young people whose lives are so directly affected by it.

By far not the least weighty of these problems for many of our young people is the question of a war marriage. Shall they marry now, before the young man leaves for active service in the armed forces, or shall they postpone every consideration of marriage at least for the duration?

Stating the question in that form we already leave out of consideration all such marriages as are directly brought about by the war. To be sure, in these days of emotional stress a soldier boy may strike up an acquaintance with some young lady, either at home or near his camp, and in order to drown his sense of loneliness rush into marriage with her. Or some giddy young woman will allow her head to be set awhirl by the sight of a uniform, is flattered by the attentions of its occupant and before the excitement has died out has made an insane vow which is intended to be binding for life. Such foolhardy marriages are always to be condemned, and especially in times like these. But they can safely be left out of consideration here since we expect better things of our young people than that. Nor, on the other hand, is it necessary to consider in this category each and every marriage that is contracted in times of war. It is very well conceivable that vows are spoken which are not brought about in any way by our times and are only indirectly affected by them. If the prospective bridegroom has every reason to believe that he will not be called away into active service, the war itself need not be a reason for postponing the wedding day. Just because the country is at war does not mean that a holiday must be declared on marriages.
But I have particularly such cases in mind where a young couple have known each other and have actually kept company with a view to marriage for some time. Under normal circumstances they would be married now or in the not too distant future. But as the case now stands the young man will be, or is already called into service and their separation from each other is imminent. Their problem is a very real one, shall they marry now in the face of their impending separation, or shall they postpone it until the young man returns, which may mean waiting for a number of years or even no marriage at all?

Certainly neither consideration is very pleasant, yet if the question be considered calmly and rationally there can be but one answer: wait!

Too often the arguments raised in favor of war marriages prove the case against them.

Sometimes the fear is harbored, though generally not expressed, that one or the other may not prove faithful during the period of separation, so that a wedding ring might help to remind them of their sincerity. But if sincerity lies not deeper than that, an unfaithful boy or girl friend will prove to be a greater asset than an unfaithful husband or wife. What better proof of love and faithfulness can there be than the test of a forced separation?

Or it is also possible that the young couple wish to seal their undying love for each other with a marriage vow. Yet the seriousness of the step which is taken must not be forgotten. A monthly check from the government is a poor compensation to a lonely wife, and an insurance indemnity to a bereaved widow, who has forsaken father and mother to cleave to an absent husband. The young lady may even desire to have a child as an abiding remembrance of him, but she may well consider that a mother of a child is not free to come and go as she may desire, has difficulty in keeping a job and caring for her family at the same time, and can easily make herself a burden to her mother and family. Facts are inescapable and must be considered.

The young man may even anticipate coming to a home and family of his own upon his return, and the young lady may dream of welcoming her newly-gotten husband. Yet little thought is given to the fact, that both, and particularly the young man, are due to undergo remarkable changes during their absence from one another. Will the young lady left behind still be the blushing bride of his dreams, and will the young husband still be the same person, with the same make-up and outlook on life, as she daily sees in the picture before her? Will time and the gruesome experiences
of war leave impressions which can readily be erased so that they can immediately accommodate themselves to each other as man and wife? If the war should leave him a physical or mental wreck, which does happen in some cases, and he becomes a burden to her instead of a support, should she be expected to cope with that? Surely it is better that one life be ruined than two, particularly if the possibility can be foreseen in advance. They may both be very certain of their abiding love for each other, yet love cannot overrule the grim realities of war.

But, you may ask, are there no exceptions to the rule that war marriages should be avoided? No doubt, each case stands or falls on its own merit and must be judged individually. Yet is equally certain that any young couple must have an absolutely air-tight case, especially in times like these, to escape the maxim, "marry in haste and repent at leisure".

And even so I can readily imagine that this weighty question, which so directly involves the lives of many young people, has many other angles to it. How about discussing it in our Open Forum? It can only prove beneficial to all of us.

The Mass Meeting

The mass meeting is now a thing of the past. The day came and went, and now lingers in our memories.

It is not my intention to give a report of the happenings of that day, or a summary of the evening lecture, even though this would be both possible and beneficial. The program was run off with clock-like precision, the afternoon and evening sped by all too rapidly, and according to all reports the day proved to be both pleasant and profitable.

I merely want to reflect on a few impressions left by this rather unique meeting.

The attendance was all that anyone could hope for. Taking into consideration that a number of our young men are in service, that many of the young people are working in defense and could not possibly take off, that travelling was difficult and made it impossible for many of our churches to be represented, the attendance was very good, exceeding our expectations.

A fine spirit prevailed throughout the various sessions. A spirited song service was followed by an
interesting and warm discussion of the subjects at hand. Good order prevailed throughout the day and our young people showed once more that they can enjoy and participate in a discussion of their mutual problems with the Scriptures as their guide.

Our hosts put forth every possible effort to prepare a splendid program, a wonderful supper, and a fine, Christian entertainment. Compliments are in order with a word of thanks both to our hosts in Roosevelt Park and to the Board of the Federation.

Yet no one could fail to be impressed by the fact that the war has made inroads into our society activities. Not merely because our discussions were predominated by the problems of the day, but also because the effects of the war were so evident on every hand. The mass meeting was no Convention. That we all realized. It was the next best thing since a Convention is out of the question. But we keenly felt the absence of the young men who have gone into service. The young women outnumbered the young men by far, and those young men who were present were the ones who for the most part will soon be called away with the others. That, more than anything else, forced upon our consciousness the seriousness of our times, especially for our youth.

There are more reasons to be glad that this meeting was held. Another mass meeting of this kind may not be held for a long time. But we at least are benefited by this experience even as it lingers in our memories. We realize, as one of our young people expressed it, that we are one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling, there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all. Ephesians 4:4, 5.

The "Beacon Lights" Staff

extends to all

The Season's Greetings

— 6 —
It Was Written Centuries Ago

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: And the government shall be upon his shoulder: And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God. The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

—Isaiah

"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, Though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler of Israel: Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

—Micah

"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, Which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, Lying in a manger."

—Luke

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth Peace, goodwill to men."

—Luke
The Magi

By Mr. Walter Hofman

There is, perhaps, no other Scriptural narrative around which has sprung up such a mass of tradition as that which we find concerning the story of the Magi. This is probably due to the fact that their history is recorded in such brief simplicity and has left unanswered a host of questions which arise so naturally in the curious mind of man. Who were they? Where did they come from? How many were there? So one could go on at great length asking questions which apparently are of no great interest to Scripture.

Tradition, however, has as many answers as there are questions. The number of the company is placed variously at from three to twelve, although three seems to be the favored number. The most often cited proof for this contention is the three-fold gift which is presented to the Christ Child. From the third verse of Isaiah sixty: "And Gentiles shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising" many assume that the Magi were kings. Others go to great length to establish them as shepherds or of some other calling. The best known of all the traditions actually names the visitors: places their number at four, three of whom reached Bethlehem. The fourth member of the group, so the story goes, was lost on the way and never saw the Christ until the time of His crucifixion. It is
said that this lost traveller arrived just in time to hear Christ call: "I Thirst" and to this fourth is ascribed the doubtful honor of having offered Christ the sponge of vinegar after His cry. Tradition can even show the remains of the Magi safely kept through the years in a special tomb. Obviously such stories are products of a vivid imagination.

In reference to the questions which arise, Scripture leaves us almost entirely in the dark. Or to put it positively, the Biblical narrative is told simply and directly without the addition of any non-essential details which would serve only to satisfy the curiosity and add nothing at all to the point or significance of the visit of the wise men. Turning to Scripture, we find that no stretch of the imagination would ever yield the names of the visitors and that their number is almost as obscure. So too their position and later history is not nearly so specifically circumscribed or even suggested as many would have us believe.

Among the facts that Scripture does give we might note the following. In relation to Jerusalem, they come from the East, or more correctly from the rising (of the Sun). Therefore, certainly from quite a distance, which is also substantiated from Herod's private conversation with the Magi which resulted in his decision to slay all the babies of two years and under. That they were not kings is clear from their specification as Magi, which is reference to their position. The term "Magi" may be compared to our present day astronomer. These men were students of the firmament and especially the starry firmament. What they learned as they studied the heavens, they passed on as teachers and astrologers. Also in reference to their position it can be determined that they were not poor but rather well-to-do, rich in fact. The gifts which they presented are evidence of this for they were signs of wealth at that time, even as today: nor are people with limited means and of a meager livelihood very likely to make a long extended journey. That they were Gentiles and not Jews is evident not only from their question: "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?", but also from the fact that they go first to Jerusalem and not immediately to Bethlehem. Every interested Jew surely knew that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem as prophesied by Micah.

At the time of their visit Herod occupied the throne of David in Jerusalem. The iniquitous reign of the usurper was drawing to a close. He had ascended to the throne through intrigue, trickery and by way of a bloody purge. His dissipated life had left him with a
loathsome disease as seeming expression of his wickedness. Now into his realm is born the King of Righteousness. It is He for whom and through whom the worlds were created. All of God’s revelation and prophecy converge to fulfillment in the Babe of Bethlehem. Throughout the 4000 odd years of the Old Dispensation He had been coming. Way back in Paradise Adam and Eve looked expectantly for Him for, already they, had had the promise of this Child. So too, Israel had lived earnestly awaiting His birth. In bondage, dwelling in tents or living in the Promised Land she had been constantly reminded of His coming; through her own prophets or with double emphasis through a wicked instrument such as Balaam, whom God used to prophecy so beautifully: “There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel . . .”. During the darkest hours that light of prophecy had shone ever more brilliantly, coming ever closer and keeping alive in the hearts of the true Israel the expectancy of Christ’s birth. Isaiah is full of the glory of His coming, including such specific references as: “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people: to it shall the Gentiles seek. . .” Just a few months ago when the prophecy is ready to burst into the radiance of realization He is once more promised when Joseph is told of His coming while he already sees the Babe hid beneath the heart of his beloved . . . “She shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins”. And now Jesus was born, the fulfillment of all revelation, the Saviour of His people, the Light in their darkness. He was born—yes—but not in the regal splendor of a king’s palace, or in the capitol of an earthly monarch, but in the desolation of a small town smothered in the hills of Judea. A village of no account, as it stands in the shadow of the smug smartness of a great metropolis. That was Bethlehem; not much more than a wide spot in the road about six miles south of Jerusalem. How truly the song speaks: “O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by: But in thy dark street shineth The Everlasting Light.” Prophecy has once again spoken to fulfillment: “Thou Bethlehem in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda for out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel”. But we find no beaten path to the door of His birthplace nor does it even open on the main street of
that little town. No cradle for a bed, but a manger and a layette of swaddling clothes. All these—the manifestation of divine power in utmost weakness, for though totally lacking in the natural, the scene is thoroughly equipped with the Divine. A virgin conceived and bore a son, whom the Herald angels announce to shepherds in the field, Anna and Simeon have seen the glory of the Lord and tell it in Jerusalem, and the Magi seeing His star take up their journey to visit Him.

As always a godless science seeking to frustrate a beautiful faith attempts to explain these wonders. Undoubtedly, according to some, the star the Magi saw was nothing more than a conjunction of planets, while others go to great length to prove that it was a comet. Scripture points out that star as a unique occurrence; miraculous in its appearance and effect. No Jupiter or Saturn nor yet Halley's comet but HIS star, created in the beginning and predestined from eternity and now called forth to serve its particular purpose and follow its specified course as HIS star. And after all, is a conjunction of planets or a comet so much easier to explain or believe than HIS star? The most that we or Science can ever do is gaze in awe at any star and ask: How I wonder what you are?

With the wonder of that particular star, the Magi undoubtedly received a special revelation. They must have had an expectation not only of the birth of Christ, but also of a star to announce His birth for they designate this stranger in the heavens as HIS star. Their immediate and subsequent action, also is an indication of a Word of God to them for they take up their journey—not to China or Africa, but to Palestine coming not only to visit at the home of a new born babe but to bow before a promised Messiah who had been revealed to them as worthy of praise and adoration.

Coming to Jerusalem they ask: "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?". Apparently this great city is too busy enjoying itself to be concerned about its only legitimate business of worshipping the True King and consequently the question of the Magi falls on deaf ears. That was their negative response, but they also responded positively, as all must. For God had sent these men to Jerusalem as witnesses of the birth of Christ. And so these Magi evoke an answer, for in faith they persevere and go to the highest authority at the palace of the King.

What a contrast is formed there. Gentiles from the East, out of a heathen land with a mere spattering of knowledge demanding "where is He?". Over against these dusty and weary travellers, the
palace of the King. Herod on David's throne. The Scribes and Pharisees representing the Jewish nation. Interpreters and copyists of the law and the prophets with the whole library of prophecy and revelation at their fingers tips, for without hesitation, argument or dissenting opinion, they give the answer of Micah, "Not here, but in Bethlehem of Judea."

No wonder then that Herod and all Jerusalem was troubled. For they had been put to shame by these Gentiles. But greater cause yet for inward commotion and uneasiness of heart and mind was the fulfillment of the Scriptures which the carnal heart and mind of Herod and all Jerusalem dread so much. And in that troubled heart lies the real answer to the Magi's question. The expression of that troubled heart, the real answer of Jerusalem comes a few years later when they cry, "We have no king, but Caesar", and shout, "Crucify Him". And on the sign on His cross was their final answer, "This—This is Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews".

Once again the travellers take up their journey, departing from Jerusalem with heavy hearts. Nor is there found even a kindly stranger to lead them on their way. But, behold, they are not alone! Their God has not left them, nor does He ever cease to guide His sheep, for lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them. Through this only means, divine guidance, they are led to Bethlehem. Seeing the Star, they rejoice with exceeding great joy. Their inmost beings filled with renewed hope and happiness drowning out and effacing all the disappointment and heartache of a few moments before. Now they have completely left the world behind and through divine guidance are led to the very doorstep for the star went before them until it came and stood over the very house where the young Child was.

Their journey has not been in vain. Their seeking has been a finding, and this they acknowledge by bowing reverently with faces to the ground: doing homage to the new born King. Having opened their hearts, they also open their hands. Gold—for His Kingship? Frankincense—to a Priest? Myrrh—for His prophetic office? Perhaps, but certainly unwittingly for to them these gifts were the expression of the best that they had; the best their country could offer.

Their sacrifice concluded. they rest in peace at the close of a glorious visit. During that night God reveals to them to depart into their own country a different way. They are gone, but surely we may believe that God has not left them alone. He whose star had gathered them from their Eastern homes to Bethlehem, and whose Spirit had
prompted them to worship, He has not left them to die in heathen ignorance of unbelief. Surely we may cherish the hope that they who bowed so reverently before the earthly cradle are now worshipping with a more profound reverence before the heavenly throne and that they too, shall one day rise up in judgment of their generation and condemn it, for they too came from the uttermost parts of the earth.

May the lessons they have taught be written deeply in our hearts and ne'er forgot. May we too express unquestioning obedience and persevering faith as we take up our journey to the heavenly throne, while led by the Star of complete revelation. The Star that has risen and never sets, but is with us constantly—the Word of Truth. "We have a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto we do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in our hearts."

The Magi belong to that prophecy as a fulfillment of it; as the first fruits of the Gentiles that have come to the brightness of His rising. They express the expanse of the Kingdom which is no longer for the Jew only, but also for the Gentile. They bow and worship at Bethlehem's cradle as our representatives, the first expression of our faith and offer of our allegiance. Let us rightly follow in their steps. Seeking to find. Finding to worship. Worshipping to offer treasures. All this is now also our blessed privilege through Divine grace. Our privilege all the way to the heavenly home where shines THE STAR eternally.

Star of the East.
thou hope of the Soul.
While round us here,
the dark billows roll.
Lead us from sin,
to glory afar.
Thou Star of the East,
Thou Bethlehem Star.
BEACON LIGHTS

Natures Zoo

By Mr. C. De Boer

Thousands of miles away on the island continent of Australia, there is an unusual collection of unique animals belonging to the class mammals (animals whose bodies are covered with fur and who nourish their young). Mammals may be classified into three groups: egg-layers, pouched and placenta. (The latter type is the kind of animal with which we are familiar as the dog, horse, pig, lion, monkey, etc.) However, members of the first two groups are found only in Australia with just one exception, the opossum.

Only two specimens of egg-laying mammals are in existence today. One of the remaining type is the duck-bill, which resembles the beaver in shape and size but its mouth is similar to the beak of a duck from which it derives its name. However, the webbed feet, flat tail, and general appearance remind one of a beaver. Anyone searching for this animal would find it inhabiting fresh water streams. Contrary to the habits of the beaver, which builds its home of sticks and logs in the stream itself, the duck-bill burrows into the bank of the stream where it lays its solitary egg. When the period of incubation is over the egg hatches, and the baby duck-bill receives nourishment from its own mother.

The other egg-laying mammal is the spiny-anteater, which resembles our native porcupine, but differs in respect to its mouth, for the anteater's is a long slender tubelike structure, marvelously adapted to the capture of insects. If one would investigate the interior of this unusual mouth one might be surprised to discover the absence of teeth. However, it is equipped with an extended slender tongue which produces a sticky secretion enabling it to capture its prey.

Very interesting is the marsupial group or "pouched mammals". The young when born are so unusually helpless and immature that they require special care. How beautifully adapted the mother's body is for this very purpose, for, located in the lower region of the chest is a special pouch or marsupium into which the young climb after birth. Here the young live and are nourished by their mother for several months. Most of the
marsupials are vegetarians; that is, they live on plants, getting their food supply from the roots and leaves.

Most of us are familiar with the kangaroo, which is characterized by its deer-like head, abbreviated fore-legs, long powerful hind limbs, and its large sturdy tail. Many people have misconceptions concerning its size and often visualize it much larger than it actually is. In reality, however, the species vary from the size of a rabbit to that of a sheep. They are known to be very timid and cautious. The most interesting feature is the development of the young. Imagine a baby kangaroo the size of your little finger, for they are only about one inch long when born! Gradually, these wee babies make their way thru the furry coat of the mother until they reach their destination—the pouch, where they find shelter and nourishment for a period of eight months. Certainly, there must be an intimate love and maternal instinct of protection developing in that time. The kangaroo's tail is a great asset in sitting, for it acts as the third leg of the "stool". In some sections of the continent this pouched animal occurs in such great numbers that they prove to be a menace to the herdsmen who find it difficult to obtain sufficient grass. The pouched animals, you remember, are vegetarians. Their hides provide valuable leather for shoes, belts, and similar articles, while the natives use their meat as a source of food.

The wombat is a second example of a marsupial. It resembles a small bear but its flesh tastes like pork. Rugs and mats are made from the coarse long hair of the animal. It might be interesting to add that it has nocturnal habits, for that is when it is most active.

Australia's most fascinating animal, which has drawn international attention in the past few years, is the koala or "teddy-bear." Our common toy, the teddy-bear, which is so greatly enjoyed by infants, is an imitation of the original, native to that continent. The adult is about two feet long and weighs about twelve pounds. Its soft thick fur, pudgy nose and friendly disposition make it a favorite subject of much affection. Strange to say, this little animal drinks no water, and if given some, it endeavors to chew it. The feet are well adapted, to climbing and suspending the body from limbs, as its toes are divided into groups of two's and three's. Of the four hundred eucalyptus trees native to the continent, only twelve species prove to agree with the teddy bear's finicky diet; all others have proved fatal. Without a doubt this explains why even the famous zoos in New York and London have not been successful in keeping them. Only a few import-
ed into California were able to maintain themselves, because a certain species of eucalyptus could be grown there. When the baby kaola is born, it is about the size of a small beetle. It, too, like the kangaroo young lives in the mother's pouch for eight months. The next few months it clings to the mother's back, and is thus carried about from tree to tree, riding like an Indian papoose. Although they were at one time plentiful in the Australian forest, the number has decreased considerably, for they were ruthlessly shot and sent to the U. S. when the supply of fur diminished from our own forests. The kaola pelts were used for making cheap fur coats and other articles. Today, however, a law prohibiting the killing and exporting of any kaolas is rigidly enforced. Furthermore, a large reserve, known as Kaola Park, has been set aside to protect them.

On our own continent we have the only marsupial existing outside of Australia; namely, the possum. There are approximately twenty species varying in size from a rabbit to a large cat. The young are so tiny that a dozen can be held at one time in a single teaspoon. They are nocturnal in habit and maintain themselves by devouring small snakes and bird's eggs. When this creature is in danger, it relaxes its muscles and acts as if it were dead; hence, the expression "playing possum."

There are many other very interesting animals in Australia with which most of us are unfamiliar, as the animal life there is very different from our own continent. This article, however, merely introduced just a few of the unusual ones, in an attempt to stimulate your interest in further study.

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IN MEMORIAM

The Staff of BEACON LIGHTS and the Executive Board of the Federation join with all our Young People in this expression of sympathy with our Editor-in-Chief, the Reverend C. Hanko, in his recent bereavement.

— 16 —
Current Events

By the Rev. H. De Wolf

The Second Front

By far the most significant of all the war news is that of the second front which has been started in Africa. Although it is claimed that this is not really the second front which has been so widely discussed, it is nevertheless a second front. That is evident from the fact that it has succeeded in diverting much of Germany's military strength from the Russian front; the pressure on Stalingrad has been considerably decreased, so that now the offensive has been transferred from the Germans to the Russians. So far the American forces have been quite successful in their African campaign and it seems as though there is a real possibility of driving all the axis troops out of that coast-line territory. With the English pursuing Rommel's shattered forces and with the Americans pushing on to meet them, we can expect one of two things: either that Germany makes a last stand, which will result in sharp fighting; or that it will attempt to move out all its troops which can still be saved. The first seems to be the more probable. We should be careful, however, that we do not think that the war is practically won even though all the axis forces are driven out of Africa. We are told that only then the real second front will develop. It is expected that the allies will attempt an invasion of axis territory beginning with Italy. And that can be done only with a tremendous loss of life.

What About Italy?

One hears persistent rumours about the Italian people's dissatisfaction with the axis. And no wonder! What has Italy gained by its union with Nazi Germany? She is no better off than any of the conquered countries. No wonder that there should be regret on the part of the people and perhaps there is a great measure of truth in the rumours that the sympathy of the Italian people lies on the side of the allies and that the only thing which prevents its open display is German domination. It is for this reason that many expect that an allied invasion will see the
Italian people in open revolt against the axis and sharing in the allied drive. Well, its a possibility at least.

*The Pacific Conflict*

A great allied naval victory! That is the report. And that is all we can go by, even though we are often inclined to be skeptical. There are also many reasons for being somewhat skeptical of all the reports which are published. One hears so much of enemy losses and so little of our own losses that one cannot help but wonder about these things. It certainly doesn't seem very plausible that all the losses would be on one side; still that is the impression that is being left. It is just about too much to ask of anyone in their right mind. Perhaps the reports of enemy losses are true but very likely there is a lot more to the reports of our losses than we are permitted to know. It is a fact that it is the U. S. policy to suppress the news of our losses for fear that it would give valuable information to the enemy. We may expect that, when the facts are made known, also our losses will be great.

*God Works*

That the hand of God guides the affairs of men and nations becomes apparent time and again in this present world conflict. God is destroying many lives through the angel of death. There are many who will not speak of the fact that God kills men; they think that is awful. The fact is, nevertheless, that it is true. Follow if you will for example the course of the present war and you will see that that is true. Think of the German successes in the beginning of the war. Recall the course of the conflict in Russia. Think of the conflict between Germany and England in Egypt and Lybia. There is one thing that stands out in all these conflicts and that is that each had a period of success and a period of defeat. Take the German conflict in Russia for an example. First Germany invades Russia and makes great gains but is stopped by the Russian winter. Then Russia takes the offensive and succeeds in driving the Germans back, only to find that in the ensuing seasons the Germans, in a renewed offensive, drive them back again. Then history repeats itself and we find the Germans stalemated again by the cold winter and a second front. And so it goes on every front.

Yes. God rules.

The angel of death is reaping an abundant harvest.

May God give us grace to realize that He is the Only Rock, a strong Defense in the day of trouble and may we learn to pray evermore, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done"!
Dear fellows:

When you will receive this letter Thanksgiving Day will be a thing of the past. In fact, for many of you, especially if you have already crossed the big pond, it will be almost forgotten, so that you will, perhaps, be surprised that I still write about it. But, then, you must remember that I am writing this letter to you on the twentieth day of November, and that at the time of this writing it is still a week before Thanksgiving Day. And, besides, even though we celebrate Thanksgiving Day as a national holiday once a year, thanksgiving itself is not a matter of any special day, but of our whole life.

It is only in as far as we are quite conscious of this fact, that thanks to God cannot be limited to a certain day or season, and, what is more, that it is not to be rendered for certain things only, but that it is real joy in the Lord, that it is possible for us to celebrate Thanksgiving Day this year; and that this is possible, not only for us, who are “at the home front”, but also for you, who are in the service, and, perhaps, actually at the battle front. When we consider just “things”, there is many a bitter drop in our cup of thanksgiving this year. No doubt, especially on days like Thanksgiving Day, which seems to be an especially homely day, a day on which we like to gather as families at our own fireside, we are sharply reminded of the stress of the times, you by being away from home, we by feeling your absence. And we might feel as if there were plenty of reason to disagree with the ways of God, rather than to give thanks. Or, perhaps, we might select certain things, and give thanks for them, while we try to forget the less pleasant circumstances of the present time. But that is not true thanksgiving, and it is certainly not the teaching of Holy Writ. If thanksgiving were rejoicing in “things”, there will be thousands of God’s people this year whose thanks to God must die on their lips. But that is not the case. It is joy in the Lord! It is rejoicing in the God of our salvation! And that joy is permanent. It is not dependent on circumstances. For God is always the same. His ways are always perfect. Whatever He does, we know that His work is worthy of all praise and glory and thanksgiving. And we know, too, that He controls all things, also the present war, and all that is connected with it. And He so controls all things that they must all be conducive to the salvation of them that love Him, and to the coming of His eternal kingdom. No, we do not understand His ways always, but we know this by faith. And so we rejoice in Him and give thanks whatever the way may be.

It is to that God that we always commend you in our prayers. And may God give you grace daily to commit all your way to Him! He will bring it to pass!

Yours in Christian love,

Rev. H. Hoeksema

— 19 —
Dear . . ..

It sure is a job to keep up on one’s letter writing, especially when about the only time one can write is on Sunday. I’m feeling fine and getting along alright so far. I keep busy every day and that helps to keep my mind off from the things at home and also helps to make the time go faster. I think that the societies are doing a wonderful job in writing to us . . . it cheers a fellow up . . . and you should see the faces brighten when we have a mail call. It usually takes about a month or six weeks for a letter to reach us from the States . . . but I did get a letter which took only seventeen days to get here.

There isn’t much that I can tell you about what I do or about conditions here. It is winter here now and the weather is a whole lot like California weather. It will be getting warmer here soon now. The people here in Australia are about like the folks at home. They talk the same language . . . Their money is entirely different from ours. Instead of our dollars and cents they have pounds, shillings and pennies. A pound is worth about three dollars and twenty-two cents and there are twenty shillings in a pound. That makes a shilling worth about sixteen cents and there are twelve pennies in a shilling. It was all rather confusing at first.

Corp. Tech. Henry Koster Australia.

Dear Sirs:

I received my first copy of Beacon Lights yesterday and read it through immediately. I enjoyed it very much and hope I’ll get more. I had been losing contact with our church and its’ activities of late and I believe the Beacon Lights will be an excellent means to regain contact with our people again.

It made me a little bit home-sick while I was reading about the activities of the different societies, particularly the Young Men’s Society. It seems as though one never appreciates what he has till he loses it.

I would certainly appreciate an occasional letter from any member of our church. My address is: Cornelius Nobel, Section 7, Hospital Corp School, Great Lakes, Ill. This will be my address for three more weeks. When I have moved I will notify you of the change.

My work here in the Hospital Corp School is very interesting. It includes: Nursing, First Aid, Minor Surgery, X-ray technique, Field Hygiene, Sanitation, Pharmacy and related subjects. It is a large field.
and consequently there's plenty of room for advancement. It's primary objective is to preserve life and not to destroy it, which is the reason that I chose the Medical Department of the Navy. A nice feature is that we sleep in swell beds, not hammocks, and we have better than ordinary Navy "chow". The coffee is as bad as other Navy coffee although we get all we want. I'm in excellent health and hoping some of my old friends who read this will write to me.

Sincerely yours, Corny Nobel

* * * * *

Dear . . .

I am feeling fine and by this time am quite an outdoor fan—more like a farmer or woodsman. I admit it's great but 'oh' for an easy chair or a good bed 'with a mattress and everything'. The old story about keeping our chin up is sort of fading now. It is terribly monotonous each day but my work is very interesting and credit is given to that for my not being homesick.

I would like to tell you a lot about Australia but many things must be withheld . . . it is a very beautiful country. Many things are backward in comparison to the many conveniences that we have in the U. S. A. We are given passes quite frequently and then lodging is our main difficulty. It is hard to find a hotel and the best we can do is depend upon the peoples' hospitality which abounds. They welcome us here and show their gratitude in many different ways. Transportation is another problem . . . we have the same difficulty as you people now have at home and that is the gas (called petrol over here) rationing.

I might list a few things of interest: Tractors are quite unheard of. It is common to see from 12 to 14 horses pulling a plow, or 16 to 20 oxen pulling a logging wagon. Flying foxes, squirrels, kangaroos and all types of insects are numerous. The trees . . . the abundance of flowers and well kept gardens are a sight. Mutton stew is on the outs with us. When we first arrived they fed it to us morning, noon and night, but we sort of cured them of that and now we are getting plenty of beef which is more to our liking. Our American dishes, when mentioned to them, are all too extravagant. We live altogether too fast for them. There are plenty of oranges, lemons, bananas, pineapple and ever so many more types of fruit which I had never heard of before.

St. Sgt. John Wierenga Australia,
Outline X

ABRAM'S SOJOURN IN THE LAND OF PROMISE

2nd week of December

Heb. 11:9, 10 —

By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

The previous verse tells of Abraham going forth at God's command this verse speaks of his sojourn in the land of Canaan.

THE LAND OF PROMISE

By "the land of promise" as it is spoken of in vs. 9 we must understand Canaan, the earthly Canaan. The text cannot refer to the heavenly Canaan of which the earthly is a type, for in the heavenly reality no one is a stranger or sojourner. Besides, vs. 10 tells us that he sojourned in the land of promise because he looked for the heavenly city.

The land into which Abram came was the land of promise. It was that then, it is that now in the New Testament no more. Some teach that Canaan is still the promised land which the Jews will inherit. However, the promise of receiving has been fulfilled in the past, and now the church looks directly to the heavenly Canaan. For Abraham it was and remained the land of promise. Personally he never so much as owned a foot of ground in it, except the cave of Macpelah which he bought at a good price to bury Sarah. All his life he was a stranger dwelling in a strange land, among strange peoples. The text says that this also applies to Isaac and to Jacob after him. It was not till some four hundred years later that Abram's seed received the land as their possession. During the life of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob the land was the property of the Canaanites. Theirs were the cities and the land. The land was also
quite densely populated as the history of Genesis clearly shows. Abraham was therefore in Canaan a man without a country. Nowhere could he settle down. Neither might he, he was called to go up and down in the land. When death entered his home he did not even have a tomb to bury his beloved Sarah. Stephen in Acts 7:5, 6 pictures Abraham as a wandering nomad, an alien in a strange land.

That Abraham sojourned in the land of promise implies therefore: 1. That he never possessed a foot of ground in Canaan he could call his own, except the tomb he bought. That he lived as an outsider. 2. It also meant that he lived as a stranger among the peoples. He did not amalgamate with them and become a Canaanite. He lived alone, even naturally—apart from their cities and customs. Above all, he did not join in their religions; he everywhere built altars to the Living God.

This separate life Abraham choose. He could have intermingled, but for God's sake he might not and did not. He could have become a mighty leader among them, but he would not. He could have returned to Ur, but he remained stedfast to his divine calling.

Undoubtedly Abraham the father of believers is an example for us to follow. We must not intermingle, we must be spiritually separate. Our residence here below must be a spiritual dwelling in tents.

**Why Abraham Lived as a Sojourner**

The text says, "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God".

What was that city Abraham looked for. One interpretation has it that Abraham was looking for the earthly Jerusalem. Those who thus interpret always resolve the hope into an earthly inheritance of some kind or another. Abraham had in mind the earthly city of David where the temple later stood. How this could have been possible for him these interpreters do not say. They claim, however, that the Old Testament nowhere tells us of a longing for the heavenly things on the part of Abraham. This interpretation referring the city which hath foundations to the earthly Jerusalem is for various reasons altogether untenable. First of all, the interpretation must weaken the meaning of "which hath foundations" and "whose builder and maker is God". The very words themselves are a warning against the earthly interpretation and refer to a heavenly city. Besides, the context of verses 13-16 plainly disproves the interpretation. And, finally, the Old Testament believers did look for the heavenly things, and very definitely. Cf. Ps. 73:24, 25: Joh 19:5-27,
etc. Surely the Old Testament believers did not see the heavenly things as clearly as we do in the New Testament, since Christ ascended and the Spirit was poured out, but essentially they too looked for the heavenly reward and inheritance. This vs. alone of Heb. 11 in connection with the following verses clearly shows it. The Spirit that inspired the writer Himself so interprets, and that should be the end of all contention on this score.

The reference can only be to what Scripture calls the new Jerusalem, the city of God, Paradise. That final manifestation of glory is called a "city", a city that "hath foundations". The latter descriptions points to the stability and permanence of the heavenly over against the temporary dwelling in tents. It is founded on the solid foundation of Christ the Lord, who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Of that city the "builder and maker" is God. "Designer and builder" would more correctly give the idea of the original, I believe. The city is entirely God's work. God conceived it in His counsel and willed it, God alone also builds it. There is no room for glory in man. All salvation is the work of God alone.

It was for that city that Abraham looked. "Looked" means: expected, longed for, waited for, hoped for. That heavenly city was the goal and object of his life.

For the sake of that final city and its glory Abraham was willing and ready to sojourn in the land of promise. He did not remain a sojourner in Canaan because he could never forget Ur, the land of his native birth. So some people always remain sojourners and never quite at home in the new land to which they come. You may not so explain Abraham's sojourn in Canaan. Abraham looked for the heavenly city. Therefore he obeyed God and dwelt alone in Canaan. Had he amalgamated he could not have entered that heavenly city. He understood that it was his calling of God to walk as a stranger in Canaan, the land of promise, and with a view to his final reward of grace he obeyed.

**BY FAITH**

This sojourn in the earthly land of promise with a view to the heavenly city as his goal was possible only "by faith". That he looked for the heavenly city and was assured of it was faith. That he sojourned in the land of Canaan and believed that his seed would receive the typical Canaan, was faith. For without faith Abraham could never have thus acted.

**QUESTIONS:** Did Canaan ever become Abram's homeland? Why did Abram dwell in tabernacles (tents)? Is Canaan still the land of promise? Did Abram remain faithful merely because he hoped...
one day to inherit the land of Canaan? Why is God called “the builder and maker” of the heavenly city? Why is final salvation pictured as a “city” instead of as a “garden”?

Outline XI

SARAH A MOTHER BY FAITH

3rd week of December

Heb. 11:11,12 Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

In the hall of the heroes of faith are also the portraits of heroines, of women who are examples of a life of faith. God’s grace is no respecter of sex, and in Christ Jesus there is no difference. Although the man more than the woman stands on the foreground in Scripture, women occupy a rather prominent place not infrequently in the sacred record. It was Mary’s privilege to be the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ who had no earthly father, it was the women’s glory to receive the good news of the resurrection first, etc. This chapter of Heb. 11 speaks in succession of Sarah, of Rahab, and then of ‘women who received their dead to life again’. Sarah’s faith is spoken of in her relation to her husband as his wife. It is Sarah the married woman, Sarah in her marital life, of which the text speaks. Twice Scripture so refers to her. Once Peter does so (1 Pet. 3), calling attention to her faith as she showed it by recognizing Abraham as the head of the home. Peter calls believing women to follow her example and to do well and not be afraid with any amazement: he speaks of the woman’s faith as manifested in her relation to her God-given husband. Hebrews 11 does not speak of Sarah so much as a wife as it does as a mother. A God-fearing wife wishes to be a mother as well as a wife. By faith Heb. 11 says Sarah became a mother, and by faith alone.

A GLORIOUS FAITH

Apparently in the light of the O. T. record it would seem at first sight that Heb. 11 speaks far too strong language when it lauds Sarah’s faith in connection with her motherhood. The text says that Sarah through faith received strength to conceive seed, because she judged him faithful that had promised. This means that she believed the promise of God in respect to seed, that she waited for that promise, that she clave to it even when it seemed hopeless, and
that at God's time she received strength and brought forth a child. Now this testimony of 1Heb. 11 is very striking. In the previous illustrations we have seen that the writer singles out exactly those instances in the lives of the saints that most clearly reveal their faith. Instances of sin, e.g. Abraham’s life in regard to Sarah, are passed by, and the one main instance most sharply bringing out faith is held up. That must be the case here too. Sarah was, of course, a woman of faith, but in this instance of her motherhood her faith reveals itself most gloriously. So Hebrews 11 would seem to imply. Now, if you compare the testimony of Genesis, it would seem that Sarah was rather weak in this matter. History would seem to disprove that “she judged him faithful who had promised”. Take, e.g. the instance of Hagar—Sarah suggested that Abraham beget seed of her, does it not seem that she had lost hope and faith, and that she took matters entirely in her own hands and acted contrary to faith? Again we might mention her laughter when God announced the birth of a son a year hence, Gen. 18: 11-15.

However, the writer of Heb. 11 is not mistaken in his evaluation of Sarah’s faith in regard to the birth of a son. Firstly, he could not be because he wrote by inspiration of the Spirit, and the Spirit is never mistaken. Secondly, as far as the case of Hagar is concerned, we must remember the following: God had not yet specifically stated that Abraham’s seed would be born of Sarah, although it was surely implied: and further, when she gave Hagar to Abraham with the purpose of begetting seed it was her faith that induced her to this act. It is true it was misguided faith, but nonetheless underneath her attempt to have a child through her maid, was the fundamental faith that God would somehow give them seed. She sought the seed and looked for it, even though Jacob-like she sought it amiss. In regard to her laughter at the angel’s announcement there is an element almost natural in her laughter because of her age. Even Mary said, “How shall these things be?” Note, further, that when the angel reprimands her laughter Sarah in her shame denies her unbelief—this could only be because she fundamentally believed that with God all things are possible. These instances indeed show an imperfect faith, yet even in them faith is not entirely absent by any means. We may be sure that Sarah looked for the fulfillment of the promise, and that when it finally came she continued in firm assurance that God would fulfill his promise. That faith for a woman who was some 65 when they left Ur and 90 years old when she
gave birth to her first-born and only son was indeed a remarkable and glorious faith.

**Her Wonder Child**

Isaac was wholly a wonder child. He was that from a *physical* viewpoint. For, as far as Sarah was concerned, she had always been barren. Besides, when the child was born she was long past the normal time of child-bearing. She was 90 years old. As far as Abraham was concerned, this was also true. "As good as dead" of vs. 12 is a deficient translation: the Dutch is better, "dat teen verstorvene". Abraham was sexually incompetent, as the original means, and as Rom. 4:19 testifies. Some have asked, if Abram was sexually incompetent, how then can we explain Keturah's children, i.e. the children Abraham begat by Keturah, Gen. 25:1-4. Two explanations are possible: either Abraham married Keturah and begat these children before this time or the rejuvenation of his body continued after Isaac's birth. But, one thing is plain, when Abraham begat Isaac it was not in the normal course of nature, but it was by an act of God. Hence, both from the viewpoint of Sarah and from that of Abraham, the birth of Isaac was from the viewpoint of the physical a miracle of God.

Isaac was also a wonder child from the *spiritual* viewpoint. Parents can only beget corrupt offspring; we pass on a corrupt nature, we cannot pass on grace. Isaac was the child of the promise, not merely because of the wonder of his *physical* birth, but also because he was the child of the Spirit. "In Isaac shall thy seed be called". Isaac was the spiritual seed, the seed of election, the seed that would believe, and in whom the covenant of God should be continued. He was that by the power of Almighty grace, and therefore surely the wonder-child.

This child, Abraham and Sarah received by faith. This does not mean that their faith as such empowered them. It rather means that they believed God's promise, and that God fulfilled that promise to which they clave. It was all by faith therefore.

**An Innumerable Progeny**

God had promised Abraham a multitude of descendants. As the stars make the impression of countlessness, and as the sands of the seashore are multitude, so God had said would Abraham's seed be. This promise God fulfills. Already four hundred years later, the descendants of Isaac and Jacob are a mighty number. In Egypt they multiplied and grew, remarkably so. All this multitude sprang from one, one that was dead.

In *the* miracle-child, our Lord Jesus Christ, the promise of a mul-
t;ud:no's offspring is finally fulfilled. Abraham becomes the father of many nations, the father of all believers. That centrally through the one great wonder-child, Jesus Christ, for whose sake Isaac was so wo:.drously brought forth in old age.

QUESTION: Why does Peter mention Sarah’s faith as wife, while Hebrews mentions her faith as mother? I prove that it is certainly true that Sarah believed the promise and judged him faithful that had promised? Why was Isaac born in their old age. so miraculously?

Outline XIII

STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS ON EARTH

4th week of December

Heb. 11:13-15 —

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country, and truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.

All men die, but all men do not die in faith. To die in faith means that one belongs to Christ, and with a living faith looks forward expectantly to the full salvation in Christ Jesus, and in that faith lays down the head on the pillow of death in the firm assurance of going home to glory. So all men do not die. Only the believers so die.

The text tells us that “these all”, so died. “These all” refers back to Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob and all the heroes of faith. So to die implies, of course, that we have lived “in faith”. It is impossible to live in unbelief and then to die in faith. As we live, so we die. To live in faith is prerequisite to dying in faith. And, to live in faith means to live as strangers and pilgrims here below.

STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS ON EARTH

The words “strangers” and “pilgrims” both stress the same fundamental thought: not yet home. However, each emphasizes the thought in its own way. To be a stranger means that in the land where you temporarily dwell you are not a citizen. The people of the land do not speak your language nor follow your customs. The word pilgrim emphasizes that although you are not a citizen you do temporarily dwell there, you do live among the others. Thus the two words are simply aspects of the same fundamental idea: not yet home. Your home is elsewhere. You do not settle down permanently, you look forward to return to your homeland, you do not give
up your citizenship at home.

God's people are described as strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Notice, the text does not say "in the world", but "on earth". The saints are also strangers in the world, in the world as it lies in sin and seeks it. The saints are not of this world and maintain their spiritual distinctiveness. Yet that is not the thought stressed here; nor could it be, for no saint is a pilgrim of that world. The text says "on earth". The word "earth" has in view creation with its natural ties, even apart from sin. Also in relation to those earthly ties, of man and wife, brother and sister, employer and employee, house and possessions, the saints are strangers and pilgrims. They may enjoy all God gives in these natural things but do not set their heart on them. They understand that these things are only a means to an end, a means on their journey to the heavenly city.

Of course, men are not strangers and pilgrims on earth by nature. By nature, even apart from sin, the saints are also of the earth earthly, and due to this may at times feel very much at home on earth and loathe to part with these ties. Yet as Christians the new life is not earthward but heavenward in its inclinations. In a good sense the Christian grows home-sick for heaven, and desires the better and heavenly country, and the heavenly ties. These spiritual ties become precious, and for them the Christian is ready to sacrifice the natural ties of flesh and blood.

Its Confession

Notice that the text says that the saints confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth. They all did. They did it by mouth and by their whole walk. They confessed it by speech, for vs. 14 speaks of those that say such things. Think only of Jacob's testimony before Pharaoh, Gen. 48:9. They, however, did not only say it. They also showed it by their whole walk. Abraham left Ur for Cannan at God's command, they all continued in this sojourn though if that had been their purpose they had time to go back. But through the years they continued faithfully to deport themselves as strangers and pilgrims on the earth. They did it and were encouraged therein by their faith, for they looked for the heavenly fatherland, the better country. They kept their eye on the heavenly reward and continued steadfast unto the end.

By Faith

This behavior of the patriarchs finds it explanation in their faith. For by faith they saw the promises afar off, were persuaded of them, and embraced them.

The promises spoken of refer to all God's promises to them. Cen-
Beacon Lights

trally, however, it is the Christ, the promise. In this center all the promises find their pivotal point, and to it all the others are related.

These promises they saw afar off. They did not see their fulfilment in their own life-time. Yet they saw them and were persuaded of them, i.e., they were convinced that God could and would realize them. And therefore they also embraced them, i.e., trusted them and acted out of the belief in their certainty.

Thus they lived. And thus they died. Even the advent of death did not change their hope. Hoping they went to glory, expecting the better fatherland and country for which they had hoped and suffered.

Questions: What difference is there between a stranger and a pilgrim? What do they have in common? Must God's people still be strangers and pilgrims on earth? If so, in what sense? Were the saints seeking the earthly Canaan as the object of their faith? Explain. What does it mean to confess that one is a stranger and pilgrim on earth? What are the implications of confession of faith? What does it mean to die in faith?

Outline XIII

Desiring a Heavenly Fatherland

1st week of January

Heb. 11:16 —

But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city.

The text speaks of desiring a better country. In a sense the whole world desires a better country, a better world. Also today this desire is frequently given expression to by wicked men. The text does not refer to this striving of wicked men, but to the definite longing of God's saints for a truly better country, i.e., for the heavenly fatherland.

The Fatherland Desired

To understand what the text means we may well begin by emphasizing what is implied when a better, heavenly country is spoken of. It means, negatively, that the saints never seek an earthly country. Both modernism and premillenarianism look for an earthly Canaan. The modernist simply seeks this world, this earth, and wants a heaven (without God) on earth. The premillenarian claims that the country the Old Testament saints sought was the earthly Canaan. They claim the Jews shall still receive it. Now it is true that departing Israel forgot the typical character of Canaan and were interested only in the earthly land and not in what it typified. The true Israel of God, however sought the earthly as a type of the heavenly, and the heavenly fatherland was
their aim and goal. Since Pente-
cost God's church looks directly to
the heavenly, and the Old Testa-
ment types are forever fulfilled.
There will be no millenial reign
of Christ on earth with the Jews in
Canaan.

Secondly, we should note that
the text speaks of the heavenly
country as a better country. We
do not know how to describe its
 glory and life; we do know it is
better, far better than ought that
has ever come up in the heart of
man.

Most important to our mind is
that this better country is, accord-
ing to the original Greek very
clearly, the fatherland. That idea
should be stressed. There is a
great difference between a father-
land and a country. One may be
living in a country, a country bet-
ter than one's own and yet not be
in his fatherland. A fatherland is
one's own country, the country of
birth and love, where one's lan-
guage is spoken, where family and
kin are. The better, the heavenly
country is the Christian's own
country, his fatherland. It is the
land of his spiritual birth and kin;
it is the land where he will be at
home and no more a stranger and
pilgrim. Thither all his desires go.
for "they desire" that country, i.e.,
long after it, yearn for it, aspire
to it. And therefore also the saints
are strangers and pilgrims on
earth, marching upwards and on-
wards to Zion, the heavenly home-
land.

THE CITY PREPARED

The text says that God has pre-
pared a city for them. Note, the
country here becomes a city, show-
ing that earthly terms are used
to explain the heavenly salvation.
A city implies permanence and
close fellowship. The heavenly city
is the "new Jerusalem". This city
God has prepared "for them". God
did not simply prepare it, but he
prepared it "for them". We may
also emphasize that there is not a
city prepared for the citizens of
this world, only for the strangers
and pilgrims.

God has prepared it. God, not
man; God alone in Almighty Grace.
The city is now prepared. First
of all, because it was eternally pre-
pared in God's sovereign counsel.
Further, it was historically real-
ized by Christ's mediatorial work.
And it is ready to be revealed in
the last time in all its glory, I
Peter 1:4-8.

There will be no disappointment
for the strangers and pilgrims.

THE GOD NOT ASHAMED

The portion "wherefore God is
not ashamed to be called their God"
is not altogether easy to explain.
According to the usual inter-
pretation the meaning is as follows:
because the saints by faith seek a
heavenly country, confessing their
God, God on his part is not ashamed of them. According to this explanation the idea is that the saints did not confess God. God would be ashamed of them seeing he has prepared for them a city. To this interpretation the main objection is that it is hard to fit it in the last part of the text. The last part of the text says the reason God is not ashamed is because he hath prepared for them a city. The reason God is not ashamed is not, therefore, that the saints desire a heavenly country and confess their God, but it is specifically because he has prepared for them a city.

A second explanation is possible, and to our mind it is the only correct one. The meaning of the text is that Christians are strangers and pilgrims without a country here below. They desire a better country but they do not yet have it. They call God their God. Seemingly God ought to be ashamed of himself, ashamed of the way he lets his children be treated on earth. But the text says God is not ashamed, nor need he be, for he hath prepared for them a city. This interpretation fits the whole context and does justice to the last part.

An example has been used to clarify the second and proper interpretation. We shall repeat it. A father has riches and wealth, lives in a palace and bathes in luxury. He has children whom he allows for a time to run in rags, to go hungry and cold. Would you not say of such a father, "He ought to be ashamed of himself, ashamed as the father of those children". So one would be inclined to say of God, and the heathen do indeed mocking say to Israel, "Where is thy God?" A God who lets his people be strangers and pilgrims on his earth certainly, it would seem, ought to be ashamed of himself.

Yet God is not ashamed, nor need he be, "for he has prepared for them a city", the heavenly city. And thither he leads his saints, and he makes all the present work together to realize that ultimate day. In his wisdom we are now strangers and pilgrims, in heaviness as long as necessary as God knows is best. But the way leads home. E'erlong the children of the king shall be clothed in glory, and at home with their God. God is not ashamed "for he has prepared for them a city".

QUESTIONS: What difference is there between a country and a fatherland? In what sense is the heavenly country the saints' fatherland? Why is this country also called a "city"? Why is God not ashamed of himself? Why must a Christian be a stranger and pilgrim here below?