

From the President

The Seventh-day Adventist Church

December 14, 1998

UPDATE

A New Voice: This weekend, while participating in a small brainstorming session focusing on church issues, a question was raised about the upcoming change in the composition of the delegation for GC Session 2000. As we are preparing to move into 1999, perhaps this is a good time to offer a brief explanation of this change. At GC Session-Utrecht in 1995, it was voted to change the constitution and by-laws in order to rebuild the demographic of future session delegations. Simply speaking, this means that more church members, local church pastors, and teachers will be added to the delegation. It was also voted to limit the delegation to 2000. It is hoped that this decisive move will add a new and fresh voice to future GC Sessions.

ADRA Serves in Yemen: Did you know that ADRA estimates they will help nearly 40,000 people in Yemen in 1999? ADRA established its work in Yemen in 1995 in a predominantly Arab and Afro-Arab region with 338 villages and 213 hamlets. Their primary target populations are women and children, which can be extremely difficult to communicate with due to the nature of local culture. Also, the status of women and children (particularly girls) throughout the target population is considered quite low. Women's education is not seen as important locally, and girls are not typically encouraged to attend school beyond elementary years. Because of this, the literacy rate for women in Yemen is an estimated 26 percent. Another statistic that drives the work of

ADRA in Yemen is the estimated under age five mortality rate of 110 per 1,000 live births. These statistics and others have led ADRA to the development of successful programs in women's literacy and small enterprise development, a nutrition project that focuses on vitamin A, and a village pharmacy project. As the Yemen project grows, we will continue to report on its progress in *From the President*.

FOCUS ON FAITH

The Languages of the Bible: In our last few segments we studied the formation of the New Testament canon. In the next two segments we will briefly look at the languages of the Bible. Any student of the Bible will profit from a study of the three languages in which the Word of God was originally written -- Hebrew, Aramaic (a cousin of Hebrew), and Greek.

HEBREW: Except for a few chapters in Daniel and Ezra in Aramaic, the Old Testament has been transmitted in the Hebrew language. In the Old Testament it is called "the Jews' language" (2Kgs 18:26 KJV), or the language of Canaan (Isa 19:18). It belongs to the Canaanite branch of the Semitic family of languages and is closely related to Phoenician, Ugaritic, and Moabite. The story of its development is unknown, but the earliest biblical reference to spoken Hebrew is found in Gen 31:47, where Laban calls a heap of stones Jegar Sahadutha, which is Aramaic, while Jacob in Hebrew calls it Galeed (heap of

witness). This would place spoken Hebrew at the beginning of the second millennium BC.

Hebrew was the living language of the Israelites until the Exile. In Babylon they adopted the language of their conquerors -- Aramaic. Hebrew continued as the literary and sacred language as the non-biblical literature in Qumran (1 century BC and AD) and the Bar Kochba letters (AD 132) show.

Hebrew thinking focuses on the concrete rather than on the abstract. Things are generally observed according to their appearance as phenomena rather than analyzed as to their essence (e.g., the creation story). The language, therefore, is rich on similes and metaphors; some even found their way into the English language, e.g., "apple of the eye" (Deut 32:10; Psalm 17:8) and "skin of my teeth" (Job 19:20). On the other hand, Hebrew is poor when it comes to adjectives and adverbs, and sentences are short and blunt, which makes the language difficult to translate. Furthermore, the Hebrew verb system has only two tenses which refer primarily to complete and incomplete actions rather than to past, present, or future. Isaiah in chapter 51, for example, uses what is called "the prophetic perfect" (completed action) although the cross was still 700 years in the future. The death of the Messiah in the future was considered so certain that it was expressed in the "past tense." ■

