

From the President

The Seventh-day Adventist Church

December 21, 1998

UPDATE

A Report on the Church family in Iraq: Roland Fidelia, communication director of the Middle East Union, reports that Seventh-day Adventist Church members and buildings in Baghdad have not been hurt or damaged during the recent bombings. This report was received on Thursday, December 17. According to a Baghdad church member, all 200 members are safe for now, but they request our continued prayers. There are three Adventist churches in the country of Iraq.

A Walk Through Bethlehem: On Monday, December, 14, the third annual World Headquarters community Christmas out-reach program, Walk Through Bethlehem (WTB), concluded. This year approximately 8,300 visitors “walked through” as more than 100 costumed volunteers created the Bethlehem experience. And, 3,425 pieces of literature were distributed. Also this year, WTB received more media coverage than ever before. Fox 5 television hosted a live broadcast visit to “Bethlehem” on Friday, December 11, during the morning news. The DC-based newspaper, *The Washington Times* also covered the event.

Loving the World for Christ: This is the theme of the upcoming international young adult missions conference, GO '99. Sponsored by Andrews University, The Institute of World Missions, and Adventist Frontier Missions, GO bases its programming around the great commission found in Matthew 28:19-20. GO is held every two years on the Andrews campus. The conference

will begin on Tuesday, December 29. For more information call 800-937-4236 or GO99@juno.com.

FOCUS ON FAITH

The Languages of the Bible: Hebrew was the language we considered in our last segment. In this segment we look at Aramaic and Greek.

ARAMAIC: Aramaic, which is linguistically very close to Hebrew, is found primarily in Daniel (2:4b-7:28) and Ezra (4:8-6:18; 7:12-26). Aramaic phrases and expressions also appear in Genesis (31:47), Jeremiah (10:1), and in the New Testament (Matt 27:46; Mark 5:41; 7:34).

The Aramaic in Daniel has frequently been used to date the book to the second century BC. However, as linguistic studies have demonstrated, the Aramaic of Daniel and Ezra exhibits striking parallels with the Aramaic of the Elephantine Papyri (documents found on the island of Elephantine in Egypt), which are dated to the fifth century BC. Other documentary evidence leads to the same conclusion. E. Yamauchi, for example, says, “Discoveries, such as Adon’s letter in Aramaic (sixth century BC) have confirmed the fact that the Aramaic of Ezra and Daniel is basically the same as the Aramaic of the sixth-fifth centuries as we know it from contemporary evidence” (*Greece and Babylon* [Baker, 1967], 91). On the other hand, the Aramaic material from Qumran (first century BC) “is of a later type than Biblical Aramaic” (E. Y. Kutscher, “Dating the

Language of the Genesis Apocryphon,” *JBL* 76 [1957]: 289). Thus, the Aramaic linguistic evidence is clearly against a date in the second century.

GREEK: Although most New Testament authors were Jewish, they wrote in Greek, the *lingua franca* of their day. However, the Greek they used was not the classical Greek of the poets or philosophers, but the Koine (common) Greek of commerce, administration, and diplomacy.

Greek grammar is fairly complicated and therefore far less susceptible to ambiguities than Hebrew or English. While Koine lacked the elegance and finely shaded nuances of classical Greek, it had its own strength, clarity, and rhetorical power. Greek words often took on a new, more spiritual meaning in the context of Scripture, creating new idioms. The words “water” and “washing”, for example, in some texts becomes a symbol of Christ’s cleansing power (Eph 5:26, Titus 3:5). In interpreting the New Testament, therefore, one must be careful to take into account the meaning a word receives from its immediate context. On the other hand, many papyrus documents provide illustrations of the meaning of New Testament words. ■

