FRIDAY CHURCH NEWS NOTES

LETTERS TO GOD

Hundreds of letters arrive annually in Jerusalem addressed simply to “God.” They are collected by the Israel Postal Service, and once a year they are taken to the Western Wall of the Temple Mount (“Letters to God,” Israel Today, Nov. 2017). Before that, though, each one is opened and read by the Israel Ministry of Religious Affairs. Not surprisingly, most reflect gross biblical ignorance. The writers are seeking God’s blessing in general or requesting God’s help with some mundane problem. A person in South Africa asked for “food, a car, a livelihood, and a just divorce.” A woman requested that God would ask her deceased father to forgive her and be reconciled to her. A woman from Arizona wrote, “Actually, I believe in Jesus, but that doesn’t make any difference, I would also like to receive blessings from You, O God.” Obviously she doesn’t have a clue who Jesus is or who God is, for that matter. Jesus said, “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9), and, “I and my father are one” (John 10:30).

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY HAND WASHING STUDY

A scientific study this year by researchers at Rutgers University found that even 10 seconds of hand washing with soap has a major benefit in the removal of harmful bacteria. The study, published in the June issue of the *Journal of Food Protection*, used 20 participants and measured the degree of bacterial removal under various washing circumstances. The conclusion is that the temperature of the water made no significant difference, but a simple routine of washing with soap makes a big difference. The soap does not kill the bacteria; the washing process removes them from the hands. The conclusion: “Overall, the length of lather time and volume of soap used did not make a large difference, but a minimum of 0.5 mL of soap and 10 s seconds of lather time is recommended based on our findings. Lotion use by the volunteers had an effect on the results; microbial reduction was greater for volunteers that used lotion regularly.” Ten seconds of lathering with soap is equal to singing one stanza of “Happy Birthday to You.”
JOHN DENVER’S APPOINTMENT WITH THE GOSPEL

The following is excerpted from “John Denver’s Opportunity Lost?” by Bill Fay, Baptist Press, Feb. 4, 2010: “One day in a frequent flyer room, I looked over and saw John Denver. It was pretty obvious with his distinct features and signature guitar that it was him. I went over and said, “John!” He jumped up, stuck out his hand and said, ‘I haven’t seen you in a while.’ I said, ‘No sir, we’ve never met. But I am a man who’s prayed for you for over five years, and I have a message for you from your dead father, Dutch.’ You see, years earlier, in the height of my pagan lifestyle, John Denver’s father was the copilot on the Learjet that used to fly me around the country to do my illegal mob business. His father--whose hand I held when he surrendered his life to Jesus Christ--made me promise that one day I would share with his son. I said, ‘Dutch, if God provides the moment, the privilege is mine.’ Now it looked like the moment was going to come. I met with John in a private room in the Denver airport for the better part of two hours. I took him line by line through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There wasn’t a single verse of Scripture he did not understand--nor was there a single verse of Scripture that he would accept. Finally, I said, ‘John, when did you make up your mind Jesus Christ would never become your Lord and your Savior?’ He could remember the date, the time and the place. A godly Sunday School teacher, like some of you, said to him Jesus Christ was The Way, The Truth and The Life. I left with a saddened heart, tears in my eyes.” CONCLUDING NOTE FROM BROTHER CLOUD: John Denver’s folk-rock music had an impact on me as a lost person. His song “Rocky Mountain High” refers to being “born again” through communion with nature (probably with a help from drugs), and apparently, that’s the only “born again” that John Denver ever experienced. He died at age 53. When the song was released in 1972, I was hitchhiking across America in a restless search for a nameless “something.” On that journey I encountered Hinduism and joined the Self-Realization Fellowship Society, but it was empty. I had studied Christian Science, and it, too, was empty. I traveled the length of America the beautiful, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and explored California from the seashore to the Sierra Nevadas, but gorgeous scenery and a nature high and “foot loose” travel didn’t satisfy. Thankfully I found the new birth in Jesus Christ the summer of 1973, and I’ve never looked back. Before, I served the creature more than the Creator, but the creation was made to enjoy, not worship, and there is no deep satisfaction there. The Creator is far more lovely than the creation, and man’s purpose is to know and love Him.

ANGLICAN CHURCH BANS “ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS”

A Church of England congregation banned “Onward, Christian Soldiers” at a service this weekend so as not to “offend” non-Christians. St. Peter’s Church in Oadby, Leicester, dropped the song from the annual Remembrance Sunday service which commemorates British war dead (“Church Bans Singing ‘Onward Christian Soldiers,’” Christian Post, Oct. 29, 2017). The song was previously sung as a tradition. Some members planned to stay outside the service and sing the song in protest, but it is an exercise in vanity, in our opinion, since it’s obvious that it has been a very long time since any true Christian soldiers have occupied pews in that “church.”
LESSONS FROM PRENATAL SURGERY

The New York Times recently reported on a prenatal surgery to repair a defect called spinal bifida (the spinal column doesn’t close properly). Doctors had urged the parents, Lexi and Joshuwa Royer, to abort the baby, citing the likelihood of a “decreased quality of life.” Instead, they opted for prenatal surgery. During the three-hour procedure, the doctor opened Mrs. Royer’s abdomen, eased the uterus out of her body, inserted a fetoscope and surgical tools through slits, and operated on the 24-week-old. The amniotic fluid was drained and carbon dioxide inserted to keep the uterus expanded, allowing the surgeon to see better and cauterize tissue. There are many lessons that can be drawn from this event. First, we commend the Royers for not aborting their baby. The Bible teaches that God is the author of conception (Genesis 29:31; 30:22; Ruth 4:13) and He forms the baby in the womb (Psalm 139). Second, the mother’s willingness to risk her life for the baby’s well-being, an an act of selfless love, reminds us that we are made in God’s image and retain a semblance of that image though fallen. One of the doctors assisting with the surgery observed that “fetal surgery is one of the few operations with a 200 percent risk of mortality.” Third, modern medical technology itself is evidence that man is made in God’s image and is not part of the animal kingdom. Fourth, belief in God gives people a different and better perspective on life. Mrs. Royer’s mother said that even though they know that the baby will probably have some degree of disability, “[W]e’re strong believers in God and we’re at peace; this baby is going to be so loved; we just don’t care” (“Reporting from the Operating Room as Doctors Perform Fetal Surgery,” The New York Times, Oct. 24, 2017).

BRITISH GOVERNMENT WANTS “PREGNANT WOMAN” LANGUAGE TO BE INCLUSIVE

The following is excerpted from “Men Get Pregnant Too, British Government Declares!” The Daily Caller, Oct. 23, 2017: “The phrase ‘pregnant woman’ needs to be more inclusive and termed ‘pregnant people’ in a U.N. treaty, the British government announced on Monday. The British government’s suggestion on proposed amendments to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights claim the wording excludes pregnant transgender people. The treaty says ‘pregnant women’ are protected and not subject to the death penalty, reported The Times. The current terminology excludes transgender people who have given birth, The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) claims. ‘We requested that the U.N. human rights committee made it clear that the same right extends to pregnant transgender people,’ FCO officials told The Times. There are two transgender men on record in the U.K. who have given birth after having a sex change. The biological women kept their womb and ovaries during the change, according to the Sunday report. ... The British government is also considering to remove a census question asking citizens to identify gender and biological sex for the 2021 census.”
Two depictions of dinosaurs from the Middle Ages can be found at a Buddhist temple at Angkor in Cambodia and on the tomb of Bishop Richard Bell at Carlisle Cathedral in England. The depiction at the Ta Prohm temple in Angkor, dating to about AD 1200, is of a creature that looks exactly like a stegosaur, though other theories of what the carving depicts have been proposed. “The simplest explanation is that the carving at Ta Prohm is a stylized representation of a dinosaur of the Stegosauridae family. In other words it is an artist’s version of what the creature looked like, not a scientist’s version. However, the main elements for a stegosaurian dinosaur are clearly depicted: namely the strongly arched back and dinosaurian body, and, crucially, the plates along the back of the animal. No other creature known, fossil or living, has a row of such characteristic plates along its back” (“Did Angkor Really See a Dinosaur?” Creation Magazine, April 2013). The brass decorations of Richard Bell’s tomb, dating to AD 1496, contain a depiction of what appear to be two dinosaurs. “On one engraving the creatures have an unmistakable resemblance to certain dinosaurs. Yet how could that be, since the bishop’s tomb was sealed and decorated over three centuries before the fossil bones of such creatures were systematically dug up, described and named? ... Although dinosaurs appear to be extinct today, it would not be very surprising if some kinds had survived until quite recently. ... [The engraving] shows two dinosaurs engaged in a struggle (or perhaps courtship). [One is] like recent reconstructions of sauropod dinosaurs, e.g. Apatosaurus. It is portrayed with its neck positioned horizontally, instead of raised aloft as palaeontologists (scientists who study fossils) believed until quite recently. Similarly, its tail is suspended, rather than lying on the ground as all but the most recent sauropod reconstructions incorrectly show” (“Bishop Bell’s Brass Behemoths,” Creation Magazine, September 2003).