

In Wrath Remember Mercy

"Lift up a standard for the people" — Isa. 62: 10

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"In Wrath Remember Mercy"

"Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord.

Renew them in our day, in our time make them known;
in wrath remember mercy"

Habakkuk 3: 2 (New International Version)

RAGE IS IN VOGUE. A flare-up of tempers between motorists or shoppers appears to be a common occurrence. Sometimes such an encounter is fatal. Though the frequency of such events is no doubt exaggerated, the impression made is that of social breakdown. Increasing rudeness and inconsiderate behavior reflect the drying up of the social lubrication of courtesy and respect for one another.

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." So says the writer of Prov. 16: 32. Self-control is a grace of character which is indispensable amid pressures of time and work. In a social order which places great importance on speed and fulfilment of one's desires, it is not surprising that this "waiting" grace receives scant attention.

OLD DAYS, OLD WAYS

When the natural order ruled the lives of most nations, the daily routine of life followed a more predictable — if frustrating — rhythm. While there is little popular support for a return to the old days when convenience was a luxury, there is a prevailing instinct that some peace of mind and heart has been lost in the scrimmage of contemporary life.

Most religions place a high value on discipline of spirit and subjugation of the self in the interest of others. This is certainly true of the Christian religion. In spite of the fragmentation into denominations and factions, the basic thrust of the Gospel — good news to all — has been translated into compassionate action and service to those in need. In the absence of state support, the care of the poor has for centuries been assumed by the church, be it Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, or other. This service has been a direct response to the the statement made by Jesus that whatever is done for the humblest of His people, is done for Him (Matt. 25: 40).

The charitable impulse of the Christian faith is based on unselfish love and its helper, self-control. The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 underscores this connection (verses 4-7). Here he sets forth the primary need for the cultivation and development of love (translated in

the King James Bible as "charity"). The Corinthian church was a somewhat fractious and rebellious company, and the Apostle had frequently to reprove them and correct their beliefs and behavior.

LOVE IN CONTROL

Without love, whatever else may be attained, the Christian is as nothing in the sight of God, and shall gain no profit thereby. The Apostle declares in the words of our text that "love is not easily provoked." He obviously uses the word provoked here in a very different sense from its meaning in Heb. 10: 24 where he states that we should "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works."

The latter text gives the thought of stirring to good works, calling forth love from others, and exerting an influence favorable to righteousness. Our present text, however, imparts the thought of being excited or aroused to anger. The Apostle thus declares that love is not easily ittitated, but is longsuffering.

The quality of love itself would never be moved to anger. Yet there is a proper anger — a just indignation aroused by one's love for the principles of righteousness — that is compatible with love. God is love, yet the Scriptures assure us that He "is angry with the wicked every day" (Psa. 72: 11). His anger is therefore a righteous indignation against sin; it is an element of His justice, yet fully in harmony with His love.

Given the enormous compassion which fills the hearts of Christians around the world, it is surprising that they so readily adopt a model of God's character which does Him little credit. Many misrepresent the wrath of God in their zeal to use it as a tool of evangelism. The not-so-hidden threat of eternal punishment for those who in ignorance rebuff the message of good news does not bring glory to the character of the Heavenly Father. The difficulty seems to lie in the conclusions drawn relative to God's wrath, or anger. Most Christians take it to mean the punishment God inflicts on the wicked, that is merely punitive.

WRATH vs. ETERNAL TORMENT

Those who deny the doctrine of a burning hell are mistakenly assumed to deny the reality of God's wrath and therefore of eternal punishment. This is a false assumption.

We do not believe the Scriptures teach a literal burning hell. However, we most certainly recognize that God has eternal punishment in store for the incorrigibly wicked. We say eternal punishment — not eternal punishing, which is what a burning hell purports to be. The Scriptures speak plainly about the fate of the wicked; they will be destroyed (for example: Obad. 16; Acts 3: 23).

God is pre-eminently a God of love, not of the sentimental variety, but of the robust sort which the Apostle Paul exhorts the church to develop. The cultivation of such energetic and practical love achieves in God's people some restoration of the character-likeness in which man was first created.

The wrath of God is not merely an instrument of the power of God. The Heavenly Father is a forbearing and self-controlled Father, not given to whimsical and unpredictable outbursts. Always righteous and just, God is nonetheless merciful and — as our heading text implies — we may reasonably pray for Him to show mercy.

GOD'S RIGHTEOUS WRATH

God's love was manifested on behalf of the human family in their creation. It was His love for humanity that provided our original parents with perfect life in the Garden of Eden with all its blessings, and with the prospect of filling the earth with a race of beings made in the image and likeness of their Creator. It was God's love that prompted His covenant with man, promising eternal life in return for obedience, yet fully respecting man's free will — his freedom to choose his own course. It was love that gave to man rulership over the earth and over the lower creatures. Divine love rejoiced in extending the Father's fellowship to His earthly children.

But when Adam disobeyed His Creator, the covenant was violated and sin entered the world (Rom. 5: 12; Hosea 6: 6, 7). God's love stepped back, and Divine justice came to the fore. Justice swiftly condemned Adam and Eve to death in His righteous wrath.

Yet even in pronouncing the death sentence on man, God's love was by no means inactive. In His fore-knowledge He planned that in the end much good would result from mankind's experience under this punishment for sin. God had from the foundation of the world planned man's redemption.

God's indignation was kindled against His chosen people, the Jews, when He said to the Prophet, "Why have they provoked me to anger?" (Jer. 8: 19). The Scriptures show that God's anger has always burned against sin. It has been resting upon the world since the dawn of human history, yet His love has not been violated in the least by

this attitude against the condemned world. He who declares that justice is the foundation of His throne (Psa. 89: 14) always engages in sentiments and activities fully in harmony with His justice.

But it is God's love that has arranged for the full recovery of His fallen creatures. This is shown in the beautiful illustration of the "ark of the covenant," the sole piece of furniture in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle and, later, the Temple. The cherubim which overshadow the propitiatory, or mercy seat, represent the dual qualities of God's love and power which fly to the relief of those condemned by justice [Ex. 25: 10-22; see *Tabernacle Shadows*, p. 125).

GOD'S LOVE HELD IN ABEYANCE

Love is neither easily nor unjustly provoked. It was not because Eve was deceived that the sentence came upon the world. It required an act of intentional disobedience on Adam's part to provoke God to anger, and thus the wrath of God came upon all mankind. Consequently, for more than 6,000 years, sin has been in control, and God's love has been held in abeyance, provoked to the point of withdrawal.

All the while God's character has not changed. He did not cause the distressing conditions which have existed since the fall of man. Neither love nor justice, as embodied in Jehovah, could sanction sin, for "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6: 23). Every adverse circumstance we associate with death is a part of that penalty. God has allowed this state of affairs, knowing that by His power all would be overruled for the ultimate good of mankind.

Satan, the great adversary of God, is responsible for the disaster which sin has wrought upon the earth. In due time the Almighty will cause Satan's treachery to accomplish good for the peoples of earth. Ultimately this great enemy of righteousness will be crushed — annihilated (Heb. 2: 14).

The love of God has bided its time, waiting to be revealed to an astonished world. Twenty centuries ago love manifested itself when the Father sent His only begotten Son to become man's Redeemer. Jesus came to earth and gave His life — a willing sacrifice for human sin. Then the call went forth to gather the Church — a people who in God's purpose were to be associated with Jesus, first sharing His sufferings, and thereby developing characters which would prepare them for their great future work towards the world in general, in the great Kingdom of God to come.

During the Gospel, or Church, Age, this company was gathered, and in due time will be fully exalted in Kingdom glory (Rom. 8: 19). Millions pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6: 10). When God fully answers that heartfelt longing, the Mediatorial Kingdom of God will lift mankind out of sin, degradation, and death, and bring all who are willing to accept life on God's terms into the glories of a perfect earth. From alienation they will step into fellowship with their Creator.

DEVELOPMENT OF LOVE IN THE CHRISTIAN

This fellowship with the Heavenly Father is one of those lost elements which Jesus came to restore (Luke 19: 10). Most of mankind — the non-elect — will have to wait until the setting up of God's Kingdom on earth before they regain lost sonship. But for those who have faith now, those who recognize and repent for their sins, the door of friendship with God opens wide (Rom. 5: 1). For the new and growing Christian the progress toward Christlikeness is a difficult one and is contingent on the quality of love. If we would be like God, we must develop a Godlike love. This

means enduring under the tests which will surely come.

It is important for us as children of God to watch and pray. There is always the danger that love will not be sufficiently strong in us. By reason of the fall, sin and selfishness have become overwhelming influences in the world. Operating for over 6,000 years, these traits have caused mankind to be deficient in love, sympathy, brotherly kindness, forbearance, and many other qualities which make up a Godly character. There is a greater tendency toward anger, malice, hatred, and strife, than toward love. Consequently, when God accepts the believer into His family, He tells us that one of the first requirements is love. Love must grow in our hearts and minds, and permeate all our thoughts, words, and actions.

Our many weaknesses will hinder our at-

taining this necessary condition; and even after it is attained, strong pressure will at times be brought to bear upon us, inducing us to compromise this high standard. The powers of darkness assail us, encouraging feelings and sentiments we are seeking to fight. At times we come to a crisis in our Christian experience, and we must either go forward or fall backward — standing still is not an option. The struggle is on. Will this severe trial prove a stepping stone to lift us nearer to God, or will it be a stone of stumbling to overthrow us?

At such crucial times, the only refuge is prayer. Our Heavenly Father permits these very trials to test our mettle as His children. The adversary will place the matter before our agitated minds in the most unfavorable light, seeking to pervert our judgment and to deceive us as to the real facts of the case; and our fallible human nature responds to this view.

The only safe course during these times of testing is to refuse to entertain to the slightest degree the thoughts of bitterness that are trying to find a lodgment in our minds and hearts. Then, we need to cry at once to God for strength

> and help in our time of need, seeking counsel from His Word as to our proper attitude

"BE YE ANGRY AND SIN

NOT"

in such an emergency.

In Eph. 4: 26 we read, "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath." This does not mean that we will never have occasion to get angry. However, as we grow, anger should not come quickly and frequently.

Note the words of caution, "and sin not." When aroused, anger prompted by love should be controlled by love. It must know no malice, bitterness, or holding of grudges toward one who offends us. Even when properly aroused, it is not to persist unduly long — "let not the sun go down upon your wrath." Anger unrestrained

> turns into rage, with all of the concomitant elements — bitterness, malice, begrudging, and personal hatred. We are to guard

against getting angry quickly and frequently. This indicates a lack of Christian development on our part.



God's Wrath Falls Upon the Disobedient Prophet 1 Kings 13

GIVING, AND ACCEPTING, FORGIVENESS

Let us be kind and forbearing with one another, putting the kindest construction upon the words, actions, and natural tendencies of our companions, remembering our own peculiarities and foibles. We are all blemished by the fall, and those whom we find "difficult" might, because of their hereditary tendencies, their personality, environment, and training in earlier life, draw out our greater sympathy if we knew the problems they face. Indeed, we may be altogether unaware of some of our own weaknesses and mannerisms, which grate upon others. We should be more careful to note our own mistakes and faults than those of others.

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" — and still forgives you (Eph. 4: 31, 32).

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom . . ." (Col. 3: 12-16, NIV).

But every failure to overcome leaves the child of God weaker and less able to resist the onslaught of the flesh, of the adversary, and of his evil hosts, and makes one less sure of being a final overcomer. But after we have gained the victory in a struggle with the fleshly mind and ways, and have through prayer and determined effort brought the Arm of God to our deliverance, we become a stronger Christian than before the trial. We have taken a stride forward, gained a firmer hold of our wayward will, and are the better enabled to conquer in the next testing.

If we want to be pleasing to the Lord, we must develop this grace of love richly. Those who possess this quality in large measure will not be easily provoked to anger, will not readily take offense, and will not be too watchful lest their own rights and dignity be infringed.

Those who have little love will be easily angered and offended. Let us keep self down and look always to Him from Whom comes our help. The love which our Lord appreciates is longsuffering. However, it would be un-Godlike not to have a feeling of righteous anger when we see great injustice against others. God is angry — wrathful — with injustice. Likewise, God's people should have no sympathy with injustice.

LOVE ADDED TO JUSTICE

While appreciating what is right and what is wrong from the Biblical point of view, we are to go further. We must cultivate the quality of love, sympathy, charity. None can say that his own estimate of what constitutes justice and love is entirely right, and that another person's estimate is entirely wrong, especially when the other is a sister or brother in the Lord, one who also is seeking to develop the same Christlike qualities as we ourselves are. Viewpoints are Those who have little love will be easily angered and offended. Let us keep self down and look always to Him from whom comes our help.

not always alike. Therefore, let us not be too sure that our own estimation of things is correct. We need to learn to disagree gracefully on non-essential matters. The Scriptures must be our guide in all matters. God is the Judge of all (1 Cor. 4: 5).

GOD'S COMPASSION vs. GOD'S WRATH

We cannot emphasize too strongly that while God has no sympathy with sin, He has much compassion for sinners. He has provided His well beloved Son to redeem and uplift the sinner — those who become Christ's disciples now, and the rest — the world in general — in the Millennial Kingdom. He has set apart a thousand years for this work of human uplift (Acts 3: 19-21). We do not teach universal salvation unto eternal life. Rather, we believe the Scriptures teach universal deliverance *from sin* and one full, fair opportunity for all to gain eternal life (1 Tim. 2: 3, 4). The conditions to make this possible for the majority of mankind will be established during the reign of Christ and His Church over the earth.

Psa. 89: 14 reads, "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne," and 1 John. 4: 8 says that "God is love." Truly we can say that justice is the foundation of God's throne, and love is its superstructure. How thankful we should be that our God possesses these two great attributes to the superlative degree, and that they harmonize so beautifully, as demonstrated in His revealed plans and purposes for the blessing of the world of mankind.

Well might we pray for God's Kingdom to come, and soon. His wrath will not burn forever. At the time appointed, God's mercies, which now lie hidden behind a frowning providence, will be revealed for all to see. Then will the Heavenly Father be glorified in all His ways and works. Then His smile of favor will beam upon the restored race and all shall rejoice (Rev. 21: 3, 4; Psa. 30: 5).

* * *



"I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things" (Isa. 45: 7). "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos 3: 6). Do these and similar verses prove that God causes sin and calamities?

Several things need to be kept in mind in answering this question. First, one needs to understand the meaning of evil. One definition of evil, according to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, is "That which causes harm, misfortune, or destruction." Another meaning is, "morally bad or wrong; wickedness." The first meaning is more comprehensive than the second; in fact, we could say that the second meaning is part of the first. To state it in other words, sin is always an evil, but evil is not always a sin.

The Hebrew word *ra*, translated "evil" in the above verses, is used many times in the Old Testament. It is often translated adversity, afflictions, trouble, hurt, distress, and harm, as can be seen by consulting a Bible concordance. In Isa. 45: 7, peace stands in contrast to evil, giving evil the thought of trouble, war, or some similar experience opposed to peace. If moral badness or wickedness were meant, the contrasting word might be "righteousness" or "goodness." Isa. 45: 7 in the New International Version makes this thought clearer. It reads, "I form the light and create darkness, *I bring prosperity and create disaster;* I, the Lord, do all these things" (emphasis ours). We can see from this information that not *sin*, but *calamity*, is meant in this verse.

Furthermore, it is unthinkable that God could either sin or cause anyone else to sin. Numerous Scriptures make this plain. For example, 2 Sam. 22: 31 testifies, "As for God, his way is perfect." Again, Psa. 145: 17, "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." Lastly, James 1: 13 says, ". . . God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."

The next logical question then becomes: if God is righteous and holy, why does He cause or permit calamities and suffering to come upon mankind? History is replete with records of human suffering. We see current examples, such as the earthquake in India, which took many lives and caused tremendous suffering to the survivors, and the floods in the midwestern section of the United States, which caused loss of life and possessions.

It would be more correct to say that God permits, rather than causes, calamities to oppress mankind. Due to Adam's fall in the Garden of Eden, all his posterity are alienated from

God by heredity. In allowing various evils to come upon them, God is not being vindictive, but His far-reaching educational purpose in permitting evil will in due time work out a great blessing for the human race. When their experience with the bitter fruit of sin and its results is completed, mankind will be given a contrasting experience with good when God's Kingdom is ushered in. Then, doing good will be rewarded and doing evil will be punished. In this way, mankind will be in a much better position to choose the good and shun the evil (Isa. 26: 19).

Israel's Prosperity Based On Obedience to God

Permitting evils to come upon the nation of Israel was somewhat different. Israel was in covenant relationship with God, whereby if they obeyed Him, He promised to bless and prosper them (Lev. 26: 3-6). On the other hand, He warned that if they disobeyed Him, they would be subject to various punishments in the form of calamities. In Amos 3: 6, God points out to them that, according to His covenant with them, their calamities could not come without His knowledge and permission. The context of this verse (Amos 3: 1, 2) makes this clear: "Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." Accordingly, Amos 3: 6 teaches that the evils mentioned were calamities which God would permit or bring upon Israel because of their iniquities.

Finally, God's permitting evils to come upon His people of spiritual Israel is different again. He exercises His special care over us, so as not to allow anything to befall us which would not be conducive to our spiritual welfare, but He knows that only through suffering can certain qualities of character be developed. It is true also that God does permit certain untoward experiences to come upon His people as chastisements for faults. He even sends punishments for a degree of willfulness in our sins, but these experiences are designed by a loving Heavenly Father for our correction, our spiritual development and our eternal blessing (Heb. 12: 6-8, 11).

For a more detailed treatment of the topic of the permission of evil, please ask for our free booklet, *Why Does a Loving God Permit Calamities?*

* * *



Dear Friends:

I'm writing again, asking you to please send me some more of the poems, "My Lord and I." I turned 86 years old on April 25, and you will never know how much joy I get when I can give one of these poems to someone — in grocery stores, doctors' offices, repair shops, to newsboys, taxi drivers — all teenagers love it.

I live in an apartment complex. The residents all get one and ask for more to give to their family and friends — every time new ones move in I welcome them with one of these poems. I try to be a good neighbor. So please send me some if you can.

Love to all,

R.D., Georgia, United States

Dear brethren,

Just a line to let you know that I like the April *Bible Standard* magazine. The content and style is excellent for this computer age. Please find enclosed herewith my humble donation to that cause.

Your Sister by His grace, R.P., Canada

* * *

The Bible Standard welcomes your letters. We reserve the right to edit all letters received. As a rule, our practice is to indicate only the writer's initials, except where the individual is an appointee of the Movement. You may submit your letters marked "Editorial" to our postal address (see back page) or by e-mail to <code>jdavis@biblestandard.com</code>; enter "Editorial" in the subject line.

of interest . . .

The relics of St Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897) have been on display at various Catholic churches throughout Ireland. Approximately 25,000 people visited the relics in Delgany, County Wicklow. All over Ireland huge crowds of devout Catholics turn out to pay their respects and view, if not touch, the glass case in which the reliquary rests. Father J. Linus Ryan, the tour's national coordinator, concedes that many find the idea "ghoulish," but the church is "very comfortable" with the tour. "Some people shudder at the idea of a box of bones, but relics are as old as the New Testament." (Copyright 2001, *The Irish Times*)

* * *

Technology is affecting mode and manner of worship around the world. Muslim affairs website *Azzan* unveiled a call to prayer service that sends mobile phone text message reminders. Muslims must pray five times a day, but the exact times change because the sun rises and sets at different times. Soon *Azzan* expects to be sending 125,000 alerts per day. One German church even broadcasts a whole service over the telephone and the Web. (Copyright 2001, *British Broadcasting Corporation*)

THE BIBLE STANDARD and Herald of Christ's Kingdom

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announcements . . .

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GENERAL CONVENTIONS FOR 2001

At-a-glance

France: Barlin, July 27-29

United Kingdom: *Hyde,* August 3-5; *Sheffield,* October 27, 28 **Nigeria:** *Osus Amukwa Obioma Ngwa,* Abia State, June 28-30;

Aba, Abia State, November 28-30

Poland: Lublin, July 13-15; Wolka Niedzwiedzka, July 16-18; Wrocław, July 20-22; Bydgoszcz, July 23-25; Krakow,

September 14-16

Ukraine: Lvov, August 17-19

United States: *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*, June 30-July 4; *Athens-Nelsonville, Ohio*, August 24-26; *Chicago*, October 19-21; *Tulsa.* November 16-18

Details

United States

Philadelphia Area (Lionville), June 30-July 4

Site: Best Western, Route 100 (south of Route 113), Lionville, PA 19353; tel.: (610) 363-1100 Rates and Reservations. For 1-4 people, \$71.00 plus \$4.26 tax; children under 18 sleep free. Please make all reservations through our office and make your check payable to "LHMM". Our address is 1156 Saint Matthew's Road, P.O. Box 67, Chester Springs, PA 19425; tel.: (610) 827-7665.

SERVICES BY VISITING MINISTERS Bernard W. Hedman, General Editor

Philadelphia Area Convention, June 30-July 4

John Davis, Associate General Editor

Philadelphia Area Convention, June 30-July 4

Carl W. Seebald

Grand Rapids, June 16; Philadelphia Area Convention, June 30-July 4; Chicago, August 11, 12; Ohio Convention, August 24-26

Ralph Herzig

Springfield, Massachusetts, June 3; Philadelphia Area Convention, June 30-July 4; Springfield, Massachusetts, August 5; Ohio Convention, August 24-26

Richard Blaine

Waycross, Georgia, June 17; Philadelphia Area Convention, June 30-July 4; Largo, Florida, July 22

Robert Herzig

Boston, June 24; Philadelphia Area Convention, June 30-July 4; New Haven, Connecticut, August 26

John Wojnar

Pittsfield, Massachusetts, June 10; Philadelphia Area Convention, June 30-July 4; Boston, August 26

John Detzler

Independence, Kansas, June 15; Tulsa, June 17; Booneville, Mississippi, June 19; Iuka, Mississippi, June 20;
Beechgrove, Tennessee, June 21; W. Frankfort, Illinois, June 22; Cincinnati, Ohio, June 24; Akron, Ohio, June 25; Cambridge Springs, Pennsylvania, June 26;
Philadelphia Area Convention, June 30-July 4; Derry, Pennsylvania, July 6; Nelsonville, Ohio, July 8;
Indianapolis, July 9; Chicago, July 11; Grand Rapids, Michigan, July 14; Muskegon, Michigan, July 15;
Minneapolis, July 18; Boulder, Colorado, July 22

Leon Snyder

Philadelphia Area Convention, June 30-July 4; Germany, July 6-11; Poland, July 12-26; France, July 26-31; England, August 3-9; Ohio Convention, August 24-26

Baron Duncan

Philadelphia Area Convention, June 30-July 4; Ohio Convention, August 24-26

Evangelists' Services

Robert Branconnier, New York City, June 17; Sebring, Florida, August 25

Tom Cimbura, Muskegon, Michigan, July 21; Grand Rapids, Michigan, July 22

Harold Solomon, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, August 12 Edward Tomkiewicz, Minneapolis, June 9, 10