THOUGHTS OF FEBRUARY, 2012

1. The principle of subsidiarity is basic to societal success. It says that the individual should first do all that he can for himself, then the family should do all it can for him that it should, then the community should do all it should for him, etc. It organizes society around self-sufficiency, family integrity, and local responsibility. Only the major things would then be passed on to the state – Ex. 18:17-27. That sort of self-responsibility in their offspring makes parents happy.

2. Luke 21:20-22 appears to speak of a siege of Jerusalem that would be lifted for a brief time, during which Jerusalem’s inhabitants should escape. That happened in 70 A.D. when the Roman army under Vespasian temporarily lifted his final siege in order to face an enemy to the north. Believers and those who believed the believers fled to the territories in the Decapolis region. In 3 months Vespasian returned and eventually destroyed the city, killing many and taking the others into captivity.

There seems to be another time for that prophecy to be fulfilled, which is not an unusual thing in Scripture. Sometimes there are multiple applications of the same prophecy. In this case, we notice that Matthew also used what appears to be Jesus’ same words, in the Olivet Discourse where it is obviously meant to apply to the terrible days of the Great Tribulation. As believers were once saved from the Roman army, they will also be saved from a future army. Remarkable!

3. From the time of Adam everyone spoke one language. After the flood Noah’s family began to spread out and repopulate the earth, as directed. However, Nimrod, Noah’s great-grandson, convinced many that they should settle in the fertile plains around the Tigris and Euphrates rivers – and build cities. One was Babylon, where man’s rebellion against God began to flourish again. It may have been that Nimrod wanted to communicate with God Himself, or with the fallen angels that the flood had temporarily destroyed. They began building a tower that was to be a gateway to God/gods. Sure enough, it got God’s attention. He confused things by getting into their brains’ thought processes, giving them multiple languages but each had the ability to understand only one.

The 25,000 Ebla tablets [found in an ancient city called Ebla, in Western Syria, about 40 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea and a few miles north of Syria’s border with Lebanon] were discovered in the 1970s during an archeological dig. They reported that men once spoke a single language. Dictionaries were found that explained the 3 languages used in the tablets. One dictionary reported that not long before, all men spoke one language, but that “now there are three.”

It is interesting to know that about 400 years later, during the time of the Exodus under Moses, there were 70 languages. Today there are thousands. It is helpful to our confidence in those tablets that they mention two prominent, then-active cities – Sodom and Gomorrah, which were destroyed during the time of Abraham, some 4,000 years ago.

4. Have you been puzzled about why the Lord would give Jacob that dream about the differently marked sheep – the dream that inspired Jacob to plot his takeover of the finest of Laban’s herd, leaving Laban, his father-in-law with the scrawniest? In those Genesis chapter 31 verses it appears that the Lord gave a cheater a way to cheat, doesn’t it. That’s the way it turned out, but it is probable that in Jacob’s dream the Lord was telling Jacob that God would give him all the specially marked animals. Per Jacob’s character, he took God’s revelation and turned it into personal gain. He could have saved himself the trouble because the dream declared God’s purpose through faithful obedience.

That’s the sort of thing we should guard against as the Lord begins to lead or inform us of our future. Our flesh would try to turn that advance knowledge into personal gain.

5. Things were good between Jacob and his favorite son, Joseph. He had even given Joseph a special coat, which angered the brothers. When Joseph had a dream that his brothers perceived as arrogance, his father, Jacob appeared to be the only one who considered it possibly valuable. Jacob “observed the saying,” meaning he took it under consideration. Many dreams from God must simply be taken under consideration, perhaps being written out for record and future understanding.

6. Your missionary in the tribal states of Northeast India, D. U., reports that, “Tlawmnagaihna is the core value of the Mizos, and that it is emphasized over and over again in Mizo enculturation and education. Its most ancient illustration is expressed by the brave-compassion of a hunter who refuses to abandon a companion wounded by a wild animal, even at the risk of his own life. Tlawn [cheap] + ngaih [esteem] + na [noun suffix] = regarding my own life as cheap compared to the needs of another … a virtue which approximates the New Testament word agape [setting aside myself out of love for another]. In tlawmngaihna I disregard my own agenda or plans or needs for the sake of another, to serve them or to avoid putting them to any trouble. Mizo authors translate this value as chivalry, altruism or pluck. So, you might deny your hunger/thirst/pain so that others wouldn’t become obligated to trouble themselves to meet your need. It is one of many factors which generate the Mizos’ massive missionary endeavors.”

Not to be left dangling with “massive missionary endeavors,” he continues with: “How massive? The statistics are now arriving for 2011. The Mizo Presbyterian Church has about 564,000 members, yet they have currently placed 1,918 missionaries on the field.” He estimates that approximately 10,000 converts were made in 2011, and reports that those are not “easy” professions of faith from their own kids who are expected to join the church, but genuine converts from Hinduism, Islam, tribal religions, or from secular societies.

7. Sometimes [or more often] I too am tempted to think I know more about someone else’s business than they themselves know. Example: An article on an education website says that Agriculture, Animal Science and Horticulture are the top “most useless” college degrees. Since the author based his findings on the future hiring plans of 1,000 employers, not simply his personal opinion, he escapes consideration for placement on the list of those who think food comes from the grocery store.

But it was close.

8. The faith of atheists is amazing. They believe that creationists are ignorant and superstitious for believing that God made everything out of nothing, but they themselves believe it is rational and scientific to believe that nothing made everything out of nothing. That’s believing that nature has the ability to behave supernaturally. Wow!

9. If there is no revival in the church, it is not God’s fault. Being poorly informed, we refuse change, not knowing that if a person or congregation will not change there will be no revival.

That’s a human-focused statement, which lacks balance -- the application of God’s grace which causes us to see our need for change.

10. Some findings tell us that marriage is becoming rather rare. From 1970 through 2008, the U. S. marriage rate declined from 76.5 to 37.4 marriages per 1,000 unmarried women, and the rate of decline is accelerating.

In 1960, 72% of adults over 18 were married. That number today is 51%, and 5% of that drop occurred between 2009 and 2010. The greatest decline has been among young adults. What happened?

Some say it is the economy, but the trend started decades ago, and the decline has continued during economic ups and downs. The simple truth is that people just do not want to commit. It’s not just a marriage problem; it’s a covenantal problem, based on too many choices being available. The more choices, the less likely to commit – there may be a better choice available tomorrow.

Too many choices would not be so bad for brief involvements, but for long-term and life-long commitments too many choices cause us to delay choosing. As with electronics, tomorrow a better version may be available. Making a choice today would be disastrous. So, too many choices bring out the self-centeredness in us. Whereas choice is good, too many choices become bad, even debilitating.

This situation seems to prove a point: “The only perfect people are bachelors’ wives and old maids’ children.” That fits well with: “It’s not good for a person to be alone.”

So, now we know what is holding back so many from marrying. “I’m not sure if I can do better” causes many to lead lives of loneliness without the sweetness of matrimony. Singles need to choose wisely, but they need to choose.

The exception: 1 Cor. 7.

11. Today, while listening to an India brother’s testimony, I was struck by a simple truth: If the Lord does not give you victory over the rain, He will give you victory in the rain. His testimony was that he and others were about to start an outdoors preaching ministry when it began to rain. They prayed for the Lord to stop the rain but it rained harder. So, they went onward with the ministry in the rain; with a great response from those gathered. If not over the rain, in the rain!

12. Yesterday we were talking to a fine brother about his obvious anointing. He said that he has always resisted that thought although he knew it to be true. I suggested to him that he accept that truth, think about that truth, talk about that truth -- and do his wrestling against pride while abiding in the full knowledge of that truth, not while denying it.

There is no need to deny or run from the truth just because it exposes you to pride.

13. On a tombstone: “Here I lay my burden down, changing my cross for a crown.” See 2 Tim. 4:6-8; Rev. 2:10; Luke 9:22-23.

It’s not good to know the commands of Jesus and not believe them and it’s not good to believe the commands of Jesus and not do them. The cross means submission, surrender and obedience to God’s will, yet the Lord has made taking up the cross voluntary for every believer, necessary for every disciple, and revolutionary for every overcomer. See Luke 14:25-33.

14. Before the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the Evangelical church in Iran numbered a few hundred. Today, there are over 1,000,000. Of course, the churches are underground and are being persecuted. In that situation, as you might expect, the underground church is growing at the annual rate of 20%. That happens to be the highest rate worldwide. Afghanistan follows at 16%.

In Algeria, 10 years ago the saints numbered only a few hundred. Despite the intensification of persecution, today the Evangelical churches claim over 200,000 members. And, those believers have a passionate love for Israel.

Libya, now out from under the heel of Muammar Ghadaffi, reports that there is a notable spiritual hunger among Libyans, but that there is a shortage of Bibles.

The Moroccan church is emerging and accelerating in growth and maturity.

In the past few years, the number of believers in Tunisia has increased, including new church groups.

In Jordan, the evangelical church is experiencing encouraging growth, doubling from 1995 to 2010.

Syria and Lebanon, ditto.

In Iraq, although traditional Christians are fleeing in droves, the Evangelical population has increased to over 50,000 over a few short years. In fact, in recent years there have been multiple testimonies from all over the Arab Peninsula of Muslims having dreams and visions of the resurrected Jewish Messiah.

In Egypt [last autumn] outdoor worship gatherings drew tens of thousands of Christians of all types, to pray together for unity and revival in their country.

In Jerusalem, among Arab Christians, there is a fresh move of God among their communities in both the Israeli and Palestinian areas.

Because of [not in spite of] the great political upheavals and persecution of the church in the Arab world, there is a spiritual revolution taking place. Although those churches are starting from low numbers, they are faithful and strong. Their average rate of growth for those churches is between 5% and 10%, higher than any Western country today.

As a further encouragement [so that you may pray for and support our Muslim saint brothers and sisters] one of the most sustained revivals taking place is in Indonesia. Indonesia has the world’s largest Muslim population and is now around 30% Christian.

With all of that information in mind, why do we Western Christians pray for the Lord to protect us from persecution, or from even becoming a minority? He did not and does not [in general] protect the saints from persecution and death in those countries. The results were predictable, were they not? Even though the life-giving results were not immediately obvious, God was doing a hidden work in the Arab world.

Might we find sufficient favor from Him to be counted worthy to suffer with our Muslim Christian brothers? The results would be a Holy Spirit awakening where it is needed – here at home. Beyond that, we would also be considered worthy to share in His glory, having suffered with Him. See Romans 8:16-18.

15. I have been tenacious many times, and so have you – thank God! The choice is to be tenacious or flakey. I’ll choose being tenacious.

There is indeed some degree of pleasure experienced by the Lord when we stick to a matter rather than fold or otherwise blow an opportunity. But beyond exercising our personal degree of pluck there is the opportunity to add the certainty that Romans 8:28 is absolutely, functionally true and applicable to my current situation. That means that we are absolutely sure that our suffering is going to result in good – Rom. 8:28. That’s all the time, everywhere, without fail, no matter the cost – always! That means that we refuse to believe otherwise, no matter the temporal evidence and persistence of evil activity. To attain to that good result on our own is usually beyond us but that makes not one atom of difference. The Lord has spoken that good word to those who love Him and are committed to His leadership. At that point we cease to “hang on” and begin to “rest on” our cross situations.

The Israelites failed their tests in this matter. They failed to enter into the rest that comes through knowing that all things are designed for and worked into good by Jehovah – Heb. 3:7 🡪 4:16. All things! If you need to, check your dictionary again on the meaning of “all.” [When I get real emphatic and somewhat pushy on something, I know that to whatever extent I lack the accomplishment within myself, the Lord will soon exercise me on that very point. He wants no hypocrites. That’s fine. He is the Lord.]

16. The world doesn’t know the Bible’s contents and may have never seen a Bible, but it is remarkable how much it obeys those words. Even other religions have certain Judeo-Christian basics. The Holy Spirit is still putting Romans 1:18-20 into the soul of worldwide man. Where they do not respond to that inner whisper, they are held responsible.

17. Jesus did not come to judge us according to our unrighteousnesses or our righteousnesses. He simply did not come to judge us. He will be the judge of all who are His through faith in Him – at the Judgment Seat of Christ in the heavenlies during the earth’s tribulation. His [and our Father] will be the judge of all unbelievers at the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of Jesus’ 1,000 year reign on earth. But Jesus Christ did not come to judge the world on His first “visit” as Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter and itinerant preacher-prophet. He did not wear the judge’s robe and march about meting out punishments. I think that the grandest displays of His non-judge visitation among us were His refusal to judge [and therefore necessarily condemn] the woman caught in adultery, the hypocritical Pharisees [for whom He clarified their unrighteousness and warned of their coming judgment], and His own contentious disciples when He put aside all robes [including His due robe as judge] and washed their feet.

18. The power of sincerity is so overwhelming that even an atheist can get God’s attention [so to speak]. Anyone who is on a genuine search for truth will not be reluctant to talk [formulate clear thoughts, even if they be silent] to the God whom others believe in, and ask Him to reveal Himself, if the atheist is wrong. “The Lord is near to all who call upon Him; to all who call upon Him in truth” – Ps. 145:18.

 That’s a good word to believers, also.

19. Must those from whom we are estranged come to us? Making the first move toward reconciliation is an action of the more righteous party. If you go to those who do not love you, then you know you are loving with God’s love.