BIBLE TRUTH

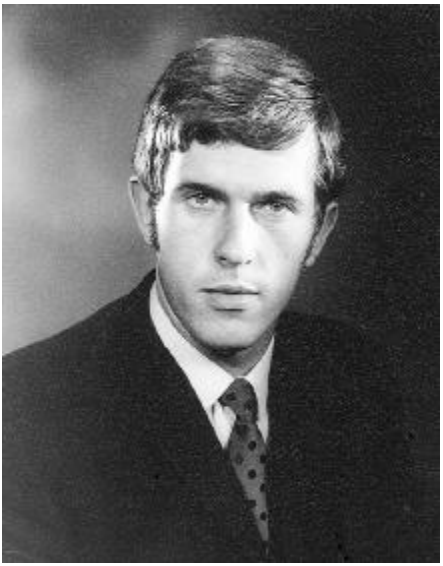
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'Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.'

Jude v.9



Dr Michael David Bennett OBE

6 October 1943 - 20 November 2024

It is with sadness yet grateful to the Lord God for his life that we report the passing to his heavenly reward of Michael on 20th November. Many friends and family attended his funeral service on Friday 6th December at the United Reformed Church in Fulbourn, where he lived. The minister, the Reverend Nigel Uden conducted the service assisted by the Reverend Robert Phillips giving the address and all Michael's children, together with some grandchildren, paying tribute to him or reading from the scriptures. Later he was laid to rest in the nearby cemetery at Fulbourn a medium sized country village in Cambridgeshire.

As a Fellowship, we extend our deepest sympathy to Anita his wife together with all members of his family, particularly his children Michelle, Danielle and Nathan, as well as our gratitude for allowing us to share in his presence, teaching and gifts over so many years.

Michael led a full life giving much service both to God and the nation. To show some aspects of this Appreciation of him a certain amount of background follows in order to help the reader.

As the 1950s drew to a close the then Prime Minister, the 1st Earl of Stockton, Sir Harold Macmillan uttered the famous *Winds of Change* phrase, 'We've never had it so good'.

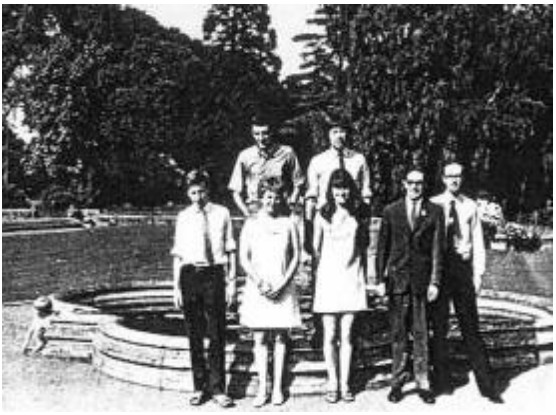
With hindsight that proved to be prophetic in a number of ways not least of which being that we are now seeing so many of Michael's generation pass away. Not only that, but just as several accounts in the scriptures reveal, when people are having it good the prophets were often forewarning against complacency. The late 1950s and into the 1960s was especially a formative time for Michael, as it was for several others of that generation. It is notable how even then, he was honing his skills as an interpreter of Bible Prophecy.

An increasing number of people are looking back to that time as being 'good' compared with the confusion and anguish of the age we have now arrived at. One important gradual change arising from the apparent contentment of people at that time has been their attitude to church, Christianity, faith and so on. In essence as people turned their time to other activities so they gave less of it to the things of God. As some observed these changes, a frustration arose amongst them because the substance and method of what was still being taught was stuck in the 'between the wars', or even earlier, culture. The only tools the younger 'Believers' had to work with, especially in literature, were still teaching that the horrors of war would be no more - it was the war 'to end all wars', we were told. Other material said that Jesus would return very soon to triumph over it all and peace would then prevail for ever. Not only that, but the style and wording of the literature to hand was written for previous generations. So at that time a growing number of teenagers and early twenties who had been brought up on good Bible teaching pleaded with their elders to do something about this, to notice the errors, print anew, research afresh and so on, but their pleas went unheeded. What was to be done, who were our allies, who would understand our need and more importantly, which elder people if any, would give us their time to at least talk about these things?

In 1965 my mother returned from having a refreshing time at the *Society for Proclaiming Britain is Israel* (SPBI) conference at High Leigh, Hoddesdon. She was excited, there is someone you MUST meet, she declared. She had heard our vexations expressed at British Israel committee meetings and was on the look out for a way forward of what might be called the Youth movement. At High Leigh she had

heard a young man give a talk that echoed our grievances in a gracious, knowledgeable and forward looking way.

A year passed before I met him, Michael David Bennett, by then he was established as a speaker on the SPBI platform and I was certainly impressed when I heard him. The action then moved to Aberystwyth university where he was reading in the botanical sciences. In he meantime two movements arose amongst the young British Israel supporters of SPBI, one in the south attracting people between London and the Sussex coast, the other in Wales. It was there where Michael gathered under his wing a group of students, John Denning, Peter Francis, Joy Rook, David Watts, Monty White and others who on the Lord's Day attended the Pentecostal or Alfred Place Baptist church in the town. The latter's 'About us' page of their website reflects the teaching of yesteryear when Michael and his team were there.



Some of the ACTS group at High Leigh

> 'As you may have picked up already, our obsession and central-conviction as a church is that it is all about Jesus. He is Lord God. We never graduate from him. There is nothing we do in church or in life which is separated from him. He is the absolute, complete and utter foundation of all of our church-life, no exception, it really is all about him.' (Alfred Place church)

This message certainly struck at the hearts of the group for the church was a great attraction to students particularly Rev. Dr Geoffrey Thomas who was ministering there at the time. This man of God served that church for 50 years and now in his mid eighties he continues to write and preach elsewhere every Sunday. So his ministry not only greatly benefited several generations of students but was another formative one for Michael and his colleagues. Thus was brought into being not only a group of students with a secure interest in the biblical meaning of Israel but one which gave them a spiritual fervour to serve God in whatever way they were called.

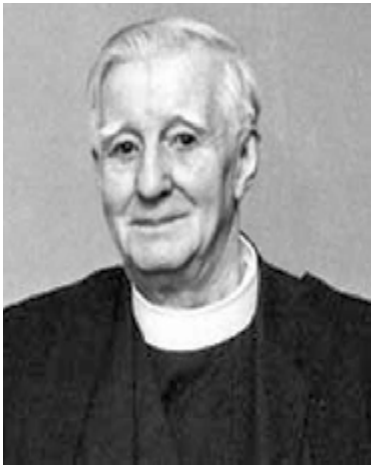
Michael code named his young flock as ACTS, standing for ‘Action by Christian Teaching and Study’. It was truly a sword in one hand and trowel in the other organisation as it battled to uplift Christianity in an increasingly apostate country on the one hand, whilst applying Christian principles in the workplace and helping those in need on the other.

Meanwhile down in the south of England centred around Brighton and Hove at times or Battersea in London at others, a group of teens and twenties coalesced around the banner of FACTS - ‘Further Action by Christian Teaching & Study’.

In the late 1960s the movements grew and my wife and I made regular trips to Aberystwyth to converse with the growing group about how to develop our outreach. Just as at times Jesus took his disciples to a quiet place to talk about how to meet the needs of the people so we met on the sands of Borth beach or on the grass in the Welsh mountains around Devil’s Bridge - gosh, what a place to be discussing how to defeat Him! On one weekend Rev. George Thompson (one of the SPBI Speaker team) joined us as we planned out the following High Leigh programme. This broke new ground as it brought together the two generations working together rather than against or separate from each other, something that was more unusual in those days.

This was also the beginning of the ‘Do it yourself ’ era which began with home decorating, craft clubs, sporting activities and even, the launch of the Open University. The last of these had a bearing on the Aberystwyth group which had as its motto ‘Christian Teaching and Study’. At the time Michael had two maxims to encourage his listeners. First, ask of any subject confronting you the question, Is it true? This may be, ‘the earth is millions of years old’, ‘the Jews or Church are Israel’, or ‘Does the Bible permit the eating of strawberries?’ Probe for the truth is the dictum. Second, when you want something done, don’t just wait for others to do it or moan that they are neglecting it, but if you are able or can learn how, get on and do it yourself, no questions, just go for it. That principle applied so much in his life and the fruit was shown in what he and those around him achieved.

One person particularly who fostered this was Rev. C.S. McKelvey (Mac) who was instrumental in promoting younger people to positions of trust and authority - something that was largely unheard of at times when people had to earn such roles by age or experience. Arising from this stance of Mac, Michael was given opportunity to lead, first one and then two youth weekends either end of the High Leigh BI convention. These were highly successful and attracted dozens of youngsters to the events; in looking back one can say they applied the principles they gained, throughout their lives.



This action had spin offs associated with it. Up to those days lectures at meetings were largely confined to a 'stand up and spout' presentation with some speakers producing a 'good meal of a talk' but others less so. Michael's fresh approach was welcomed and 'Can he be given more time?', his chairperson at meetings more than once was badgered with. Up to then the most exciting thing an audience could hope for was a 'Lantern Lecture'. Indeed it was, with glass plate pictures the size of one's hand being manually fed into a machine which would smoke as it heated and the pictures would start to melt! At the High Leigh Youth weekends though, we moved over to the more conventional 'slides' and their projectors, i.e. Equipment much easier and more predictable to handle. These were familiar tools to Michael who after a year or so, through his university contacts, produced the whole of the Bible on hundreds of picture slides which were given to us lecturers to make use of where we could.

By 1968 he was initiating 'Question days' held at *Brith Lodge,* Snakes Lane, the headquarters of the SPBI where the younger people assembled to thrash out biblical puzzles with answers given by the SPBI speakers' team. This was an innovative idea of giving the young a voice amongst the fathers of the movement,

The year previously when aged only 25 he published his first scientific paper jointly with Professor Rees on the subject of Rye *Secale cereale*. Two years later came, 'Induced and Developmental

Variation in Chromosomes of Meristematic Cells'. These set the pattern for nearly half a century to come with hours of research, scores of professional papers and books as well on these subjects.

By the 1970s ACTS of Aberystwyth had moved on with several members of the group significantly contributing their gifts to both the Christian and scientific world. Dr David Watts was appointed a Professor at the University of Manchester as well as a senior pastor in a nearby church. He also became known in Origins circles for helping to form the *Biblical Creation Society* a pioneer movement opposing evolutionary theory which is now contributing its scientific knowledge to question evolutionary ideas. Dr 'Monty' White served as a senior administrator at Cardiff university and claimed his fame by becoming known as 'The man with the dinosaur' to television audiences where he demonstrated that prehistoric animals fit into a recent time frame not that of a multimillion years evolutionary model. So both these and others of the group, in later life utilised principles they had learnt in Michael's ACTS assembly.

For his part Michael, having obtained his PhD in Wales, moved to the Plant Breeding Institute (PBI) in Cambridge where he began his distinguished career as a scientist. Here he worked with plant breeders around the world and was tasked with improving their crop production. His job in simple terms involved how to provide better strains of cereals. It was no coincidence that his career followed a path through this field because wheat, rye and so on are the ingredients of bread. At times in our personal conversation he would share his commitment to help feeding people with 'Bread', be that to fill their stomachs or their minds; both being the necessary part of their walk through life to a closer relationship with God.

> 'And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.'
>
> John ch.6 v.35 continuing to v.48

Over the years at PBI he contributed greatly to the production of new cereal strains that were much more productive, withstood disease, suited particular climates and so on. Thus he became known on the world scene as a prominent person in this subject.

In August 1971 he married his long time friend Anita (neé Ring) a lovely girl from a strongly Christian family, who he felt the Lord had led him to earlier in his life. From here on Michael was no longer on his own but one truly fulfilling,

> 'And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.' Genesis ch.2 v.18



Since then Anita certainly fulfilled that role in his life, whether in bringing his family into being, looking after them, keeping house and even in later years being appointed as his Secretary, let alone caring for him when his health declined. We all echo, Let the Lord so care for her according to her needs at this time.

By now Michael had not only published a number of scientific papers but authored several booklets expounding biblical prophecy, thus turning the tide of the lack of post war BI publications. A first was achieved in January 1969 when his book *The Principles of Prophecy* volume 1 went to press. This was an unique venture being one of the earliest methods by printers to use a Golf Ball typewriter to typeset and Litho presses to print. This was right on target, for as a joint venture of the ACTS group it was fulfilling its aims of, 'Preaching and Bible study, Training in studying the Bible and Printing'. A few years later in 1972 when Michael was 29 he published Vol. 2 but this time returned to the conventional letterpress method of production and handled by our long time printers of *Brith* [Covenant People] magazine, Frank Coupe & Co. These two publications continue today to be such a valuable fresh look at Bible prophecy in the light of the Last Days, as well as how to and how not to interpret Bible prophecy.

These were the days when for some years at the 'November Reunions' Michael could be found leading parties around the British Museum. He was as familiar with Bible history as he was of its prophets and so he would lead people to exhibits that corroborated the scriptural record of Israel's captivities as well as their migration across Europe to the British Isles and beyond.

In 1974 he jointly founded the *British Israel Bible Truth Fellowship* and with Rev. C.S. McKelvey they became editors of the *Bible Truth* magazine. In addition he was elected the Fellowship's President. This office he served, except for a few years' break in the early 1980s whilst nurturing his new family and researching at the Texas A&M University, College Station.

Since then his input of how to govern the Charity according to biblical principles has been a rare benefit not only to our work but also to other Christian organisations he was involved with. Since his days at university his teaching and preaching ministry have brought blessing to so many, especially on the Lord's day at a number of churches and at the Pentecostal church at Newmarket where he was a key help in re-establishing the outreach there in more recent times.

He had already helped in reopening the SPBI centre at his old hometown of Gravesend when some years later he was found pouring over the plans of a new church building that his father Pastor Stanley Bennett was going to construct. The original Pentecostal church at Chalk to the east of the town centre functioned in a couple of attached small cottages with two rooms knocked into one to form the meeting and worship room while Sunday schools and other offices took place next door or upstairs. This setting was no doubt the start point of Michael's walk with the Lord. The new building was completed debt free in 1973 and began its ministry based upon its spiritual roots in the fires of the healing revival epitomised by the ministries of Smith Wigglesworth and other great leaders of former years.

Michael's contribution to research at PBI lasted 19 years during which he entered the world stage for the discoveries he made within the subject of plant breeding including chromosome knowledge. There was a day when I went to his department there and he proudly showed me the Scanning Electron Microscope that had been acquired through much effort of fund raising and grants. Through this it was amazing for me to have the opportunity to see the much enlarged view of the workings of God's creation, something that few people of the world had ever seen before. This greatly magnified world was Michael's workplace, like some great scientists of old he was discovering things of God's handiwork that others never knew. That was his role for life but not only that, as his career progressed he would lead and facilitate others to do similarly. By now he was negotiating with more prestigious organisations to gain funding for

and convince them that research into these fields was essential. Hence from 1986 he was made a British Petroleum Venture Research Fellow which led to the next chapter of his life.

In 1987 he left PBI and went south to London's Royal Botanic Gardens where he was appointed the penultimate Keeper of the Jodrell Building and laboratory (a position now renamed as a Director). This was a world class botanical research centre and at the time some of its researchers wanted to get their hands on its trees which were hundreds of years old but to no avail because of the preservation orders placed on them. However, in October of Michael's first year a powerful storm ravaged many parts of the UK with winds gusting at up to 100 mph, causing massive devastation across the country during which Kew Gardens did not escape with about a third of its trees blown down! For Michael it was a rapid introduction to life at Kew when crises hit!



The early Jodrell lab at Kew Gardens



Nearby the Jodrell Hama Thornycroft's Sower statue gave inspiration

He was a man of vision and inspiration, so was it just a happy coincidence that his workplace at Kew looked towards the stimulating sculpture of 'The Sower'? This was certainly befitting to his dual career in improving seed cultivation and spreading the biblical word; it surely motivated him daily to press on against all adversity,

His academic work continued when in 1995 he was honoured to receive the Order of the British Empire (OBE) and in 1999 was made a Fellow of the University of Wales (Aberystwyth) the very establishment that first sent him on his scholastic journey. By then he had

been offered the Chair at a number of University botany departments both at home and overseas. As a result he became a visiting Professor at both Reading and Cardiff universities and so was able to further the frontiers of research in these establishments such as supervising the studies of PhD students.



In his early years at Kew he introduced a much-needed and innovative new department dedicated to systematic Molecular Biology. Later came facilities for DNA sequencing and associated activities; by 1997, he had launched an online Plant DNA C-values database that remains an invaluable resource for plant researchers.

Outside the cottage he occupied at Kew Gardens stood a huge model of a strand of DNA epitomising the work he was doing. It is said that,

> 'Nowadays, the DNA double-helix is not just a model of a microscopic organic structure: it symbolises the backbone of our current understanding of ourselves'.



Not surprisingly during his tenure at Kew he was not short of prestigious visitors from around the world. For example, he had the vision to greatly extend seed conservation and after Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's tour of his department and under his direction, a multi-million pound bid to put living seed of 10% of the world's flowering plants into the Millennium Seed Bank at Wakehurst Place was successful. A Noah's Ark, Michael called it and this venture was opened by Charles, the then Prince of Wales in 2000.

A considerable amount of Michael's time at Kew was spent on designing the enlargement of the premises as well as the corresponding work required to re-equip the laboratories for the 21st century. Ultimately, the installation of extra facilities and large

equipment rapidly outgrew the Jodrell building. So during his time as Keeper there he supervised a series of infrastructure projects that considerably enlarged the new Jodrell building further to allow for more laboratories, specimen collections and staff. The first major extension was opened by Queen Elizabeth II in 1994, and a second, larger one named the Wolfson Wing (after its primary funding benefactor, the Wolfson Foundation) was completed in 2006 after Michael had delayed retirement to oversee its completion.



Wolfson Foundation Building at Kew, Michael's last venture there.

Whilst at the Botanic Gardens he continued to publish scientific papers but by now his writing skills also turned to glossier publications. By 1979 he had already edited and written the Introduction to Rev. Charles McKelvey's substantial book, *The Great and Terrible Day of the* Lord. This was another endeavour that set a precedent in the print trade as being amongst the first to be printed with a new type of Litho equipment in Plymouth. Later, his interest in expounding the Bible Prophets came to be printed in a dozen *Key to the Pattern of history* series covering many of the time related prophecies such as *The Exodus, Doubleness in Scripture* and in the last couple of years, *Double Writing of Scripture.*

Amongst his largest written contributions at Kew Garden's Jodrell Laboratory was towards the 'Kew Chromosome Conference IV' for which he jointly produced a more than 450 page tome in 1995.

In mid 2008 Michael wrote to me,

> 'I shall not write many scientific papers from now on as I concentrate on quality [rather than] quantity and focus more on Bible and BI writing. I find it difficult to read or write so much now that my eyesight is much poorer. So this volume [*Annals of Botany,* for which he had been a Board member as well as Chairman for a while, which he enclosed with the letter] marks the end of an era'.

This comment was very telling in as much that it highlighted the handicap he struggled with for many years, yet by the grace of God and his own determination he had achieved and continued to do so for more than another decade. The aforementioned journal contained papers by authors who spoke at a two-day conference at Kew in 2007 to mark Michael's research interests.



Showing his exploits to interested children

He then entered a new era of his life as he continued to research the scriptures and shared the knowledge he gleaned from them both in what he wrote and lectured on. Whatever their age or interest he gave enquirers his time. The garden he created together with Anita in Fulbourn was a picture to behold and of course that was no surprise. After all, what less would one expect from a scientist at Kew! Perfectly planted fruit trees producing abundantly, delicious vegetables and other crops which he marketed off his driveway to passers by.

In June 2008, he told me that when he was young he had an accident that affected his whole life ahead. He was mixing concrete for a pond at his home, then in Wrotham Road, Gravesend when he caused damage to his back. This caused him pain for many months during which time he aggravated people through his moaning about it. Eventually his mother gave him a typewriter and told him to learn to type in order to take his mind off

things. He set about this by using the book of Jeremiah to copy from! This not only taught him typing skills but triggered his interest in the books of the prophets which later formed the basis of his many talks and writing on Bible prophecy. The pond was being constructed to contain goldfish provided by a friend of the family, the well known evangelist Principal George Jeffries !



Some of our BIBTF Trustees and their families outside the Jodrell in the 1990s

Not only did he write about nature and the Bible but patiently steered the BIBTF's Trustees through many years of decision making with Anita his wife as Secretary usually inviting them to their home for this purpose whether it was at Kew or Fulbourn.

As former scientific colleagues, I.J. Leitch and M.F. Fay wrote of him, 'throughout his career, genome size remained one of Mike's major interests, woven through many other areas of research, and he has contributed to the field immensely', to which one may well add 'including Bible research'.

With these thoughts we give thanks to God for Dr Bennett's lifetime of service to the Lord for two important reasons. First by showing how the mysteries of God's creation can be used to improve the lot of all creatures on earth via their stomachs. Second, by expounding scripture to mankind to give them greater hope in the world to come. Indeed he lived a life of service to the Almighty God and Michael's works as well as further writings will be sorely missed.

Compiled by Paul Boyd-Lee