



**Robert B. Thieme, Jr.**

**A Retrospective of His 53-Year Ministry as Pastor of Berachah Church;  
The Plan Moves on: The Colors Are Passed to the Next Generation**

On or about May 14 of this year Colonel Thieme was struck with a virus that caused him the usual complications associated with such an illness. The aftermath left him physically weakened among some other complications. Eventually, he defeated the virus but the physical weakness remained. This past Friday he went to his physician for a series of tests. Once completed, the doctor informed him that although he had no further signs of the virus his physical condition had not improved to the degree that he could continue the rigorous demands of studying and teaching and thus recommended to him that he retire. After consulting with members of his staff he informed them that he would step down as pastor of Berachah Church. Thus brings to an end one of the most successful, dynamic, and magnificent ministries in the history of the Church Age.

This man was my teacher, my mentor, my guidon, my pastor, and he is my friend. About ten days ago I wrote the Colonel a letter expressing my best wishes for his speedy recovery and rapid return to the pulpit of Berachah Church. This past Thursday afternoon he gave me a telephone call to thank me for my remarks. In our conversation we discussed his health and he expressed great enthusiasm about resuming teaching as soon as Sunday, June 22. He said he had used the time off to study 2 Peter 3 and was anxious to teach his discoveries to the congregation. We then talked a little baseball but before we hung up he asked me to say hello for him to my congregation and to express his personal thanks for your prayers for him. He mentioned how he missed not seeing you all since the last Bible conference in 2001 but wanted you to know how much he appreciated the hospitality you all showed him during his many visits to St. Louis.

This morning I thought I'd give a brief retrospective of the Colonel's 53 years at the helm of Berachah Church as a way of saluting him for his tireless efforts of studying and teaching for over five decades. In doing so I will quote from the program distributed at the Colonel's Fiftieth Anniversary celebration of May 7, 2000.

**On May 7, 1950, Robert B. Thieme, Jr., stood in the pulpit of Berachah Church and surveyed the small group of people that had assembled to hear him speak. He had accepted the call to become their pastor. The subject of his first sermon is long forgotten, but his love for God's Word and his passion to communicate Bible doctrine will never be forgotten. Berachah Church had found the right pastor. Fifty years later, as he speaks to a much larger congregation, his motivation has never wavered—study and teach the Word of God!**

**He was eminently prepared for a life of rigorous scholarship and teaching. From the University of Arizona he had received a bachelor's degree in classical Greek and history, and was honored with membership in the alpha chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. He had also received a master's degree in theology from Dallas Theological Seminary, summa cum laude. During World War II he served with distinction as a staff officer where he rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel. His is still affectionately referred to as "the Colonel."**

**Never before had this congregation heard exegetical teaching of the Scripture from the original Hebrew and Greek languages. His innovative teaching included the use of an overhead projector in the pulpit to help convey biblical concepts, an idea he brought from his military experience. Colonel Thieme concentrated on presenting the *mechanics* of how to live the Christian life answering the question, "after salvation what?"**



From 1950 to 1959 the congregation of his small downtown church met for weekly Bible classes and Sunday services in a Quonset hut at 502 Lamar Street. As people from all around the city came to hear his systematic teaching of the Scripture, the building soon became inadequate. So, after much prayer and deliberation the Colonel chose to build his new church on a prairie far out Westheimer Road. The westward expansion of Houston eventually enveloped the church and the surrounding area became known as the Galleria.

In the beginning there were no publications, no tape recordings, no videos. One day in 1953, a diminutive, but strong-willed lady in the congregation decided his phenomenal teaching must be preserved for posterity. Ignoring the Colonel's protests, she hauled a huge reel-to-reel recorder in a little red wagon into a side room of the church and began to record every word of every Bible class. She also typed transcripts of each lesson to distribute to those who wished to augment their study of the Word.

Thus, was the inception of Berachah Church Tapes and Publications which in 1982 became R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries. This grace ministry is dedicated to disseminating Colonel Thieme's tapes and publications at no charge to believers in every corner of the world. India, Australia, Burma, Philippines, Korea, Argentina, Canada, England, Germany, Hungary, Nigeria, Ghana, and Ethiopia are but a few of the countries where believers are the beneficiaries of his ministry. Colonel Thieme's publication have been translated into Spanish, German, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Hungarian, and several African dialects.

Through his studying and teaching of God's Word under the mentorship of God the Holy Spirit, Colonel Thieme has inspired men with the spiritual gift of pastor-teacher, evangelist, or missionary to prepare for the ministry and to carry the guidon of doctrinal truths.

Over the years the Colonel has created many illustrations to convey doctrinal principles to his congregation. He has developed a unique, technical vocabulary to communicate complex concepts and stimulate recall of entire biblical categories of doctrines. Who can forget rebound, the grace apparatus for perception, Operation Z, the edification complex of the soul, the divine dynasphere, or problem-solving devices?

To whom much is given much is expected. As members of his battalion, when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, there will be no excuse for us not to receive the "crown of life." To all future generations of believers, Colonel Thieme's challenge from Bible doctrine will echo through the remaining years of the Church Age, "Follow the colors! Press on to the high ground of spiritual maturity!"

The reason Grace Doctrine Church is here and the reason I am its pastor is because of Colonel Thieme. He was not shy about presenting the Word of God in the richness of its every divine detail. He did not pamper his congregation with short sermonettes, pithy bromides, and social gospel. Reminiscent of Leonidas at the Battle of Antirrhion, he stood in the middle of the front rank facing the enemy, both visible and invisible, with the resolute poise of a man who is convinced the victory is won before the battle begins. He fired away with an array of communicative and literary devices that were intended to first separate the sheep from the goats and then challenge the positive to cultivate their souls with the untold riches of the inerrant Word of God. The objective was to develop *promachoi*, front rankers in the double-column phalanx whose advance to the high ground would result in membership in the Pivot of mature believers, conveyance of escrow blessings in both time and eternity, and sustenance of our client nation in history.

I was fortunate enough to be introduced to the Colonel's ministry in 1971. I was challenged by the presentation although I only understood about 2 percent of its content. But I knew I had found truth and I became determined to find out what the other 98 percent was all about. A couple of years later I learned I had The Curse, the spiritual gift of pastor-teacher, and this realization soon took me and my family to Houston to study face-to-face before this man within the hallowed walls of Berachah Church.



There, under his mentorship and the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, I learned systematic theology, doctrine, principles of hermeneutics, the basics of Koine Greek, and assimilated the innovative system that he developed to communicate the Word of God to his congregation. In addition I learned some major principles: never be afraid to teach the truth; never be afraid to do so with conviction; never be afraid to be dynamic in the presentation; never slack off, never be intimidated, and spice it with some humor from time to time.

Robert B. Thieme, Jr., is without question responsible for whatever interest remains in this client nation for the strait-forward communication of orthodox Bible doctrine. Hundreds of pastors have been ordained at Berachah. But as is the case in all combat there are casualties. Some fall physically, some flee fearfully, some defect treacherously. But the winners keep moving toward the objective, isolating distractions with shields up and swords unsheathed, following the lead of their esteemed *polemarshal*, R. B. Thieme, Jr. It is to these that the colors are now being passed. It is not only my privilege but also my obligation and responsibility – indeed my solemn duty – to seize these colors and to lead you toward the objective of spiritual maturity. With your prayers for my health, my eyesight, my voice, and my clarity of thought I shall endeavor to do my best.

I'd like to reflect back a few moments on that storied night of Sunday, May 7, 2000, and the celebration of the Colonel's fiftieth anniversary as pastor of Berachah Church. It was one of those magical evenings. The auditorium was filled as were the overflow rooms. People came from all over the country to salute the Colonel. Three pastors, Sam Ammons of Houston, Rick Knapp of Pittsburgh, and I were honored to be asked to present a tribute to the Colonel. Joining us on the dais were evangelist Rick Hughes, and from Thieme Bible Ministries, Bobby Thieme and Bob Guerra. Our tributes were designed to express for every person in attendance the appreciation we all had for the man, his ministry, and especially his message.

I'd like to quote the speech I delivered that evening in order on this occasion to hopefully express for all of us at Grace Doctrine Church our appreciation for the Colonel:

The Holy Spirit has been faithful throughout the Church Age to issue the spiritual gift of pastor-teacher to a certain number of men in each generation. We are inclined to speculate that over the course of almost two millennia the Holy Spirit has not been very impressed with the results.

The Apostle Peter tells us that the angels bend down in order to concentrate on the presentation of Church Age doctrine. An interesting question arises, "Where have they been looking?" They must have spent centuries searching desperately for the precious few who managed to exploit their gift from time to time. Surely once the twentieth century rolled around they assumed this situation would never improve. That is until one fine day the Holy Spirit issued the gift of pastor-teacher to Robert B. Thieme, Jr. By late 1950 the word was out among the angels. "We've finally found a man who has figured all of this out and he is teaching it on a daily basis down in Texas."

Job informs us that when the Lord created the universe the angels cheered. Therefore, since cheering is apparently acceptable angelic behavior, it is not a stretch to suggest that for fifty years they have been giving standing ovations over Berachah Church.

During that half century the Colonel has set the standard for biblical exposition: relentless in his pursuit of truth he endures night-long vigils exegeting a single word in order to insure the accuracy of his message. He has dedicated his life to the proposition of Doctrine First and we happy few are the fortunate beneficiaries. Because of these things we are drawn to this beloved auditorium in order to salute this man on his golden anniversary as our pastor-teacher.

I think there are four lines of poetry by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow that demonstrate the Colonel's reciprocal love motivation toward God and his enduring devotion to us.

The heights by great men reached and kept

Were not attained by sudden flight,



No -- they, while their companions slept,

Were toiling upward in the night.

Once these tributes were concluded a bagpiper marched out of the darkened foyer of Berachah Church and down its center aisle. For all the world he appeared to be emerging from the foggy mists of a Scottish heath as he played an inspired rendition of "Amazing Grace." People were having major breakdowns yet miraculously maintained some semblance of composure, that is, until at the conclusion the kilted lad snapped off a British salute promptly returned by the Colonel.

After this we all wondered if there was anything else that could be done to wring every suppressed emotion from the souls of the sobbing throng. Yes! Music Director Allen Westfall instructed us to "please stand and sing 'Auld Lang Syne.'" Because of so many old times past the effort proved futile, at least for me. But of this you can be sure: the Colonel's acquaintance shall never be forgot and ever brought to mind.

Thus we bid him a fond farewell as pastor of Berachah Church. May he receive God's greatest blessings in his retirement. May he enjoy the rest of his life in comfort knowing that he did his duty and that "in the future there is laid up for him the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to him on that day."

Old soldiers never die, they just fade away.

*Vincit omnia veritas!*

Heavenly Father, we are grateful for your exceeding grace expressed by your provision of absolute truth through the ministry of Robert B. Thieme, Jr. We are the privileged beneficiaries of his teachings over the past half century. We now represent the next generation that must take the doctrine and pass it on to the succeeding generation.

We lift our prayer for the Colonel and Mrs. Thieme. May their days in retirement be pleasant ones. May they be blessed with good health, clarity of thought, and the company of good friends. As he now pauses from his arduous regimen of studying and teaching may the Colonel have opportunities to realize the magnificent impact his ministry has had on the lives of believers and the preservation of this client nation. May this impact continue through the resources of R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries.

Challenge us here at Grace Doctrine Church to continue our pursuit of truth. Your plan goes on. The appeal trial remains in session. And the angelic conflict still rages. May we take the lead from the Colonel and strive to become front rankers in the double-column phalanx fighting the good fight of faith as good soldiers for Jesus Christ.

And we lift our prayer in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Who is *YHWH Sabaoth*, the Lord of the Armies. Amen.