

December 2006

# BA

**BIBLE ADVOCATE**

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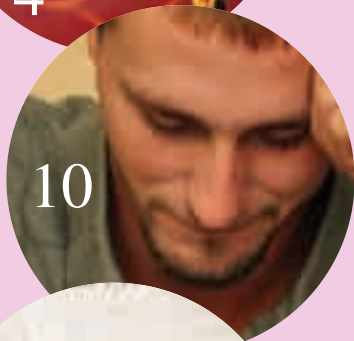
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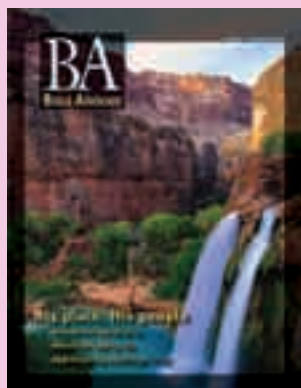
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Coming in the January-February '07 BA: the beginning of a Bible journey, Genesis 1—11

In the December issue of *Now What?:* right and wrong ways of filling a spiritual void (<http://now-what.cog7.org>)

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**Bible Advocate Press**

**Calvin Burrell:** Editor

**Sherri Langton:** Associate Editor

**Keith Michalak:** Director of Publications, graphics

**Richard A. Wiedenheft:** Staff Writer

**Sylvia Corral, Raul González:** Translation, proofing

**LeRoy and Hope Dais, Linda Michalak:** Correspondence, proofing, clerical

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## About the Future . . .



December is a time for looking ahead – ahead to January, when we begin a new theme, “Journey Through the Bible,” and ahead to whatever 2007 holds as time marches relentlessly toward that final day.

Does the Bible foretell the future? Some claim a third of the Bible is prophecy, and they try to mine it for enigmatic detail. Much of that third, however, consists not of predicting the future but of proclaiming God’s truth for the time then present.

There was a time when you could count on one or two prophetic sermons (or BA articles) every month. Back then, pastors and writers were more confident that world events were leading somewhere fast and that we could see the end from there. We often matched the more ominous current events with a text or two in trying to make a case for repentance and the soon-coming of Christ. That sort of message is seldom heard these days. Reminds me of a Yogi Berra quote: “The future ain’t what it used to be.”

One reason is that we learned a little from the text-twistings and turnings of those who set dates and otherwise predicted in the Lord’s name. Prophetic sermons were susceptible to private opinions, and we learned that much of what was said needed correction before long.

For another thing, we have grown in our interpretive skills – right and wrong ways to understand a text. Articles in this issue, for example, offer a wiser and more cautious approach to Old Testament Prophets (p. 10) and the book of Revelation (p. 14).

And third, we find it more helpful to concentrate on making disciples in the clear light of the gospel and of present truth than to speculate in the cloudy regions of future tense. Now we’re less concerned about prophetic theories than we are about the tidal waves of deception and immorality that threaten to drown our children in seas of unbelief. More on this in the next BA.

What can we know for certain, then, about the future? That we will die and face judgment; that Christ will return, the dead be raised, believers made immortal, creation restored, the wicked destroyed, and the eternal kingdom of God established. These have not yet come to pass, but the Word says they will!

– Calvin Burrell



# What If It Really Is ‘The End’?

**Whether it is or not, here’s how to prepare the right way. by Dianne E. Butts**

September 11, 2001. Then war in Iraq. Now Hezbollah picks a fight with Israel, while Scotland Yard uncovers and thwarts a terrorist plot to blow up America-bound airplanes. Local and national commentators call the current Middle East conflicts World War III.

If you’re like me, such events conjure up Bible verses like Matthew 24:6-8:

“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars . . . Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.”

With everything going on in the world, sometimes it’s hard not to wonder if we’re seeing the approach of the biblically prophesied “end times.”

So are we?

Another terrorist plot is revealed, and I wonder. Another country threatens Israel, and I hold my breath. Another big story hits the news, and my mind races.

At times world events can send me spinning into an intriguing game of “What if?” What if this is it? What if we’re nearing the end times? What if we’re *in* the end times?!

What if we did find ourselves thrust into that “great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equaled again” (Matthew 24:21)? Should we cash in our investments and pay off our houses so if the government runs amuck, it can’t take them away? Should we buy some land in the country so we could grow our own food? Should we run out and purchase a generator? Fuel?

Radios, batteries, blankets? Seed to grow food? A water purification system?

What about weapons?

Should I take the advice given to the Christians of Judea in Matthew 24:16 and flee to the mountains? Or should I throw faith in the face of fear and book a flight to Israel for a front-row view of the action?

In case God's Word might suddenly become limited or illegal, maybe I should bury a Bible in my backyard.

If I knew the world was in, or would soon be immersed in, the prophesied Great Tribulation, what would I do?

### **Stockpile weapons**

I've heard that militia groups bury fifty-five-gallon drums full of guns and ammunition on their property. I could use our cash to purchase guns, ammunition, and who-knows-what-else. Then at least we could protect ourselves. We could invite other Christians to join us. Standing together, we might create a haven for the Lord's people — a safe house for the body of Christ.

But what good would that do? Could I truly create a place where the terror of that time will not reach, where I would be protected from what God has declared will touch every human on earth (Revelation 6:12-17)? No.

Even the best weapons and training won't save me. Revelation describes humankind's weapons amassed against God, but they can't defeat Him. How could mere weapons save me out of that horrible time?

While I don't believe it's wrong to protect ourselves, to what extent should I go? Not to

the extent that I'm depending on weapons to deliver me. Remember David? He went up against a giant of the Philistines, who had the most advanced weapons of that day. With only a sling, a stone — and the God of Israel — David felled Goliath with a single shot. It is the same God of Israel who protects me today.

I'd be far better off to arm myself with the Word of God, to learn and grow in my knowledge of Him. As I get to know David's God, I'll have faith to rely on Him to protect me physically. Should He determine that my physical life is done, I will also have the faith to trust Him completely with my eternal life.

With my physical life in God's hands and my eternity wrapped up in Christ Jesus, why do I need weapons?

### **Stash food**

But sometimes I think I should at least stash some food, like a good little soldier preparing for the "resistance." I could stock my pantry with canned and dried goods. I could raid the garden centers of nearby stores and purchase every packet of vegetable

seeds they have. But would that really help?

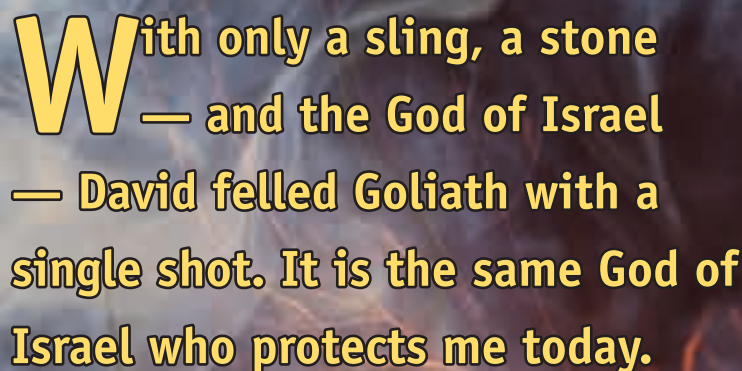
Seeds also have needs in order to grow, like water, soil, and sun. A single hailstorm or drought could wipe out everything. Yes, God could send the rain and keep the hail away, but would He?

In Haggai, the people of Israel planted and harvested but didn't have enough food. God wanted the people to turn to Him and rely on Him in every area of their lives, but they would not. So He withheld their harvest to get their attention (Haggai 1:6; 2:16, 17).

Dare I make the same mistake?

The Israelites in Moses' time also had to learn to trust God for their food. Remember how they tried to stash extra manna (Exodus 16:20)? The next day God caused it to be full of maggots! All the Israelites could do was trust God to feed them each day. And He did.

Even with food stashed or seeds planted, my own efforts won't save me. God wants me to depend on Him rather than on my own ingenuity. And I can depend on Him.



**W**ith only a sling, a stone  
— and the God of Israel  
— David felled Goliath with a  
single shot. It is the same God of  
Israel who protects me today.

# Rather than worry about food for my physical body in the end times, I'd be far better off to feed on the Bread of Life.

In addition to providing manna for the Israelites for forty years, God supplied food for Elijah, a widow, and her son during the famine (1 Kings 17). And He multiplied a few fish and loaves to feed thousands in Matthew 14. He is the same God who provides food for my physical body now. He always will — as long as He determines I should remain on this earth.

Rather than worry about food for my physical body in the end times, I'd be far better off to feed on the Bread of Life (John 6:35). As I take Him into myself, letting Him help me grow in my understanding of Him, I gain faith in the fact that He will sustain me both in this temporary physical life and in my eternal spiritual life.

With God providing food for me physically, and with Jesus himself nourishing me spiritually, why should I be concerned with food?

## Store water

Still, a person can survive far longer without food than without water. So maybe I ought to at least store water, or possibly de-

vide a way to purify it, in case all our water supplies are contaminated during the end times.

But would it really do me any good?

While I agree it's wise to plan ahead and prepare for disaster, too much reliance on my own preparations can be dangerous because if I rely on myself, even with water stored, I can't save myself.

But why should I be concerned about drinking water to sustain my physical life when I know the One who made the bitter water of Marah sweet and made water come out of a rock (Exodus 14 and 17)? I know the One who promises that everyone who drinks the water He gives will never thirst again (John 4:14).

Instead of worrying about how I will get water to drink in the end times, I could spend my time drinking the living water Jesus provides, letting Him produce in me a spring of living water that wells up and bubbles out of me (7:38) so that it splashes on those around me, bringing them to eternal life.

## Right priorities

While it is not wrong to prepare in practical ways for possible hard times, my game of "What if?" challenges me to tend to my spiritual health. There's nothing like a crisis to help us get our priorities straight. Can I feel the pressure of the coming crisis? Do I truly believe Jesus' words in Revelation 22:7 "Behold, I am coming soon!?" We may not know the actual date of Jesus' return, but one thing is for certain: We are about two thousand years closer to it than we were when John penned those words.

Any way I look at it, time is short; there's none to waste. So what should I be doing?

I should be using every moment wisely by diligently studying and preparing to wield my weapon, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). I should be feeding on the Bread of Life so that I'm nourished and strong. I should be gulping down the Living Water and passing it on to others.

Whether Jesus comes back next week, next month, or the next millennium, aren't these the things I should be doing anyway?

■ ■

**Dianne E. Butts** writes from Pueblo, CO. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



# WWTZ



## What did Jesus say or do about the kingdom of God, Israel's future, Christ's return, and the end of the age?

Jesus said more about the future, perhaps, than any other subject. Take the kingdom. His first message as an itinerant preacher was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17; 10:7; Mark 1:14, 15). All His preaching and teaching, in fact, may be described as "the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 4:23; 24:14).

Jesus' teaching about the kingdom can be summarized in two paradoxical truths, one related to each of His comings:

**1** At Christ's first coming, the kingdom of God came near as people witnessed and experienced the dynamic rule and reign of God at work in the ministry of Jesus (Matt. 6:33; 11:12; 12:28; 13:11; 16:28; 21:43; Luke 10:11; 17:20, 21; John 18:36). His instructions for kingdom living in the present are in Matthew 5—7.

**2** When Christ comes the second time at an unknown moment, the kingdom will be revealed in great power and glory over the whole earth (Matt. 8:11; 16:27; 24:30, 31; 25:1ff, 14ff, 31ff; 26:64; Mark 13:28-33; Luke 21:27, 31; 22:29, 30; John 14:2, 3).

Jesus told His disciples how to await His return at the end of the age:

- Be people of faith, like Abraham.
- Be awake; be sober; watch, prepare, pray; strive to enter in.
- Until He returns, be faithful in using what the Master gave.
- Give food, drink, clothing, healing, and friendship to the least of others.
- Take heed to the signs; lift up your heads; your redemption draws near.
- Serve, strengthen the brethren.
- Believe in God and in Christ.

About Israel's future, Jesus said:

- Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies and His disciples should flee the coming distress. Those remaining would be led captive to all nations and the city overrun by Gentiles for a time (Luke 21:20-24).
- His disciples could not know when Israel would be restored to power, but they should be witnesses of Christ to every nation (Acts 1:6-8).
- When the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne in the regeneration, His disciples will also sit on thrones to judge the tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28).

About death, judgment, hell, and heaven, Jesus said:

- Death is like sleep, and He will waken people from it — by resurrection (Matt. 9:24, 25; Mark 5:39; Luke 7:14, 15; John 11:11-14ff).
- Man could kill the body, but only God could destroy the soul in *gehenna*, or the lake of fire (Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4, 5).
- *Hades* (the grave) could never prevail against His church or prevent its ultimate triumph (Matt. 16:18).
- At some future hour, all in the grave (*hades*) will be raised — some to eternal life and some to condemnation and death. Believers will never be condemned (John 5:28, 29, 24).
- A lake of fire (*gehenna*) is prepared for the Devil and his angels. Those without faith will find great regret and everlasting destruction therein (Matt. 18:8; 25:41; 13:49, 50).
- Believers will enjoy the kingdom of heaven (or kingdom of God), His Father's house, paradise, everlasting home, and eternal life. Jesus seldom or never spoke of "going to heaven."

# Questions & Answers

**Q** On a religious talk show I listened to, a man called in wanting to know the fate of the victims of the Jewish Holocaust. The host minister said those who did not know Christ would suffer the punishments of hell, although he was not so blatant about it.

The caller persisted. Was the minister saying that those men, women, and children — starved and tortured for weeks or months — in the next second after their horrific deaths, were engulfed in even greater torments by God himself only because they were Jews and not Christians? Was their time in Hitler’s concentration camps merely for being Jewish — the “good ol’ days” by comparison? Has God planned an even more horrific punishment for them than they suffered in the camps, and for the same “crime”?

The host finally said he could relay just what the Bible says: **Only those who know the Savior Jesus would be saved. Those without this relationship are consigned to the torments of hell.**

**What struck me about this answer was the lack of hope for those with a limited exposure to Jesus, or none at all. Christians have the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. What good news did the victims of the Holocaust have? How does the good news of the gospel apply to those who never heard the gospel message? Does Christianity include a good news for the countless Chinese, Indians, Aborigines in Australia, Incas and Aztecs in the Americas who lived and died ignorant of Christ and His coming to seek and save the lost? What about those who lived before Jesus’ birth, for that matter?**

**I too believe that relationship with Jesus is necessary to be saved. I too fear the One who has the power to destroy both body and soul in hell, although I’m not sure whether the torments of hell are themselves everlasting in time (eternal punishing) or everlasting in consequence (eternal punishment) — obliteration of body and soul.**

**How would you have responded to the caller? Does the God whose desire is that all men be saved have a plan that offers good news for many who lie in their graves? Or was there never any hope for them in the first place?**

**A** Your question has been asked a million times and in a hundred different ways, but I’ve never seen it expressed as poignantly and compellingly as you have written it here. This issue almost demands an answer, and we long for one that satisfies our highest hopes and best wishes for all people everywhere.

Searching the Scriptures, I find no passages that directly address this question by intent. We could expect to find it in Isaiah, maybe, or in the letters of Paul. Romans and Ephesians, for example, are among the Bible’s most profound writings concerning the mind of God and salvation of humanity. Statements of material interest are found in Isaiah, in Paul’s writings, and elsewhere, but not the specific and unambiguous answers we hope for. Neither do the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels contain a definitive answer to your question.

“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the



words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). Note here that God reveals the things He does so that we may *do* what is right, not so that we can *know* all things.

What we do find in the Bible on this issue may be classified in two or three ways. First, we find the character of God described broadly in several texts, often in the Old Testament. God is wise, understanding, just, merciful, loving, holy, and so on, yet He judges sinners. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? . . . His mercy endures forever" (Gen. 18:25; Ex. 34:6, 7; Psa. 136; and others).

The second sort of texts, mostly in the New Testament, point toward the centrality – even exclusivity – of God's self-revelation in Jesus. Christ is the only begotten Son, the world's only Savior; no one comes to God except through Him (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; and others).

We have no right to answer your question in a way that contradicts the broad teachings of either testament. To be taken seriously, an answer must grapple with both sorts of texts mentioned above. (A third kind of text that finds its way into this discussion offers a small, enticing phrase or single verse as evidence, where the context is not closely related to the main issue.)

Let me speak to your uncertainty about whether those who suffer God's wrath will endure hell eternally or only for a time. We teach that the Bible *hell* usually means simply "the grave." The lake of fire in which unbelievers will be destroyed is everlasting *punishment*, not everlasting *punishing*. The wicked shall be destroyed, not tormented, forever. We will mail a full-length study *Will God Punish the Wicked Forever?* to those who request it.

Earnest believers have suggested several options for how those who die outside of Christ, never having heard the gospel, will be considered at the final judgment:

1. They are lost and will be resurrected to suffer the torments of "hell" and/or destruction. This is a common position taken by conservative Christians, including the pastor you heard on the radio. It stresses salvation in Christ alone, God's wrath upon those who believe not, and a strict construction of Scripture. Texts used for this view are John 14:1-6; Acts 4:12; Mark 16:16b; Romans 2:12; and others.

2. They are lost for eternity but will never be res-

urrected, judged, or punished. It will be as if they had never lived. Explicit evidence for this view is difficult to find in Scripture.

3. They will be resurrected and judged, based on how they responded to what they knew of God. Old Testament saints who trusted God but had no specific knowledge of Messiah to come are examples of this. Romans 2:14-16 advances the view that everyone has some knowledge of God for which they are accountable. If anyone is saved in this manner, it will still be by the blood of Christ, but that one will learn about Jesus only at the resurrection of the just.

4. They will be resurrected during or after the millennium, to be taught the gospel of Christ and have their chance for salvation then. Textual evidence for this view, like #2 above, is scant and mostly inferential.

5. Those who died before reaching the age of accountability, with godly parents, will be resurrected to eternal life in Christ. First Corinthians 7:14b has been used to support this viewpoint.

6. They, with all other sinners and saints, will eventually come to know the reality of God's love and be reconciled to Him for eternity. Called *universalism*, this view has been supported by texts like 2 Peter 3:9b and 1 John 2:2, but it is widely considered heretical.

We affirm with you that salvation comes to anyone only by God's grace, through Christ. It may be asked, however, if one could receive that grace without knowing of Jesus as Lord or of the role He played in salvation. Is this not the case with those listed in Hebrews 11, all of whom lived and died by faith? Could it be true, then, of others who responded by faith to all they knew about God?

– Elder Calvin Burrell

## We Ask

Readers are invited to send their biblical answers on these questions to the editor for possible publication. Answers will be edited for length and clarity.

# Understanding the Prophets

The books from Isaiah through Malachi are the longest section of Scripture and the most obscure. Here's help. by **Richard A. Wiedenheft**

Most Bible-believing Christians generally agree on many elements of biblical understanding. But when it comes to prophecy, consensus seems to disappear. Some are convinced the end of the world will come in a specific series of events initiated by a rapture of believers to heaven. Others insist we cannot know when Christ will return or the chain of events preceding it. Some believe the presence of the nation of Israel in its ancient homeland fulfills prophecies that will culminate in the Battle of Armageddon and the end of the age. Others claim that the church has become spiritual Israel and that God's only plan for Jews is that they accept Jesus as Messiah. Some teach God will deal with Israel in a special way after Jesus returns and ushers in the millennial rule. Others argue that there is no millennium and that the redeemed of the earth

will enter God's eternal kingdom when Christ returns.

Are we all reading the same Book?

An important starting point for bringing order and clarity to this divisive subject is the prophecies of the Old Testament. Much of the disagreement centers around how Bible students interpret them and connect them to New Testament prophecies.

## Function and mission of the prophets

While we don't generally think of Moses as a prophet, he was. Through him God laid the foundation for most Old Testament

prophecies that followed. Shortly before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, Moses gave them a warning that takes up most of Deuteronomy 28–30. He urged them to obey Yahweh, to be faithful to the covenant. He communicated God's promise of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience: famine, war, enslavement, and exile (28:36, 49ff). The prophets who followed essentially repeated what Moses had said, applying his warning to their specific circumstances and at times adding details.

The prophets' primary purpose was not to foretell the future but to call people to obey



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Yahweh. From Moses to Malachi, the prophets' primary mission was to urge people to be faithful to the covenant with God.

Think of Ahijah warning King Jeroboam of disaster for his family and captivity for Israel (1 Kings 14:15b, 16). Think of Elijah on Mount Carmel calling down fire from heaven to demonstrate to pagan Israel that Yahweh is, indeed, God (18:16-46). To encourage the people and demonstrate Yahweh's faithfulness, the prophets sometimes spoke of the punishment that would be carried out on Israel's enemies, of the restoration and blessings the people would enjoy after the exile. And occasionally the prophets looked forward to the ultimate blessing of a Messiah, a son of David, who would bring salvation and restoration not just for the Jews, but for all peoples. Always the prophets' purpose was to turn people back to obeying God.

It has been estimated that only one third of the Bible's prophetic material is predictive. These portions were certainly not unimportant. In fact, when the people found themselves punished by famine or enslavement or exile just as the prophets foretold, they could only confess that they had been warned by a true messenger of Yahweh.

The prophets' primary function, then, was not to predict the future but to call the people to faithfulness to God.

### Form of prophecies

The primary form of most Old Testament prophecies was the oracle, a single message from God delivered by the prophet in His name. Most oracles were first

spoken to the king, the elders, or the people. Only later were they written down, sometimes with contextual and historical information or with other oracles to compose a complete book of, say, Isaiah as we know it.

Jeremiah, for example, condemned King Zedekiah and the wealthy people of Jerusalem for holding Hebrew slaves longer than six years, contrary to God's law (Jeremiah 34:12-22). This message was later combined with historical information about what was happening in Jerusalem at that time (vv. 1-11). Often one oracle is grouped with others, and we don't always know where one leaves off and another begins. Furthermore, oracles are not always recorded in chronological order, especially in Jeremiah.

A number of oracles are set in a courtroom, with Israel as the defendant and God as the plaintiff, prosecuting attorney, or judge (see Isaiah 3:13-15). There are oracles of woe, which were pronouncements of disaster (Micah 2:1; Isaiah 3:8-26). There are oracles of salvation — promises of deliverance and restoration meant to encourage the people. Though they would suffer terribly for their sins, God would not abandon them completely (see Isaiah 10:20-34; Jeremiah 31:10).

In understanding the Old Testament prophets, we need to look for oracles and consider them as a unit of prophecy, being careful not to isolate specific passages without considering their intended meaning in the context of the entire oracle.

### Context, context, context

As in understanding any portion of Scripture, we must pay attention to both the historical and literary context of prophecies. They were communicated to a specific audience in a specific set of circumstances, with a specific intent. Bible dictionaries, handbooks, encyclopedias, or the book introductions printed in some Bibles can help explain the background. While some prophecies certainly have relevance beyond their original historical setting, we must grasp that original context before we consider applying them in other ways. If we feel free to wrest portions of prophecies from their original settings, as many modern "prophets" do, we can make them say almost anything. Thus the great hodgepodge of interpretations promoted today.

Consider Isaiah 11:11: "In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim

**I**f we feel free to wrest portions of prophecies from their original settings, as many modern "prophets" do, we can make them say almost anything.

the remnant that is left of his people. . . ." This verse has often been used in reference to the Jews' return from around the world to Palestine in the twentieth century. The first return is understood to be from Babylon after 539 B.C.; the second is applied to modern Zionism. But the people of Isaiah's day certainly would have understood the first return to have been the exodus from Egypt under Moses. Indeed, verse 16 likens the return of the people from Assyria to be like that of their coming out of Egypt.

Another example is Isaiah 13:6a, 9, which refers to the "day of the Lord." Many modern prophets have linked this passage to events leading up to the return of Christ. But the entire chapter is an oracle against Babylon, the arch enemy of Judah, and verse 17 makes it explicit that Isaiah is referring to the day of God's wrath against that ancient kingdom. It was the Medes, along with the Persians under Cyrus, who destroyed Babylon in 539 B.C. To remove selected verses of this oracle and apply them in different context does great injustice to the scripture.

### Language of prophecy

Major portions of Old Testament prophecy are poetry. Poetry is full of figures of speech and expressive, even extreme, language because it is primarily de-

signed to stir the emotions of the hearer. If we fail to understand this, we can find ourselves looking for facts where the prophet is trying to evoke feelings, or taking literally what the author meant only figuratively.

Some language is obviously figurative. For example, in an oracle against Babylon, Isaiah writes, "I will sweep her with the broom of destruction," declares the LORD Almighty" (14:23). Certainly, God didn't destroy Babylon with a broom. But the same verse says, "I will turn her into a place for owls and into swampland." Was this intended to be literal or to convey utter humiliating destruction?

In Isaiah 49 Israel is called a polished arrow hidden in God's quiver (v. 2), and Yahweh speaks encouragingly to Israel: "See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands" (v. 16). These are obviously figures of speech. But later in the same chapter, speaking of Gentile subservience to a restored Israel, God says: "Kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet" (v. 23a). Is this to be taken literally? Probably not!

Hebrew poetry, including poetic prophecy, is full of figures of speech. In the Old Testament world, grandiose, exaggerated language was commonly used to express wrath and judgment, especially God's, in order to shake the people into awareness of the seriousness of the circumstances. If we take this language literally, we can misunderstand the true meaning of the prophecies.

### Avoiding errors

To be sure, much in the Old Testament prophets looks forward to the coming of the Messiah and the messianic age in which a son of David reigns in justice and mercy and when the law of God is written in the hearts of men. And in some prophecies the New Testament writers saw greater fulfillment than the original hearers ever conceived — fulfillment that took place in the incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus the Messiah. But these prophecies were understood only after the fulfillment took place, and then only through the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit. New Testament writings offer little support for lifting most Old Testament prophecies out of their original contexts and applying them to modern nations and circumstances. Indeed, one of the major principles in understanding prophecies is that they are generally not understood until after their fulfillment.

As we seek to understand Bible prophecy, we would do well to make sure we take Old Testament prophecies for what they were: primarily calls to God's people to return to Him. This message is just as relevant for us today as it ever was. And if we faithfully walk with God; if we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; if we trust Him in humble obedience; the prophets of old would rejoice that we heeded their messages!



Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



## Online

For more on how to correctly interpret prophecy and for study resources, visit the Bible Advocate Online ([www.cog7.org/BA](http://www.cog7.org/BA)).



by Israel Steinmetz

# Don't Get Left Behind!

**O**K, I'll be honest: I haven't read a single page of the *Left Behind* series. Part of it is that I've been busy finishing a master's degree, but mainly it's because I don't want to get caught up in the hype. I know that *Left Behind* is written as fiction, but I also know that lots of people really think the world will end the way those books say it will. I don't have time to get mixed up in that.

I remember early one morning my freshman year at Spring Vale waking up to the sound of one of the students running down the hallway, screaming at the top of his lungs, "Jesus is coming back today! Get ready! Jesus is coming back today!"

My worried roommate looked at me with wide eyes, obviously concerned. I said to him, "Don't worry. Jesus said that nobody knows the day or the hour when He'll return." Then I rolled over and went back to sleep.

So much of the hype we hear on Christian radio and TV and see in Christian books is no different than that student running down the halls scaring people with his yelling. It's just hype and noise. I want to encourage you to not get caught up in it.

Jesus is coming back, and I agree with the apostle Paul that the day of His appearing is closer than when we first believed. But that's about all I'm sure of. Could Jesus come back today or tomorrow or next week? Yeah, I think He could. Or He could come back in fifty thousand years. The truth is that we don't know.

So how should we live? First, if you don't have a saving relationship with Jesus, it's time to seek it. We are all sinners in need of a Savior. You've sinned and deserve death. But if you believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins, if you repent (change your mind and turn) from your sins and accept His free salvation by faith, you can be saved and have eternal life because He rose from the dead.

If you haven't done that yet, do it, because you will face Jesus on Judgment Day when He returns. Don't delay in starting a relationship with Him. If you've got that, then live every day as though it's your last. Obey God radically, breaking the mold of those around you to show God your love for Him by living the way Jesus did, loving the unlovable, showing mercy and kindness, speaking the truth, praying, and obeying God.

Somebody said something the other day I really liked: "Live every day as though Christ died yesterday, rose today, and is coming back tomorrow." If you do that, you'll never get caught up in the hype about the end times or get left behind in worry and fear.

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**Israel Steinmetz**, his wife, Anna, and two children live in Kansas City, MO, where he serves as pastor.

# THE REVELATION

# Interpreting Revelation

A call for humility, sensitivity, and sanity. by Israel Steinmetz

Those who study biblical interpretation know that one primary rule is to interpret a biblical passage according to its genre, or class. That is, we should ask ourselves at the start what kind of writing this is. Poetry or historical narrative? Letter, Gospel, or one of the numerous other kinds of literature in Scripture? By answering this question first, we set some ground rules for how we can, and cannot, interpret the passage.

A historical narrative, like the account of the exodus from Egypt, cannot simply be interpreted as an allegory for God's judgment or deliverance, as some critics would have it. The same goes for the parables. For many years they endured torture at the hands of well-meaning interpreters who tried to make every parable an elaborate allegory where each character and item had a spiritual significance.

In one popular interpretation, the Good Samaritan story was twisted into an allegory about the plight of humanity, with the

man on the road representing Adam, the Samaritan representing Christ, the donkey representing grace, and so on. Such an interpretation was foolish and unwarranted, and it obscured the plain meaning of the parable.

## End-times mania

The need for properly determining genre prior to interpretation is particularly evident when we approach the book of Revelation. Throughout Christian history, John's vision on Patmos has been used to turn countless world leaders into antichrists, numerous economic and technological systems into the beast, and myriad denominations into Laodicean churches. With each new generation and delay in the Lord's return comes a need to reinvent timelines, re-demonize world leaders, re-target any signs of one-world tendencies, and anathematize whoever seems to best fit the description of the whore and her children.

In the midst of this, bad things

happen. For one, Christians come off looking foolish. Remember Edgar Whisenant's popular booklet *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could Be in 1988*, the great Y2K scare, the hype after 9-11, and the incredible appeal of the *Left Behind* series? These are just a few recent examples of how Christians are prone to be worked into end-times mania by faulty interpretations of Revelation.

Along with Christians looking ridiculous, a greater travesty takes place: The plain meanings and major benefits of Revelation are often lost in an attempt to mine its depths for mysterious clues and hidden messages, as if Revelation were an ancient version of *The Da Vinci Code*.

## Three genres

In the midst of the madness often associated with the Bible's last book, let me propose a better approach based on consideration of its type of literature. Simply put, Revelation is a masterful

combination of three distinct genres: apocalypse, prophecy, and epistle.

*Apocalypse* is a form of writing that looks toward future judgment and salvation. The writer of the apocalypse expects a time “when God would bring a violent, radical *end* to history, an end that would mean the triumph of right and the final judgment of evil.”<sup>1</sup> Apocalyptic literature has these common traits: cryptic, symbolic, fantastic, visionary, and strange.

Revelation is also *prophecy* — God’s message to His people through His prophetic messenger, John. Thus, there are elements of John’s Revelation that should be understood as God’s calls to repentance, commands to obey, warning of future consequences, and so on<sup>2</sup> to the book’s audience, both then and now.

Finally, Revelation is an *epistle*, or letter, written to seven churches in Asia Minor. Like the other epistles of the New Testament, Revelation was written to a specific group of Christians and had meaning for them nineteen hundred years before it had meaning for us.<sup>3</sup> As with any portion of Scripture, we should first answer the question “What did it mean to them?” before we ask, “What does it mean to us?”

The fact that Revelation was a letter is perhaps its most neglected feature in popular study. So often the seven churches are symbolized into non-reality and insignificance, except in the alignment of history. Unfortunately, such timelines have been created and edited time and again, while the plain meaning of the text is obscured.

## Right approach

We face a great challenge when we open Revelation. Unlike the Gospels, which are historical and biographical narratives with apocalyptic sections, Revelation is a tapestry of three unique genres, woven together in a beautiful, daunting way. Let us approach Revelation as such, with humility, sensitivity, and sanity. Let us not impose private interpretations on it that ignore its identity as apocalypse, prophecy, and epistle. Let us seek to understand what God revealed to John on the isle of Patmos and how it should affect our lives. ■■

**Israel Steinmetz**, his wife, Anna, and two children live in Kansas City, MO, where he serves as pastor.



## References

1. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, p. 233
2. *Ibid.*, p. 235
3. *Ibid.*, p. 236

When we were but children, You taught us to pray  
“Our Father . . . Thy kingdom come.”  
We have, and now we are grown; still we say, “Come!”

Once very young, on the last page we thrice read  
“Behold, I am coming quickly.”  
Now we are old, yet wise hearts leap hopefully: “Come!”

When sensible scoffers rise with tongues wagging  
“Where is the promise of His coming?”  
We fools forbear, sink on worn knees, and declare, “Come!”

Once perilous prophets dared to recklessly bellow,  
“The end of all things is at hand!”  
Now join them, raise banner, voices ring louder: “Come!”

Once rumors and wars, quaking and terror, we sought  
the sign of Your coming.  
Now tears and urgent years, let the redeemed cry, “Come!”

When watching and praying, so faithfully proclaiming,  
“The night is far spent, the day is at hand,”  
We live today better, knowing that tomorrow You come.

And once that Day dawns, in white we’re made ready  
“all who have loved His appearing.”  
Now finished and done, for love’s sake You’ve come!

Jason Overman

**In the middle of earth-space:** This planet's largest and most populated land mass consists of Africa, Asia, and Europe. These three continents meet and are conjoined precisely in the ancient land of Palestine – modern Israel.

**In the middle of earth-time:** The broad-brush outline of recorded human history tells of at least two thousand years prior to Israel's birth, a middle two thousand years with Israel in or near her homeland, and the last two thousand years during which she has endured worldwide dispersion.

**In the middle of His-story:** The Bible begins with an account of humanity prior to Abraham (Genesis 1–11). After this introduction, it devotes most of its pages to Israel (Genesis 12 through Malachi and the four Gospels). Church history and Christian instruction (Acts through Revelation) form its conclusion.

**In the middle of ancient covenants:** "I will make you [Abraham] a great nation [Israel]; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:2, 3).

**In the middle of the Bible:** "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: 'May they prosper who love you'" (Psalm 122:6; read also 118:1-14, which includes the middle verse of all the Bible).

**In the middle of Hebrew Prophets:** Of the sixteen writing prophets (Isaiah through Malachi), most contain one or more oracles of Israel's return to the Lord and to the land He promised to Abraham. Prime examples:

"For behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that I will bring back from captivity My people Israel and Judah," says the LORD. "And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it." . . . Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you" (Jeremiah 30:3, 11).

"I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them. I will plant them in their land, And no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God" (Amos 9:14, 15).

All these oracles of return are in perfect harmony with the words of Moses, greatest Hebrew prophet of them all (Deuteronomy 30:1-5ff).

**In the middle of God's eye:** "He kept him [Israel] as the apple [or pupil] of His eye" (Deuteronomy 32:10). "He who touches you [Zion] touches the apple of His eye" (Zechariah 2:8b).







**In the middle of our faith:** The family of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses gave us our roots, our prophets, and our Messiah-Savior. Each book of the Bible (possible exception: Luke) was written by an Israelite. Jesus, the magnetic center and focus of our faith, was a Jew – a faithful son of Abraham, Israel, and David.

**In the middle of Jesus’ prophetic teaching:** Jerusalem and Judea will be trampled until Gentile times are fulfilled (Luke 21:20-24). The trampling by Gentiles happened in A.D. 69, 70, just as Jesus said. His words imply that it would last only “until. . .”

**In the middle of Paul’s premier epistle:** Between the theology (chs.1–8) and application (chs. 12–16) of Romans, the apostle gave three chapters to God’s treatment of and plans for Israel:

God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. . . . blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written. . . . Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:2, 25, 26, 28, 29).

**In the middle of world hatred:** For millennia, the Jewish people have known persecution around the globe. Such hostility, known as anti-Semitism, traces at least to the Emperor Nero, who expelled all Jews from Rome around A.D. 62. Opposition to Jews was fostered in the church as early as Justin Martyr’s writings in the second century and was fueled by Bishop Chrysostom in the fourth. Anti-Jewish sentiment prejudiced the Romish church for fifteen hundred years, a fact it now admits.

Nor are Protestants exempt from such malice. Martin Luther’s vitriolic and violent tirades against the Jewish people are on record. The sordid story of anti-Semitism among peoples otherwise ostensibly Christian reached its zenith in Nazi Germany, where an estimated six million people paid with their lives for the single crime of being born as Jews – children of Israel.

**In the middle of her enemies:** Sixty-five years after the Holocaust, the world is not yet free of hatred for Abraham’s seed and for the tiny country they formed in 1948 at the consent of the United Nations. Many leading nations are cool at best toward modern Israel. A few larger ones within rocket distance of her borders make little attempt to hide their hatred and intent to destroy Jews any way possible and eventually push the state of Israel into the sea.

**In the middle of so much,** the people of Israel may yet have a place in God’s heart and plan, don’t you think?

# The Waiting God

by Joe Corrales

**P**atience is a virtue often lost on people today. In our headlong rush to the future, we have forgotten how to wait.

How different from God. The Creator of this universe waits. He waits for people to make Him and godliness a priority. He waits for a church that has allowed the world to steal her focus on what matters most. He waits for a people who have lost the meaning of the word *wait*.

The early church did not understand God's patience. Jesus had made promises about the future that hadn't been fulfilled yet. Christians grew impatient; some fell away from the faith.

It's easy to fault them for this, but we make the same mistake. We criticize God for not punishing the wicked quickly. Yet 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." Today, we hardly comprehend God's patience.

Peter explains that God's time-

table is different from ours (v. 8). God's patience does not imply powerlessness, though people take it that way. God's patience does not mean He is afraid to act. It does not imply that He's abandoned His children. God's is a power that intentionally withholds itself for the benefit of humanity.

But that's not the only reason God waits to send His Son back to earth. He waits to see if you will do your best with what He has given you. Jesus told a story of a master who traveled to a far country and left his goods in the hands of servants. The master delayed his return to see what his servants would do in his absence.

What have you been doing in Jesus' absence? How long will it take to use your gifts in His harvest? God delays with a caring kindness that lets us share in His work. There is nothing we can do that God could not do far better and more quickly. Yet He invites us to participate in the unfolding of His saving will.

If we are impatient with God,

how much more impatient might He be with us, if that were His nature? Why does God keep waiting?

God waits because Jesus' return will end all things. When Jesus comes to judge, the finality of that day will end all our opportunities for repentance.

Instead of resenting God's patience, we should rejoice in it. It gives us and others the opportunity to escape His judgment. Many of God's people today would not have been saved had Jesus returned years ago.

Martin Luther could not understand how God could be so patient with human beings. He said, "If I were God and the world had treated me as it treated God, I would have kicked the wretched thing to pieces!" I'm glad that Martin Luther was not God.

Is it possible that it is really not God who keeps us waiting but we who keep Him waiting by resisting what He wants us to do? Let's work in the fields, spreading the gospel seed so that any delay in Christ's return will only give more people a chance to accept Him. ■■■

**Joe Corrales**, pastor of Heart of Worship congregation in San Antonio, TX, also teaches and serves as head of the Computer Science Department at Palo Alto College.



Pondering end times is part of the Church's heritage and of Christian doctrine. The risen Christ will come again to judge, restore, and regenerate all creation. The Savior himself promised this (Matthew 19:28).

About His return, Jesus said, "But of that day and hour no one knows . . ." (24:36). The tension starts here, not only the question of when Christ will return but also of what we should do until He arrives.

This is part of a bigger tension in Scripture — that Christ's kingdom is with us now, yet we wait for a future kingdom when all the world will be made whole. To the Pharisees, Jesus said: "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20, 21). Then to His own disciples, Jesus admitted, "The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it" (v. 22).

The reality of the inward kingdom should compel us to do all the good we can while we wait for Jesus to come and complete the outward work. In a world of war and injustice, for example, Christians are called to be peacemakers and to "do justly" (Matthew 5:9; Micah 6:8).

Why is involving ourselves in this hostile world so important? Because, said Christ, people will run blindly after a savior (v. 23) in the chaotic days leading up to sudden destruction when the Son of Man comes (vv. 24-30). As in the days of the Flood and Sodom, focus will be on life's normal pursuits, coupled with fear and even panic as people

# From Struggle to Rescue

by Michael Flores

seek escape through their own devices (vv. 31-37; 21:25-27).

Christ relieved any panic His disciples may feel by providing an alternative response to the end times. He said to "pray always and never give up" (18:1ff) — to struggle through the tensions of this life while waiting for deliverance from them. In Jesus' story, the widow believes that justice should exist, but the judge denies it. The widow keeps insisting on this reality and works to attain it. Finally, the judge relents and grants her justice.

This speaks to the times between Christ's first and second comings. Thanks to Him, we have a taste of the justice that will ultimately prevail, but we do not yet see it all around. Our world is one of grim reality: wars and rumors of wars, floods, earthquakes, and fires. Sorrow, pain, and evil darken the lives of abandoned or abused children, depressed parents, broken families. We cope with poverty, racial injustice, political oppression. We live among broken lives, desperate wanderers, weary doubters.

Like the widow, we insist that another reality exists — a kingdom where justice, love, and rescue have the final word. As a

community, we are called to live as if that future kingdom is present reality, to insist on it as the widow did.

In fulfilling the Great Commission, we struggle between the realities of a world in chaos and a kingdom of joy and peace. In proclaiming that coming kingdom of God, we insist on a reality that opposes the current, dominant world, and we reaffirm that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true. In reaching out with a message of hope and restoration, we develop a community of faith to join the struggle here on earth. To oppression, we show justice. To brokenness, we offer restoration. To a world fearful of the end, we exude confidence in our promised future.

This is the kingdom and rescue that is present, while we wait for the kingdom and rescue to come. ■■■

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**Michael Flores**, married to Victoria, serves as youth director in San Antonio (Willard St. Church), TX.



# Mail Bag



## Interacting with Islam

I was blessed by reading Dr. James DeFrancisco's article "My Neighbor, My Enemy" [September '06, p. 22] and wanted to express my thanks to him and to the *Bible Advocate* for putting clearly into words answers to questions I've been struggling with about interaction with Muslims and with other non-Christian groups. Thank you for your candor and willingness to speak on a difficult subject.

L. M.  
e-mail

I enjoyed [the September '06] issue, though it was rather provoking. It provoked me some when I read the article on Islam. Especially where [the author] asked: "Is it possible that we can learn something from Muslims about the Bible and Jesus?" Who would want to hear about Jesus from antichrists? They deny Christ's divine sonship, and thus the Bible condemns them as anti-Christ. Denying His vicarious death and resurrection, they preach another gospel and are accursed, according to Paul.

M. E.  
e-mail

I take issue with the author's statement that conquest is not the essence of any valid faith — Islam, Judaism, or Christianity. If that is true, why did Jesus command us to go into all the world with the gospel message? By this command, Christianity is to be a religion of conquest as we share our faith.

His comment "If we are truly surrendered to God, we are, in the Aramaic sense, Muslims" is wrong. The God we worship through Jesus Christ is a different God than the Muslims surrender to. In the name of their god, Allah, Muslims slaughter Christians who refuse the Islamic message.

I strongly disagree that much of Christianity has a view of Jesus that is a blend of Gnosticism and hedonism. I believe that Jesus is the Son of God — God incarnate — sharing the same character, nature, and attributes of His Father. I did not study the Gnostic writers to formulate that opinion.

M. V.  
e-mail

The initial desire to promote peace is always a good one; reaching Muslims is what we should try to do. However, this purely linguistic approach coupled with a smattering of liberal theological bias does not deal with the damnable teaching of the religion of Islam. Violence and retaliation is not the needed response, but neither is a quasi capitulation based upon linguistic conjecture. I request that you issue an apology and agree to handle such controversial subjects differently in the future.

W. H.  
e-mail

*Reply from Dr. James DeFrancisco: We must know our enemy and not just listen to his critics. The article intended to agree with CoG7 doctrine of non-violence toward enemies. I am not opposed to a nation, when under fire, protecting itself by military action. During the recent combat between Israeli and Hezbollah forces, I showed up at some Bible studies wearing an IDF t-shirt. I support Israeli efforts toward peace in a variety of ways. However, Israeli actions in Lebanon, like our military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, will have temporary value at best — if there is any value at all. The long-term peace process involves peace, not war. A great Aramaic teacher put it this way: "Anything gained by force is really weak because it requires continued force to maintain it."*

*I believe in the deity of Christ and did not intend any statement to be suggested as an attack on that subject or beliefs about the Godhead. Years ago I was shocked to learn that some CoG7 members didn't believe in Christ's deity. But somehow they reflected Christ in their lives, even though their concept of Him was different than my own.*

*Over the years, I began to realize that the most important anti-Christ I had to deal with was the one in my own heart. It takes faith, humility, and love to look in the mirror and see religious arrogance toward "unbelievers." The purpose of a Christian teacher is not to condemn the rest of the world but to educate, train, and inspire Christians to be better disciples and ambassadors of Christ during our tour of duty in this world.*

*Reply from the editor: The author's prologue prepared us to expect*

something not quite orthodox. It admitted the article might not be politically or religiously correct and should not be construed as the position of any church. He told us how to pray for and relate to Muslims, not how to deal with radical Islam around the world. Is Christianity a religion of conquest? The author does not oppose evangelism, and M. V. does not endorse military conquest to extend our faith, so there is no issue here.

The statement that if we are truly surrendered to God, we are, in the Aramaic sense, Muslims is provocative only if we read into it more than this Christian author obviously meant. If the word Muslim means "surrendered to God," are we not Muslim in a generic sense? In the same sense, we might say that all true Christians are "catholics" — that is, members of the "universal" church.

Some Muslims do know more about our Scriptures than many Christians do. In respectful dialogue with people of any faith, may we not learn something about our own faith at the same time we share with others?

The author criticizes modern Christianity (not all of it) as shallow, hedonistic, antinomian, and characterized by cheap grace. Many in CoG7 and other conservative churches often say similar things. Is it not self-evident that if all Christians truly lived out the teachings of Jesus, the conflict between Christianity and Islam would have a much different tone and tenor than it now has?

### **Sabbath, salvation, and service**

[The September '06] was largely perceptive and profound in regard to the topic of "rest." I agree with 98 percent of your comments, which I find excellently balanced ["Q & A," p. 8]. I am profoundly concerned, however, with the first two sentences that express the idea that failure to obey the Sabbath command does not mark those who only profess

Christianity. I actually agree with your argument, yet maintain that your statement is dangerously misleading. Those who reject Sabbath observance almost universally do so, in part if not largely, with the heretical belief that there is no law and/or that Christians are saved without any reference to obedience, i.e., despite any degree of disobedience. If we knowingly ignore and shun those portions of the New Testament that clearly and specifically instruct us how to distinguish between true believers and those who merely profess, then are we not guilty? Am I missing something? Why is this such a taboo subject?

A. K.  
Antioch, CA

*Reply from the editor: The key issue here is where the Sabbath fits in God's will for His people generally and in His plan for our salvation particularly. My position and the prevailing opinion in the Church is that we should not elevate the Sabbath higher than Jesus and the apostles have it. While their example and teaching do support Sabbath observance, it is doubtful that they considered it among the elements without which genuine faith in Jesus Christ cannot exist. Your letter suggests that the epistle of 1 John distinguishes true believers as those who obey the commandments of God. In fact, 1 John gives three tests for how to know a true Christian. They are 1) by faith in Christ, 2) by love for the brethren, and 3) by obedience to God's commandments. These three are mutually supportive of each other, and no test may be isolated from the other two. The obedience test must not be applied in a way that demands either perfect knowledge or perfect performance. No Christian has perfect obedience to offer, but all true believers are intent on obeying their Lord as they understand His will. My sense is that more believers neglect God's Sabbath because of faulty instruc-*

*tion than through unbelief or willful disobedience.*

*Note: For the full text of A. K.'s letter and the editor's full reply, please visit [www.cog7.org/BA](http://www.cog7.org/BA).*

Although we are saved by grace and faith alone, we can be lost in many ways. One of them might be for a believer to fully ignore God's Sabbath and have no respect for the Ten Commandments law written in his heart. After we have received knowledge of the truth, willful sin insults the spirit of grace and is not covered by Christ's sacrifice (Heb. 10:26-29). Anyone who has a genuine conversion and baptism is in a saved condition, no matter his stage of learning. He maintains that condition amid all his mistakes as he grows and accepts new truth, as long as he doesn't revert to willful and flagrant disobedience to what he knows to be right.

L. and W. L.  
Meridian, ID

I loved your articles about Sabbath and am always refreshed by such a day of rest, fellowship, and worship. I work as a certified nursing assistant in a long-term care facility and receive satisfaction caring for dementia patients. I know the Lord led me here, even though all CNA's must serve some weekends. I work the swing shift and never miss church, but I often miss the fellowship and refreshment that follows. If people scold me for "working" on Sabbath, I ask them who they expect to care for their loved ones that day. Do you have words of wisdom on how to balance a Sabbath commitment with human need?

J. L.  
Jefferson, OR

*Reply from the editor: The wise words of Jesus in Matthew 12:11, 12 come to mind here. Let's invite our readers to comment on this one, too.*

**D**o Christians go to heaven when they die? Will Jesus take His people to heaven at His return? Heaven is a popular topic among Christians. By the grace of Christ, we hope for a wonderful future kingdom of God, wherever that may be. In the interest of biblical accuracy, we offer these two items with the caution that all you've been told about heaven may not necessarily be so.

# Resurrection Hope

by David Kidd

**A**re our departed Christian friends and loved ones enjoying God's presence in heaven? Are they looking down on us? Do they see us sin? This is a common view in Christian circles.

Those who were close to Jesus on earth based their hope for life after death on His resurrection. The apostle Paul's hope was that he "may know Him [Christ] and the power of His resurrection . . . if by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:11). And Peter tied our hope to the resurrection when he said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).

Similarly, Hebrews 11:35 says that faithful men and women, like Abraham and Sarah, hoped for

a better resurrection, yet didn't receive it at death, "God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us" (v. 40).

As the resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, shows, the Christian's greatest hope is tied to and modeled upon the example of Jesus. Christ died and rose from the dead (v. 20a), but He did not rise straightaway: "He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (v. 4). In this He is the firstfruits, or pattern, of those who have died (v. 20b).

Saying that Christ was the first to rise implies that others will also be resurrected to eternal life in due time. Our life after death is tied to Jesus' resurrection; He gives us the opportunity for the same. This is good news, if we are in Christ by faith (v. 22)!

Verse 23 tells the order to our glorious resurrection hope: "Christ the firstfruits, afterward

those who are Christ's at His coming." Just as Christ was not resurrected immediately, so we will not be raised until His coming. First Thessalonians 4:16, 17 confirms it.

After His death, Jesus was taken from the cross and placed in a tomb (Luke 23:50-54). This is a positive thing for our hope. His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption (Acts 2:31). Rather than a place of burning torment, Hades is the place of the dead — the grave. Significantly, this passage speaks of Jesus' *soul and flesh*, indicating a unity, not a conscious separation of His person. Jesus' whole person was in the place of the dead, not just His physical body.

Jesus confirms this by saying that on the third day He would rise again.


Generations of sincere Christians have believed that they go straight to heaven when they die. Many base this, in part, on

the case of the crucified thief in Luke 23:39-43. Here the thief said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." Was Jesus telling the thief they would meet in paradise that day?

This plain English translation faces the problem that, as we have just seen, paradise was not where Jesus went the day He died. Also, the thief would have to be in paradise *before* Christ's victory over the grave, which makes little sense.

Some have speculated that a small punctuation change would provide a correct meaning to this sentence: "Assuredly I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise." This is grammatically possible.

A preferable view for me is that Jesus' statement to the dying thief simply gives him a solid assurance that his place in paradise is secure from that day. If we are in Christ, led of the Spirit, each of us has the same guarantee. Just as Jesus was resurrected to this earth before He ascended to heaven, so we must be resurrected to this earth first before enjoying the kingdom of heaven and that great city whose builder and maker is God.

The more important point here is not when or where the kingdom is, but whether we personally will be in it. Through faith in Christ and repentance toward God, we will be! 

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**David and Angela Kidd** reside in South Australia, where they serve in leadership with the Adelaide church.

# Daniel's Revelation, David's Throne

by **Richard G. Cress**

Even if we did not have explicit Scripture stating that the righteous will someday reign on the earth (see Revelation 5:10; Matthew 5:5), ample evidence of this fact is stated elsewhere in God's Word.

For example, Daniel's interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream depicts the kingdom of God replacing all other earthly empires. It states emphatically, "The stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:35b).

This smiting stone is interpreted in verse 44 to be the kingdom of God. The king's dream, then, means that the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman Empires are destroyed in turn and that their place on earth is taken by God's everlasting kingdom.


Again, the promise is made that Jesus will reign from a specific location on earth. Read this anointed message from the apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost:

"Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He [God] would raise up the Christ to sit on his [David's] throne" (Acts 2:30; Luke 1:31-33).

The throne of David, of course, was in Jerusalem. We expect, then, that Jesus will reign on this earth from the throne of David.

Further, we are promised that when Jesus comes again and takes His earthly throne, we will reign with Him (Matthew 19:28). Our reigning and ruling with Christ are assigned to a specific time and order, set by a revelation to the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 15:22-28):

1. Jesus will return from heaven, and those who belong to Him will be resurrected.
2. Christ will put down all authority and power. He will reign until He has fully accomplished this.
3. He will deliver the kingdom to His Father.

This establishes the timeline. It begins when Jesus returns, and it ends when He has finished the job of subduing the kingdoms of this earth (Psalm 2:7-9; Revelation 19:11-16). We know this period as the millennium — one thousand years, according to Revelation 20:1-6. For the above reasons, and more, we expect it will happen here on earth. 

---

**Elder Richard Cress** pastors congregations in Ft. Smith (Southside), AR, and Muskogee, OK.

# Tragedy, Tears, Triumph

Overcoming the pain of grief through the power of Christ. **by Robert Barthel**

A typical spring day in eastern Oklahoma, April 1997: bright sunshine, green grass, flowers blooming, trees blossoming. My wife of thirty-eight years, Dorothy, and I had much to be thankful for. Recently transferred from Texas with a promotion, we had purchased a new house and were looking forward to settling down back home.

We had driven to Tulsa that day to visit family. Just three miles into the return trip, Dorothy pulled up to a stop sign at a busy highway. "There's no traffic on the right side," I told her from the passenger's seat.

Suddenly, a tremendous noise pierced my ears, and pain shot through me. As we spun around, a bank of dirt came up, and the car rammed into it. My head snapped forward and hit the dash. We had pulled into the path of a box truck. Its full impact hit the driver's side.

I took Dorothy's hand and called her name, but got no response. Soon paramedics extricated us from the wrecked car and laid us alongside it. I could hear them trying to revive Dorothy while others worked with me.

After a while, the chaplain of the local police department came, held my hand, and told me Dorothy was dead. With my

mind running in all directions, the only thing I could say to him was "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21, KJV).

## Struggle to live

At the trauma center, I learned that I had sustained multiple injuries. The staff at St. John's Hospital in Tulsa worked several hours patching me up and stabilizing me.

The next morning I had the first of five surgeries to rebuild my left arm. As I was coming out of the anesthetic, the nurse in recovery called my name and asked if I was ready to wake up.

"I don't want to wake up," I responded.

When she asked why, I answered, "One of my reasons for living is no longer living. I don't want to fight to get better."

The nurse left me alone for a while and let me talk with the Lord. When she returned, I said, "I'll wake up. I lost my wife, but I still have my sons and grandchildren, and I have the Lord. If He brought me through that car wreck, surely He has a place for me and a task for me to do."

Over the next several months and through many surgeries, I

fought to stay positive. In time, I recovered so that I could attend church and return to work. I would often sing to myself when nobody else was around. But I withdrew from people for a time and knew I was doing it. I didn't want to be around them. Eventually, though, I went back to singing songs at church, teaching classes, and occasionally filling the pulpit.

I was married to Dorothy for two-thirds of my life, and I felt as if I had lost at least two-thirds of me when she died. Thank God, I didn't stay that way.

## New bride, new battle

In the third year of being alone, I developed a relationship with Leah Moldenhauer. We were married on Thanksgiving Day 1999 in her North Dakota home.

Soon after our wedding, Leah experienced episodes of nausea, weakness, or dizziness, but she'd beg off going to the doctor. The only reason she finally went was that I wanted her to go.

In April 2001, less than three weeks after routine tests, Leah had a colonoscopy and surgery for colon cancer. In May she started chemotherapy at the Roger Maris Cancer Center in





Fargo, North Dakota. In June we attempted to attend the Dover Family Camp in Oklahoma, but it was difficult working the church activity into the chemo schedule. We attended the General Conference convention in Colorado Springs in July and, while there, visited the hospital twice to get blood tests and medications.

In early September we learned the chemo was not working, so the medication was changed to another much stronger solution. When we attempted to attend the senior retreat at Dover, Leah wound up in the hospital in Oklahoma City. At this time, she began to lose her hair.

Leah never recovered her strength after that massive dose of medication. She continued to weaken.

### Losing the battle

In November the doctors in Fargo reported that the cancer was still growing and that they

had nothing more to offer. They said we could seek another step of research not available at their facility. We searched from Rochester to Houston and found the research program near our home. Leah started it in Muskogee in December 2001 and continued it for six weeks.

On January 22, 2002, we learned the cancer had grown approximately eighty percent in the past six weeks and that the chemo was not working as a preventative. It was time for me to take Leah back to North Dakota to be with her children. The end was imminent.

On Sunday, January 27, we arrived in Jud, North Dakota. We enjoyed the family all day Monday. That night I helped Leah prepare for bed. She couldn't stand or walk more than across the room. I guided her to the bed and brushed what had regrown of her hair. Her son-in-law, Tim, helped me set her on the side of the bed. We read some

Scripture and prayed. Then we settled Leah in a recliner in the living room and called the rest of the family.


Leah recognized each family member, held their hands, and expressed her love for them. We gathered around her, read more Scripture, and sang a song to her.

Looking at us, she said, "I love you," then closed her eyes — gone.

Leah's faith did not waiver from the time we learned she had cancer. She never asked, "Why me?" nor questioned God. As far as I could tell, she was never depressed, thanks to her comfort and confidence in God and the promise He has given through Jesus Christ.

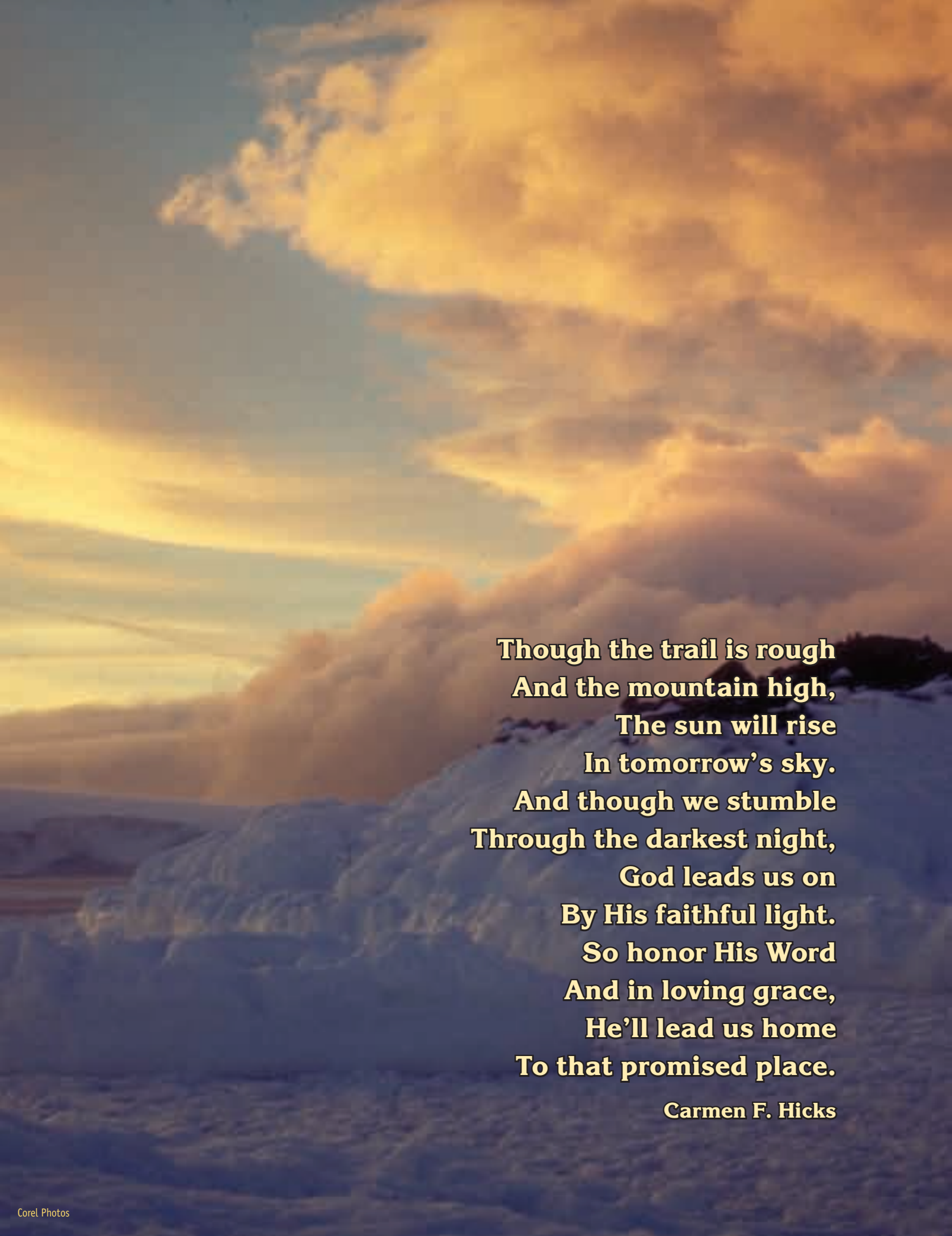
### Changed life

My life has changed considerably since losing Dorothy and Leah. Some of those changes have been for the good. I have a closer relationship with the Lord and find it a little easier to turn things over to Him. In August 2004 I married Mary (Irwin) Githens, and once again the Lord made light shine out of darkness.

I don't know what other plans God has for me, but I'm certain that He guides my steps. And that's plenty for me. 

**Robert and Mary Barthel** make their home in Muskogee, OK, where they attend the Three Rivers Church of God.



A dramatic sky with golden and blue clouds over a snowy mountain landscape. The sky is filled with large, billowing clouds that are illuminated from below, creating a warm, golden glow. The lower part of the sky transitions into a deep blue. Below the sky, a snow-covered mountain range is visible, with the peaks and ridges covered in a thick layer of white snow. The overall scene is serene and majestic.

**Though the trail is rough  
And the mountain high,  
The sun will rise  
In tomorrow's sky.  
And though we stumble  
Through the darkest night,  
God leads us on  
By His faithful light.  
So honor His Word  
And in loving grace,  
He'll lead us home  
To that promised place.**

**Carmen F. Hicks**



## What's new with . . .

### Publications

- Join the Editor's Circle for 2007, p. 29

### Ministries Training System

- Regional classrooms resume in 2007; visit [www.mts.cog7.org](http://www.mts.cog7.org)

### Spring Vale Academy

- Second semester openings; call 989-725-2391

### National FYC

- Southwest District Youth Retreat, December 28-31; [jrande@houston.rr.com](mailto:jrande@houston.rr.com) or 281-220-9652

### Missions Ministries

- Pioneer Missionary Training to Mexico, December 21-30

## Ministries Training System

Calvin Burrell, Director

The news about the number and status of CoG7 pastors and ministers is good and not so good. Consider . . .

- Fewer than one-third of our 220 churches are led by ordained, vocational pastors. And the majority of pastors are above age fifty.
- About one-third of congregations are led by laymen with minimal training for pastoral ministry. Thank God for the good work done by these lay pastors!

- More than one-third of the churches have no recognized pastoral leadership. In these, local members do their best for the Lord and His people. We're grateful for all of them, too!

- Six CoG7 pastors/ministers have died so far this year. Others chose to retire from active duty or were lost to the Church due to discouragement, doctrinal differences, or other reasons.

The good news is that more than one thousand students have enrolled in one or more MTS courses since 2002 and that a hundred or more of these express interest in future pastoral or vocational ministry in the Church. Praise God!

The assignment of Ministries Training System is a God-sized job. We are pleased to have a growing number of veteran pastors and qualified teachers who provide training in nearly twenty regional classrooms around North America. By God's grace and Spirit, pastors are being called and prepared! Please join us in prayer and financial support for this work.

Ministries Training System  
303-452-7973 • [training@cog7.org](mailto:training@cog7.org)



*Rex Miller with his wife, Lisa, of Grand Rapids, MI, receives his MTS Diploma of Pastoral Studies from NE District Superintendent Richard Wiedenheft. Elders Max Morrow and Paul Heavilin look on.*



*Sixty-five ordained ministers met in Overland Park, Kansas, October 2-7. They chose Robert Coulter, Carl Palmer, and Kenneth Knoll as president, vice-president and secretary of the council, respectively, for the next two years.*

### NAMC Approves Statement

In an encouraging exhibit of unity and deference, the North American Ministerial Council has approved a statement of faith for the Church that

- updates and condenses the CoG7 Doctrinal Beliefs booklet, reducing the number of items from twenty-seven to twelve.
- preserves all essential teachings from the previous booklet, presenting them in a more compelling and appealing form.

The council also called for production of a book to present biblical evidence for the twelve doctrines, while exploring implications and applications for each.

The new statement of faith may be read on the Church's Web site ([www.cog7.org](http://www.cog7.org)) and will be available in printed form from the Bible Advocate Press by December 31. The book-length presentation should be completed by mid-2008.

In addition to doctrinal considerations, the ministers began each day of council with an hour of song and sermon around the theme "His Name is Wonderful – Jesus, My Lord." Elder Loren Stacy, council president for the past two years, directed business sessions and coordinated seminars on such topics as Ministerial Ethics and Personal Fitness. Jose Antonio Hinojosa, James Sawyer, and Eduardo Villalba were ordained for ministry at the concluding program on Sabbath, October 7.

The Ministerial Council found much to like about the hotel and convention center in Overland Park, Kansas – the same facilities that will host the General Conference Convention, July 2-7, 2007.

#### From Church Planting

**WANTED:**

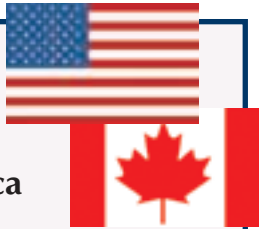
#### Missionaries to America

##### Qualifications

- Must be a believer in Jesus and willing to work in fulfilling the Great Commission, even though you may not be a pastor or preacher. We are looking for willing **members** to serve as missionaries to America.
- Must have a trade or profession that would enable you to live and work in a number of areas in the U.S. or Canada.
- Must be willing to relocate as part of a team to plant new CoG7 congregations somewhere in the U.S. or Canada.
- Must possess the greatest ability of any true missionary: **availability**.
- Must provide proof of current participation in a CoG7 congregation and a pastor's statement of maturity in Christ.

For more information, contact William C. Hicks, director of G. C. Missions, at [carlylehix@aol.com](mailto:carlylehix@aol.com) or 423-323-7191.

**Please don't forget your G. C. Missions Ministries. We're working for you around the corner and around the world sharing the good news of Jesus Christ!**



*Emogene Coulter, 74, passed away on September 15, 2006, in Mentone, AL. She is survived by her husband, Elder Robert Coulter, four children, ten grandchildren, and a multitude of friends.*

Dr. A. L. Carlin, 85, longtime physician in Stanberry, MO, and servant of the Church, died on October 15, 2006. He is survived by his wife, Catherine, their four children and families, and numerous friends.



### Ministerial License, Credentials

Men who aspire to begin ordained ministry in the Church in 2007 should submit their applications by December 15. The License and Credentials Committee – composed of Elders Raul Lopez, Max Morrow, Carl Palmer, Glen Palmer (chairman), Don Rodgers, Heber Vega, and Mike Vlad – will consider the applications early next year.

### Golden Anniversaries

Congratulations to CoG7 couples celebrating fifty years of marriage in 2006. These include . . .

Mr. and Mrs. George Hnamte of Mizoram, India (April 10)

David and Betty Kauer of Sacramento, CA (June 17)

Ken and Dora Noble of Muskegon, MI (June 26)

Charles and Joan Hartley of Rogers, AR (July 14)

Edward and Lottie Davison of Tulsa, OK (August 20)

James and Barbara Taylor of Springfield, MO (September 5)

Wayne and Clela Endecott of Central City, IA (October 21)

Also, Henry and Marina Adame of Sacramento, California, were married fifty-four years on September 14.

Please send names and dates of golden anniversaries in 2007 (and any omitted for 2006) to the editor.

### Florida Super Sabbath

The city of Orlando (3032 Monte Carlo Trail) will host a statewide Super Sabbath on December 16, with Pastor Henry Harley, president of the Jamaican Church, as guest preacher. For information, call 407-275-5616 or e-mail [wlargie60@yahoo.com](mailto:wlargie60@yahoo.com).



## An invitation to join . . .

The Editor's Circle places the printed gospel into the hands of more people for their salvation and spiritual growth. Qualifications for membership are simple:

- Have you been blessed by the *Bible Advocate*?
- Do you ask the Lord to use this ministry to bless others also?
- Will you give \$60 or more per year (\$5 or more per month) to the BA so others can be blessed?

If you answered yes to each of these, you can join the Editor's Circle. Your support will help reach new readers with the *Bible Advocate*. Use this coupon. . . .

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### STATEMENT

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# International Tour

## Poland

This issue features one of the smaller conferences working within our International Ministerial Congress. The IMC seeks to encourage development of groups that see their efforts in harmony with many that desire to “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12b).

Over the years, we have had contact with, and provided support for, several churches within the Sabbathkeeping community in Poland. The good news is that some of these have chosen to work with IMC. They are called, Zbory Boze Chrzescijan Dnia Siodmego (Polish) – something like “God’s Congregations of Seventh-Day Christians” in English. This group has long connections with similar churches in Germany, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, the Ukraine, and other countries. Like many small national conferences, being part of the IMC reminds them that they

are not alone in their efforts but have brethren who seek to serve the Lord in like manner around the world.

In June 2006 I met with members of the group’s executive committee in Pruchna, southern Poland, where they shared the state of their work. Their seven congregations are mainly in southern Poland, with offices in Bielsko-Biala. They are directed by an executive committee, with Elder Emil Stekla as chairman and Elder Boleslaw Parma as secretary. Elder Tadeusz Swiercz was named as their delegate to the next congress in Overland Park, Kansas (July 2007).

The challenge facing the Polish conference is similar to that of others living in a culture dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, where even the government has close ties with the Vatican. In spite of this, using mainly lay pastors, they worship their Lord with a clear conscience and grow in His grace. They express their desire to move a few key leaders into full-time employ-



ment to help in developing literature and in training more leaders.

In June 2004 and again this year, the Polish church hosted European IMC meetings. Sabbath services in Skoczow (2006) were attended by 240 participants from the continent and the U.S., using the theme “That We May Be One.”

The Polish church is a praying church and requests our prayers for one of their own. The daughter of Elder Boleslaw Parma (pictured above between her brother Pawel, left, and Elder Hicks, right) suffers from a rare form of anemia that renders her too weak for a heart transplant. According to her doctors, she is incurable. May we be one with them in prayer for this dear sister’s healing and for the Church in Poland as well, that we may be one in Christ.

– Elder William C. Hicks,  
Director  
Missions Abroad



*European IMC meeting in Warsaw, Poland (2004)*



## Firm and Secure

The New Age Movement grew in popularity during the 1990s, finding wide acceptance in secular culture. New Age taught that there's a new world (age) coming, that the stars and planets mysteriously influence life on this earth, that the signs of the zodiac represent cycles of earth's existence, and that somewhere near the year 2000 the cycle Pices will give way to Aquarius. Remember the song "Aquarius" by Fifth Dimension that predicted harmony and understanding, sympathy and trust?

But New Age prophets came up short. Instead of global harmony, this century has ushered in a new struggle for peace on earth. Terrorism, nuclear weapons, and escalating conflicts in the Middle East are among the stark realities of this so-called new world. This year's war between Israel and Lebanon, with calls from the leader of a neighboring country to rid the world of the Israeli state, evoked words and phrases such as *Armageddon* and *World War III*. It called to mind this prophecy: "Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about . . ." (Zechariah 12:2, KJV).

"In times like these you need an anchor," wrote Ruth Caye Jones in an old hymn. This song is based on Scripture: "We have this hope as an anchor of the soul, firm and secure" (Hebrews 6:19a, NIV). The context of this verse focuses on God's unchangeable nature and purpose, guaranteed by the death and endless life of Jesus Christ. So Jones continues: "This Rock is Jesus, Yes, He's the One;/This Rock is Jesus, the only One!/Be very sure, be very sure/Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!"

There's enough going on in the world to make people panic. To the earlier list of terrorism, nuclear arms, and Middle East conflict, add tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes, global warming, the oil crisis.

And don't forget the bird flu. Yet those whose anchor grips the solid Rock can find peace in troubled times. Peace is not the absence of war but the presence of Jesus. Because of our confidence in Him, we can make some safe predictions about the future: God will still sit on His throne; Jesus will still be Lord of all; the Bible will still be true; people will still come to faith in Christ through the power of the gospel; and physical death will still be only a comma, not a period, in the story of life.

Dreams of utopia, the creation of communes, and predictions about the mysterious transformation of life on our planet are ways in which some people have sought to cope with a broken world. But Scripture offers something different: confidence in Christ, firm and secure. Paul confirms this:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35, 38, 39, NIV).

These confidence-filled verses are beautifully summarized like this: "If I fall, it will be at His door. If I die, it will be in His hands. If I sink, it will be on His ship."

Things will no doubt get worse before it's over, but according to the end of the Book, we win! We may tremble on the rock, but the Rock on which we stand never trembles.

— Whaid Guscott Rose  
General Conference President

# Planned Giving



**Your financial resources may be worth a lot more to your church's future than you think!**

The General Conference's Office of Planned Giving encourages Church-wide participation in the Conference's pooled Endowment Fund. The purpose of this fund is to gather resources for both immediate and long-term ministry development. Through planned giving, you can set your financial house in order and bless the Church you love at the same time.

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