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BA

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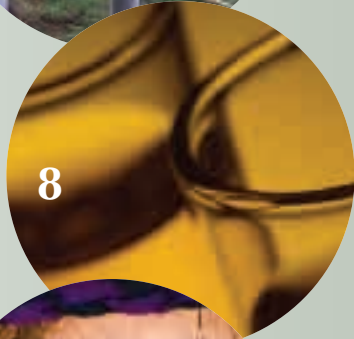


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“Six Days You Shall Labor”

It's common to use the season or a public event to launch our visit on this page, so let's talk about the national holiday on this month's calendar: Labor Day. On the first Monday of September, working folks get an extra day off with honors, in both the U.S. and Canada.

Say it up front and out loud: Work is one of God's good gifts to the human race. If we think of good works primarily in terms of “saved by grace, not of works,” it may sound strange. Yes, several texts, mostly penned by Paul, do teach us to rely on God's grace in Jesus — not on our own efforts — for forgiveness of our sins and the glory to come.

Those several texts are just one piece of Bible teaching about labor, though. Dozens of other passages endorse the inherent, spiritual dignity of work, along with its personal value and social benefits. Ecclesiastes 3:9-13 is a good, earthy example.

The little letter of Titus illustrates the Bible's double-edged truth on this topic. Six times in three chapters, Paul urges Christians on to good works (1:16; 2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14). On the other hand, he also insists that our righteous conduct can never achieve the salvation that comes only through Christ and grace (3:4-7).

Because work is present and prominent in the Bible's first two chapters before sin entered, it cannot be a curse for sin. Having noble work to do with the gumption to do it: This is true blessing.

Pity the man or woman who detests his/her work, considers it drudgery, finds excuses to come late and leave early, claims sick time for personal use, or otherwise ditches duty by piddling and playing on the job. Pity the boy or girl who is coddled by parents, spared the discipline of work at home, school, and church.

Both Jesus and His Father work (John 5:17). We have the privilege of day labor with them, but the night is coming when no one can work (9:4). Since each of us has just enough time to finish the work God gives us, now is the right time to make our pledge to the intrinsic value of work generally and to our Christian duty of good works toward others in particular.

Happy labor days — this one in September and all six of them every other week of the year!

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Photo: Jasper, AR, church

THE POTATO PATCH

Practicing community with hands in the dirt.
by Jason Overman

Like many churches, ours here in Jasper has a mid-week service every Wednesday evening. We gather for a meal; we visit, sing songs, read and discuss Scripture, share, and pray together. But on one Wednesday this past March we broke tradition and planted potatoes instead.

Grandpa Jim had already plowed and prepared the spot we dedicated for the project. Each family picked a row and started planting the potatoes they had bought. It was quite the sight: men, women, grandkids, and grandparents all gathered with hoes and shovels burying their “taters.” When we finished, we said a prayer over twelve little rows and went back to our homes. It was one of the best services we’ve ever had.

Thanks to a rainy spring and lots of hot sun, the potatoes are

well over knee high. Recently I spent some time alone in the potato patch weeding and thinking. As I worked up the rows, I could see our church building in the distance. The pastor in me couldn’t help but find a parable in the parallels.

Shared spaces

In a world where individualism and personal fulfillment are hailed as fundamental virtues, it isn’t surprising that many now find themselves alone and lonely. Sadly, even church has sometimes succumbed to this cultural malady, since it is reduced to a mere hour of worship, marginalized as just one more commodity to be shopped for. All too often church is not any more socially meaningful than a ball-park or movie theatre: We come, we sit, we are entertained, and

we leave — no less strangers than before.

Whether it be an Old Testament prophet like Isaiah or Jesus in the New, it isn't unusual to find the people of God compared to a garden in the Bible. As I look over ours, I realize how apt the metaphor is. Its order and form immediately distinguish it from the surrounding environment. To any chance observer, this is obviously intentional territory; it is shared space.

Acts recounts the shared space of the first Christians. Take this passage, for instance:

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need (Acts 2:42-45).

Here we find five central activities of the church: Bible study, fellowship, eating, praying, and sharing. But the unifying word in this passage is *together*. Note how "all who believed were *together*." These five graces are not described as occurring in isolation; they are gifts precisely because they are shared. Togetherness gives shape to this garden called church, and togetherness must be practiced if our garden is to withstand the encroaching disorder of the wild that surrounds it.

Acts often draws our attention to this community of togetherness with the phrase "with one accord" (curiously translated "together" in the NIV). At the

very root of community is unity, a shared identity in Christ that translates to a sharing of purpose and life. Wherever we find the people of God "together with one accord" in the early chapters of Acts, we also find prayers and supplications (1:14); the Spirit poured out and the kingdom preached with power (2:1); joy, gladness, and eating from house to house (v. 46); praising God and sharing possessions (4:32, 33); signs and wonders and the respect of onlookers (5:12-15); discernment and healing (8:5-8); wise counsel and fresh revelation (15:25-29).

The psalmist puts it just right: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1). He creates his own metaphor of togetherness: "Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together" (122:3). We are this city, this garden, *when we are a people "together."*

Fruitful fields

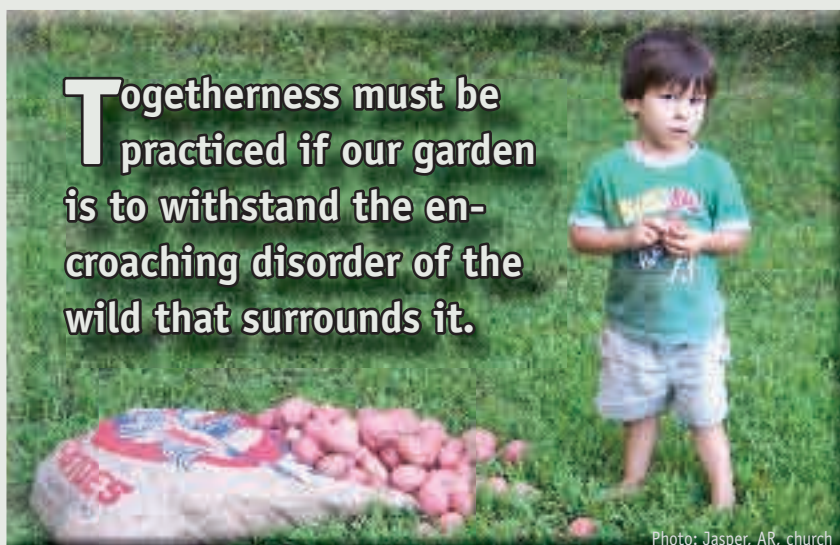
Of course, this community of unity cannot be taken for granted. If our shared space leans purposefully toward fruitfulness,

if we are to grow inexorably toward that goal, then we must be diligently aware of all that opposes our fruitful field. Back in our potato patch, as I am pulling pesky weeds and tossing the rocks that seem to magically grow in our Ozark soil, the point is all too clear.

In a world where the average child is subjected to over twenty thousand thirty-second commercials in any given year (www.csun.edu/science/health/docs/tv&health.html), it is little wonder that so many are as distracted and discontented as ever. The church as it is currently arrayed seems ill equipped to withstand the onslaught as poll after poll reveals that the lifestyle of the average Christian is not measurably different from his non-Christian counterpart. In the final analysis, the weeds and the rocks, the trials and temptations of the wild, are laying waste our garden.

Jesus clearly identifies these enemies in His parable of the sower and the seed:

"But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root,





Ultimately, superficiality leaves the garden smoldering in the heat of petty division and offense.

who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity" (Luke 8:13, 14).

The twin threats to our fruitful field are clear enough. The innumerable rocks that seem ever renewing in our potato patch point toward a kind of superficiality, a shallowness of character that is as vocal as it is fickle. In the face of difficulty, its distracted, rootless longing for the novel easily saps the soil of the patience necessary to endure and thrive. Ultimately, superficiality leaves the garden smoldering in the heat of petty division and offense.

The weeds are even worse. Those in our mountain garden aren't individually that intimidating but are actually rather small. The problem is that they are legion. Like twenty thousand commercials, weeds are all the innumerable wants and desires that take captive our actions and imaginations, the "cares, riches, and pleasures of life" that create a culture of selfishness that robs

us of our collective nurture, leaving a strangled mess of confused indulgence. Ultimately, we are a garden without shape or fruit.

Rocks and weeds are not outsiders. Though they do have an affinity with the wild beyond, they are present and lay dormant in the very soil the Spirit would use to bring forth love, joy, peace, patience . . . self-control. Rocks and weeds are present because not so long ago, this space was wild itself. Now that it's reclaimed for a greater purpose, we find rocks and weeds challenging our fruitful field. But we ought to be concerned when they threaten our existence because we have neglected to do the hard work of rooting and tossing them out.

The psalmist once more hits the mark, this time focusing on what God brings upon the negligent: "He turns rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground; a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of those who dwell in it" (107:33, 34).

This sobering assessment is followed, however, in the next verse by a note of hope and of a coming reversal:

He turns a wilderness into pools of water,
And dry land into watersprings.

There He makes the hungry dwell,

That they may establish a city for a dwelling place,

And sow fields and plant vineyards,

That they may yield a fruitful harvest (vv. 35-37).

Harvest homecoming

Before too long, we'll be harvesting potatoes here. I'm looking forward to seeing what kind of harvest we'll get. In these rows we'll hopefully uncover some red russets and Yukon Golds. They will be big and small, all colors and shapes. And best of all, they will feed and nourish many a hungry soul beyond this small-shared space. Sounds like a church, like rows of another kind, doesn't it?

More than harvesting potatoes, I will be in the garden with my friends; our potato patch, after all, isn't just a metaphor of the church fruitful, but a particular act of it. Like Bible study, prayer, eating, and fellowship, this garden is just one more tangible way that we share our lives. Of course, you can do all these things alone, but as the church in Acts models for us, we may learn more, become more, by practicing them in community.

Your church may be like mine. The effort is never perfect, but it's always *together*. And that makes all the difference. **BA**

Jason Overman lives and ministers in Jasper AR.



Q Is the seventh-day Sabbath binding on Christians today? If so, how can the injunction in Exodus 35:3 be observed?

A It will help us toward an answer if we examine several ways that the weekly Sabbath day is described and prescribed in the Bible.

First, the Sabbath was blessed as a memorial to God's handiwork at the end of Creation week (Gen. 2:2, 3; Ex. 20:11). As long as heaven and earth remain, the seventh day of the week will retain this magnificent meaning and some men, at least, will remember their Creator.

Second, the Sabbath was set aside (sanctified) as a day of rest from the labor of the first six days, by God's own example (Gen. 2:2, 3). As long as men imitate their Maker by engaging in fruitful labor, the need for a weekly rest day will remain.

Third, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" was spoken by God as a command and was written by Him on tables of stone — the heart of the old covenant (Ex. 20:8-11). As long as the moral essence of God's law stands, the seventh day will be sacred time.

Fourth, Sabbath was prescribed as a day for holy assembly for the nation of Israel (Lev. 23:3). Christ our Master followed this practice, and it can carry the same significance for Christians.

Fifth, Sabbath was observed as a sacred custom by Jesus and His apostles (Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14, 42-44; 17:2). As the last great Day of the Lord nears, the need remains for Christ-followers to assemble for worship and to encourage each other — just as He did (Heb. 10:25).

Sixth, the Sabbath became a picture of the New Testament gospel in Christ. Just as we lay aside our efforts at self-justification when we trust Jesus the

Savior (Eph. 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5), so does every seventh day call us to cease from works and enter His divine provisions for time and eternity. As long as salvation by grace through faith apart from human labor remains true, so will the Sabbath day be a true teacher of the gospel.

Seventh, the Sabbath provides a preview of eternal rest in God's kingdom to come (Heb. 4:1-11). If we understand God's plan for a future filled with righteousness, we may also affirm the corresponding truth that there remains a *sabbatismos* (Sabbath rest) for the people of God (v. 9).

In the points above, note the roles and meanings attached to the biblical seventh day: a memorial, a day of rest and assembly, a command and a custom, a picture and a preview. Would it not be foolish, then, to discard or devalue a gift so replete with divine reflection and benefit as Sabbath is?

"You shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath day" (Ex. 35:3) is a law given through Moses, with little relevance to us. The preceding verse (2) echoes Exodus 31:13-17, where Sabbath is described as a sign of the covenant between God and Israel and is enforced with the death penalty. None of these three elements — exclusivity of national Israel, prohibition of Sabbath fire, or death penalty for Sabbath violation — is a part of the new covenant in Christ's blood, nor are any of the three imposed on Christians.

With the example and teachings of Jesus as our touchstone, we may remember the Sabbath with confidence that we are gaining freedom, not moving toward bondage or legalism. For those who work six days, as the commandment says, the seventh truly is the best day of the week!

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Faith-Plus Forum

on Science and the Bible

Corel Photos

What Do You See?

by Troy Gedack

Colorado Springs, Colorado

People view the world, God, and themselves in many different ways, as if everyone is wearing different eyeglasses. Some see God as all-powerful, all-knowing, eternal, and ever-present, while others believe there is no God. Still others perceive everything is God and all is divine. Some believe God created the world, and others believe it evolved naturally by chance.

Finally, people look at humanity and view a cosmic accident, evolved from a slime pit, while others see man as created in the image of God with a definite purpose. What do you see? What eyeglasses are you wearing?

Sure Anchor

by Jody McCoy
Austin, Texas

From the time Moses wrote Genesis, the Jewish people have regarded their Scriptures (our Old Testament) as God's Word. The fallibility of their leaders — even Abraham, Moses, and David — was understood and documented, so final authority always rested in the unfailing, unchanging Word of God, not in their leaders.

Jesus too regarded the Scriptures as unbreakable and authoritative (Matthew 5:18; John 10:35, etc.). He spoke of its history as literal events (Matthew 12:40; 24:38, 39; Mark 12:26; John 3:14; 6:32). Though ultimate authority resides in the sinless Christ (Matthew 28:18), His authority is entirely consistent

with scriptural authority, not in competition with it. Christians have the added revelation of the New Testament, written by those who knew Jesus or His apostles. Thus our Bible is the infallible, unchanging Word of God. In this horizonless, drifting world, such an anchor is welcome company.

The Bible has remained the anchor throughout the centuries, yet its authority is often resisted. Creative interpretation is a subtle challenge to biblical authority. Since the Bible's words must be interpreted to give them meaning, it is possible to subtly distort their true intent. The early Christian church faced the challenge of heretical interpretations, such as denial of Jesus' humanity and divinity. Church councils were convened to meet and defeat these challenges.

Over time, church leaders have centralized the authority to

Views expressed in this forum may not reflect those of the Church or of the editor.

interpret. Eventually, the church itself supplanted the Bible's authority by becoming its sole interpreter. How tragic that the original noble effort to protect the Bible's authority became the means to undermine it. The final authority is always the Bible itself, not the forgiven-but-fallible leaders of the church. The sixteenth century Reformation was a restoration of this biblical authority. Though churches remain exposed to incorrect interpretations of the Bible by influential members, interpretation remains an individual responsibility — as a personal God would have it.

Reason alone is a further rival to biblical authority. Reason attempts to comprehend reality without revelation (i.e., God's Word). The manifestation of reason's authority is philosophy. While "reason alone" may sound "reasonable," the rejection of revelation is a willful deafness and rebellion against a personal God who has spoken through His Word. Reason and philosophy alone take us to a godless world without meaning or purpose.

In the last two centuries, evolutionary science has arisen as another rival to biblical authority. With its rejection of a recent creation, animals created by kind, man as a special creation, death entering the world through sin, the judgment of a global flood, and a Creator, this authority is a hostile affront to the Bible's authority. Though God is revealed in nature as well as in Scripture, the final authority must always be the Bible. Trust and respect for God, His Son, and His Word is our relationship with Him.

Building a Defense

by Thomas Huebner
Colorado Springs, Colorado

By the somewhat arduous process of calculating genealogy from Jesus back to Adam, the Bible teaches that creation occurred around 4,000 BC. Reading how old each generation was when the next was born adds up to about four thousand years before Christ. Add two thousand years since, and Creation week was about six thousand years ago. This contradicts so-called "science" about the age of the earth and universe — billions of years. The differences between the Bible and evolutionary theory on this issue leave no room for both to be true.

Consider Jesus' words in Matthew 19:4, quoting Genesis 1:27: "Haven't you read . . . that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female'" (NIV). If humans evolved over long eras, then either Jesus did not know this or He was not telling the truth about human origins. If evolution is true, every scripture written by an author who believes the Genesis Creation account (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-18;

Hebrews 1:2; 2 Peter 3:5) is untrustworthy.

If Christians want to believe the universe is only six thousand years old, we have every right to do so. However, something more convincing than "God said it, I believe it!" is required to validate the Bible's teaching. "Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you . . ." (1 Peter 3:15b, NIV).

How would you answer anyone who says, "Science proves the earth is billions of years old and that humans evolved from primitive life forms"?

Excellent resources that answer these points and expose the evolution theory's flaws are available to equip you. Creation Science Evangelism, founded by Dr. Kent Hovind, and his Creation Seminar DVD series is one example. Ken Ham's *Answers in Genesis* Web site (www.answersingenesis.org) is a superb place to get information that exposes evolution's weaknesses. Similar sources: *Creation* magazine; a book called *The Evolution Handbook*; a video titled *Young Age of the Earth*, by Robert V. and David Gentry; and a DVD called *Incredible Creatures That Defy Evolution*, by Dr. Jobe Martin.

continued on page 25

How would you answer anyone who says, "Science proves the earth is billions of years old and that humans evolved from primitive life forms"?

The Father's Assurance

by Bob Fogarty

When children never hear their dads' words of love and acceptance, we see the results in the desperate actions of a searching segment of society we point a finger at.

Too many believers don't hear their heavenly Father's affirmation either, though He speaks it. The results are evident in our churches. Instead of doing the Father's will, we spend more time defending and defining ourselves. Unsure and untrusting of His true feelings toward us, we live as spiritual orphans. And society points its finger back at us.

If we knew we are all OK with God, what would life be like? Look at Jesus, the picture of what our lives could be like if we heard and believed "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

Jesus knew that the Father loved Him and was pleased with Him, giving Him identity and purpose. Knowing whose He was, Jesus didn't have to impress others. He was neither inflated when others called Him good nor crushed when they accused Him. What His Father thought of Him became Christ's full motivation.

Because of His confidence in the Father's love, Jesus was always drawn upward (Luke 2:49). Whether as a child, a blue-collar worker, or a spiritual revolutionary, He purposed to put God first (John 5:30).

As Jesus studied, God's Word took priority over all. When He spoke, it wasn't the latest philosophies or theories but what He had personally experienced with the Father (8:38). Jesus didn't keep secret agendas or try to manipulate circumstances to His favor; God was His purpose.

Dedicated in every step, Jesus wasn't overly concerned where His path might lead. He learned to unflinchingly trust all situations to God, regardless of the hardship (Hebrews 5:8).

Peter, on the other hand, didn't have the same confidence nor share the same sense of security. Though a Jesus follower, he would deny it under the risk of rejection (Matthew 26:69-75).

Like Peter, we too look to other sources for our security and purpose when we don't understand the extent of God's love and the price He paid. But if we believe what Scripture says,

we can walk in the same awareness and assurance Jesus had of how His heavenly Father saw Him. Just as God fully accepted Christ, His beloved Son, just so "He made us accepted in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6).

Knowing and believing in God's affirmation and faithfulness can greatly impact our journey. When we know that God loves us with an everlasting love, these are some results:

- The chains enslaving us to the deception that God loves and accepts only the perfectly obedient are broken.
- Evangelism ceases to be the spiritual vandalism of others, dangling them over the fires of an eternal hell, and becomes a wonderful sharing of *good* news.
- Prayer ceases to be a ritualistic drudgery as we sense God's eagerness to commune with us and we desire to hide away with the Lover of our soul.
- Obedience in difficult trials becomes easier as we trust in God's love and provision.
- The words "I will never leave you nor forsake you" become light in the darkness of depression and loneliness.

God, help us realize that we are no longer spiritual orphans or widows but part of Your family with You as Father. Give us the understanding, passion, and strength to take our God-approved places for Jesus' and the kingdom's sake. Amen. BA

Bob Fogarty and his family live in Lee's Summit, MO, and attend church in Kansas City.



Why We Must Laugh

by Joe Corrales

Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them" (Psalm 126:2).

What does your sense of humor say about you? As people see your capacity to enjoy yourself in good, clean fun, they are more likely to say, "There is a Christian blessed by God!"

If you tend to be often sullen and disagreeable, however, then they probably won't look for your brand of faith.

The average child laughs about four hundred times a day, says Barb Fisher, a certified laughter yoga leader. The average adult laughs only about fifteen times every day.* What does that imply? Why do we seem to lose our sense of humor as we get older?

Everyone knows an old grump who can't find anything to laugh about unless it's at another's expense. There is no joy in that sort of humor! But we seldom see children who can't enjoy themselves, unless they're ill.

In *The Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient*, Norman Cousins tells of being hospitalized with a rare, crippling disease. Diagnosed as incurable,

Cousins checked out of the hospital. Aware of the harmful effects that negative emotions can have on the body, Cousins reasoned that the reverse would also be true. So he borrowed a movie projector and prescribed his own treatment, consisting of Marx Brothers films and old *Candid Camera* reruns.

It didn't take long for him to discover that ten minutes of laughter provided two hours of pain-free sleep. Amazingly, his debilitating disease was eventually reversed. After the account of his victory appeared in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Cousins received more than three thousand letters from appreciative physicians throughout the world.

My birth family was poor, but we never sat around feeling sorry for ourselves. Our home was constantly full of laughter! Although my mom had more than her share of burdens, she often joined in the fun.

Once she got the brunt of a shaving cream fight we kids got into. She managed to wrestle

the can away from me as I ran to lock myself in the bathroom. I sat there a half hour, peering under the door to see her feet, until I was sure she had given up and the coast was clear. When I opened the door, there she was standing on a small stool to the side, with a shaving cream can in her hand. She proceeded to empty the contents on my face and head!

Even when us kids were sick, my mom tried to cheer us up by making us laugh. Thinking back, it did seem to make us feel better.

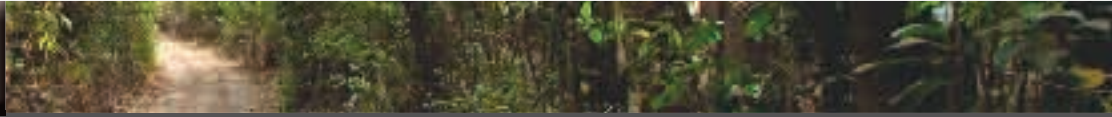
The Lord wants us to have joy in this world and to find laughter and mirth even in the midst of difficulty. May you take on the joy of the Lord so that it can help you find the peace and health the Lord wants for all His people.

BA

Joe Corrales serves as pastor of Heart of Worship church in San Antonio, TX.



*"Laugh Your Way To Wellness With Yoga Trend" (ScienceDaily, www.sciencedaily.com, May 6, 2008)



Back to the Bible

by Alexander Ciurana

Born and raised in Southern California, my parents matched the fabric of that cosmopolitan state: Dad, a Spaniard Protestant, and Mom, a Polish-Prussian Catholic — yet with no Reformation tension at home. Perhaps this proves that dogmatic differences can be transcended for the sake of peace and love.

Like many boys my age, I enjoyed baseball, soccer, and recklessly sailing off jump-ramps on my Huffy bike. I wanted to be many things when I grew up. Mom kept copious notes of such matters in my baby book. When I was about four, she recorded that I wanted to be a priest. I would come home after Mass and reenact the sacrament. Although future entries in the baby book would include my desire to be Rambo, a spy, and an orchestra conductor, the religious one proved prophetic.

Raised a Christian, I enjoyed my spiritual roots: Catholic baptism as a baby, Brethren Church private school, and Lutheran catechism as a teenager — an ecclesiastical mix! Actually, I rebelled in this environment and was eventually kicked out of

catechism. On the whole, church and Jesus represented faraway stories that didn't much pertain to me. That would soon change.

During my adolescence, the family moved to Arizona. Ugh, the heat! Providence, however, is kind. When I was eighteen, I met a lovely young lady in Arizona, whom I married two years later. She may have been enticed by the lucrative career I enjoyed as bagger at the local grocery.

Shortly after marriage, Christen and I moved north to Washington State. There we became fruitful to help replenish the earth with four fabulous children — three girls and one boy. Also in Washington I experienced further spiritual growth.

My wife was raised in the Church of the Nazarene, an early twentieth century break-off of the Methodist movement. When we first met, her mother wouldn't allow us to date apart from "youth night" at the church. During membership as a Nazarene, but not at any church service, I experienced a revolutionary spiritual transaction. Most evangelicals would describe it as a salvation experience, entire sanctification, or the infilling of the Holy Ghost. These are all profound descriptors, but the more I con-

templated it, the more difficulty I had wrapping my linguistic arms around that experience. Eventually, my struggle led me to study and admire mystical experience within world religions.

With newfound spirituality, I desired to understand and practice more deeply the rich traditions of Christianity. So off I went to a small, fundamentalist seminary — perhaps not the best source for breadth and wealth of tradition, but by the grace of God, I learned much of value there. After graduating, I became a youth minister with a Southern Baptist church, and my wife left the comfort of the Nazarenes she was accustomed to. She and I grew together, spiritually and theologically. All was going smoothly and happily.

Then, a couple years into my new career, my theological world was deeply shaken. The main catalyst for this "torment" took place over a rather happenstance lunch with a Church of God (Seventh Day) theologian Dr. Tom Roberts. I thought I was sitting down to a friendly chat, but what I received was a thorough undermining of my cozy, orthodox worldview. He was meticulous, attacking the popular views of the Trinity, immortality of the



Alexander Ciurana

soul, a celestial heaven, Sunday observance, and traditional holidays. The only stone he left unturned was my Baptist potluck!

For the next two years I determined through frequent phone calls and personal meetings with Dr. Tom to provide a biblical apologetic for my beliefs. But one by one, they began to teeter and fall. I could not defend these doctrines and simultaneously apply even the most basic hermeneutical principles. I couldn't reconcile the Hebraic-minded, first century authors with the developed Hellenistic doctrines of later centuries. I learned that the Reformation maxim *sola scriptura* wasn't realizable within mainstream Christian practice. Although I tried my best to be a good Baptist, I couldn't keep sufficiently silent at the Sunday school lectern or morning service pulpit. Tiny slips of a Sabbatarian sort refused to be censored from my lips.

Ironically, the final chapter of my Baptist story ended in the same setting my Sabbatar-

ian theology was birthed: over lunch. My senior pastor and I had a sincere doctrinal heart-to-heart. After three hours of theological ping-pong, he offered his final rebuttal. "Alex, I think you are probably biblically correct," he stated flatly. "But do you think anybody at church really cares

about these things?" He went on to maintain that all people really want from church are instructions about raising children, how to have a happy marriage, and other such "practical" concerns.

I was dumbfounded that a man of God, whom I had gained much wisdom from, would so easily discard matters of biblical and theological import for the sake of being contemporary. He was unwilling to move the church in a more Bible-centered direction; it would rock the Baptist boat.


I believe this dynamic is prevalent among evangelical leaders. They accept the wonderful changes brought by the Protestant Reformation but are unwilling to embrace the continuation of that reformation today. Thus, *sola scriptura* is but a sentimental relic, and current Protestantism is left with nothing to protest. What a shame!

In 2003 my family and I moved to Texas. There I began looking for a church that recog-

nized some of the same voids I had experienced as a mainstream Christian. Having never attended a Church of God (Seventh Day), I looked in the phone book and found about fifteen of them in the Houston area alone! I called each one and received endless rings or answering machines in Spanish.

Then I contacted the church in Galena Park and heard a message in English. I left one of my own, and to my surprise, Pastor Calvin Burrell called back and invited me to lunch. About ten months later, I was selected to succeed Elder Burrell as pastor in Galena Park when he relocated to his present post in Denver.

Today I am happy to testify that I have found a church that still embraces the Bible as a living revelation. The Church of God (Seventh Day) engages the Bible with openness and adventure. Doubtless we have strong doctrinal convictions, but we do not allow our convictions to cloud the prism of God's Word. The Bible serves as a prism as we, the readers, approach the inspired writings from various spiritual loci, receiving the divine light in new hues and splendor. Thus we are enabled to respond to insights gained without sacrificing our sacred traditions. In fact, by being open to the depth of the Scriptures, we authenticate and vivify our old adage "My Bible and my Bible alone." It is truly both a pleasure and privilege to serve God's church under this banner of spiritual freedom.



Parental Guidance Required

Now, more than ever, our kids need help making wise media decisions. **by Pat Jeanne Davis**

John was close to tears while pacing the kitchen floor. “It’s rated PG-13, Mom. All my friends are going. Justin’s mother is taking us to the mall. I’ll look like a fool if I say you won’t let me see it.”

It was the end of a long school week filled with many tests for my fifteen-year-old son. I felt he deserved a break, too, so I agreed he could go out with his pals. But it didn’t include going to a film that neither my husband nor I approved of him seeing.

“Why are you spoiling my fun?” John went to his room and slammed the door.

To keep our boys’ minds and hearts pure for as long as possible, my husband and I soon realized that neither the ratings for films and video games nor the evaluations of other parents could be our guide. Even with an MPAA rating of PG-13, or even PG, a film could quickly gravi-

tate into profanity-filled verbal exchanges, violence, and sexual references or scenes that included nudity. I tired of having to fast forward through these offensive scenes. Often I stopped the film and turned off the set.

Explicit sex and violence on the Internet and in films, video games, and television, as well as some popular music and certain teen magazines — these powerful forces can corrupt our children. They exploit and give messages with unrealistic expectations. Often sexual encounters are seen as casual events and portrayed without relationship and consequences.

What can you as a parent do? Try following these. . . .

Guidelines

Exercise responsibility. The apostle Paul exhorts Christians to “bring [your children] up in the training and instruction of

the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Parents are the best interpreters of program content, but too many of them are unclear about what their child should be viewing. Assume responsibility for your children’s viewing habits so you can “Train [them] in the way [they] should go . . .” (Proverbs 22:6).

Supervise entertainment. Many children have a TV set in their bedrooms. Most kids say that their parents have no rules about films and television viewing, according to a

study by the Kaiser Family Foundation in 2005.¹ Set limits and screen television viewing. Ask your children what videos will be shown at the sleepover.

Participate in viewing. While viewing a program with your children, you can discuss it and draw lessons from the characters’ experiences. You then can help them form an opinion based on biblical and moral standards. Deuteronomy 6:6, 7 states:

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Become the primary instructor. A study in 2008 conducted by the Rand Corporation revealed the dramatic impact on adolescents of sexual content portrayed in the media. It

showed that kids are more sexually active in proportion to viewing these programs.²

Rand concluded, "Our research offers only limited insight into the best method for ameliorating the effects of TV sexual content on youth behavior but clearly indicates the need to do so."³

As primary instructor, help your children put on the whole armor of God so they can stand against the Devil's schemes (Ephesians 6:11-17). Be sure to teach them the biblical view of sex, that God's instructions are for their protection and that they can always come to you with questions.

Become informed about ratings. You can obtain information on a video or movie by visiting www.screenit.com, an entertainment review site for parents. Read comments about the film, a summary of plot content, and the reason for its rating. (See box for other resources.)

The criteria for judging a film have changed for the worse. A film rated PG-13 five years ago could carry a PG rating today.⁴ Either rating can include an adult situation, foul language, violence, and nudity. I have heard that kids at younger ages are moving on to shows created with older kids in mind. Many TV-14 ratings are questionable for this age group.

Additionally, studies conducted in 2004 show that sexual content and the level of violence in video games are on the rise. The Kids Risk Project from Harvard School of Public Health reveals that video game content descriptors do not always reflect what is in the game concerning the severity of violence and graphic sexual content.⁵ As a re-

sult, parents can't make informed decisions. There also exists a gray area between those games rated "Teen" and those rated "Mature."

Check out other resources.

You can borrow videos and DVD's distributed by Family Favorites, Hallmark, and Disney from the public library. If in doubt about any movie borrowed from the adult section, view it beforehand. If not appropriate, you can return it at no cost. Often, reading the book before seeing the film will enhance the viewing experience.

Fight the negative effects of excessive viewing. Many kids sit in front of the TV out of sheer boredom. Statistics say that school-age children watch television more than five hours a day. Replace television with productive activities (reading, board games, projects) that can recapture the imagination while improving family time. Also, physical activity that builds bodies and burns calories prevents obesity in your children.⁶

Set a godly example. Be sure to teach your children not by talking about godly values but by translating them into your life. Don't send a double message by watching ungodly programming. Such inconsistency says that it's all right for an adult, but not for them, to view trash. Live by the psalmist's desire to "walk in my house with blameless heart. I will set before my eyes no vile thing" (Psalm 101:2b, 3).

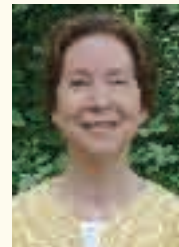
Eternal benefit

My son didn't go to the cinema that Friday night. Instead he called another friend and they went skateboarding. When I picked him up later, John had

had so much fun that he'd forgotten about the movie. He even apologized for arguing with me.

I learned a valuable lesson through this experience: that children feel safe and secure when a loving parent takes charge. We will never regret our decision to carefully monitor both television and video viewing. And the benefit to our children will be everlasting. **BA**

Pat Jeanne Davis writes from Philadelphia, PA. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



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Resources

Feature Films for Families
(www.familytv.com)

Ted Baehr's Movieguide
(www.movieguide.org)

Parents Television Council
(www.parentstv.org)

Plugged In (www.pluggedinonline.com/)

Family Values Cinema (www.familyvaluescinema.com)

HEARTSPEAK

TAKES ON SOCIAL NETWORKS

What twitter

by Michael Mancha

Can Tweeach Us

Twitter. It's all the rage these days, isn't it?

Here's one way of knowing when something new has become a hit. When its name becomes a verb, then it has caught on. Raise your hand if you've heard one of these statements:

"Dude, just Google it."

"Hey, MySpace me later."

"Oh yeah, I texted her yesterday."

"I blogged about it last night."

Tweeted, Twoated – Twitter isn't just a social hit; it's a phenom.

For those who've been wandering in the desert this year, Twitter is simply micro-blogging. You have 140 characters to say what you want and post it to your personal Twitter thread. You find other Twitter users and "follow" them, which means their posts also appear on your Twitter page. You can follow whomever you like, and they can follow you. That's it.

Sounds simple, right? As it turns out, the whole Twitter movement is not that simple.

For those I've talked to about Twitter, feelings usually fall into one of two categories: 1) Love it; use it all the time or 2) Hate it; it's the stupidest thing on the Internet.

When the popular social networks MySpace and Facebook first arrived, they too had their share of criticism. People's feelings about Twitter are much more black and white — love or hate. This could be because the main idea behind Twitter is — you! It's just a tool to tell people what you're doing, feeling, eating, saying, thinking and where you're going, what you saw, what you overheard, and so on. Most social networks are about connecting with friends and, well, being social. But on Twitter, the catch phrase is "What are YOU doing?"

Now evidence has shown that Twitter isn't just a "me" thing. For example, when the terrorist bombings happened in Mumbai, India, last November, Twitter was the first place information began circulating — before the media got it. News agencies post their headlines on Twitter. Apple and other tech companies often use it to leak rumors and new info to the public. Several months ago, NASA Twittered, minute by minute, the launch of the space shuttle.

Between all the good and bad, believe it or not, there is a

valuable lesson to be learned from Twitter. A Bible story in the book of Acts can shine some light on this.

After escaping from Berea, Paul found himself in Athens, where people worshiped many gods. They were so religious, in fact, that they made a statue for the gods they didn't yet know so they wouldn't offend any. Paul came across this idol labeled "To the unknown god."

Being the good Jewish man he was, Paul knew the people of Athens were violating God's commandments. This bothered him very much, but rather than point a finger and tear down their idols, Paul chose a better approach. He made an earnest attempt to understand and reach them on their level.

"Men of Athens!" he said, "I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. . . . For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring'" (Acts 17: 22-24, 28, NIV). Hearing this, some in Paul's audience were moved and eventually converted.

Beyond the "what" of their idolatry, Paul tried to understand the "why." To him the people of Athens were desperate to believe in something, and all he needed to do was help them see what they were actually seeking: the Lord God.

We too should seek to understand, not what people do but why they do it. As humans, you see, we long for acceptance and may even be desperate for it. We may seek it through love, through our talents, and or simply through social networks. Most of the time these connections can be harmless. The danger, though, is that someone can easily become focused on looking to them to satisfy their ultimate need for acceptance that only God can give. Do you know anyone like this? Maybe this describes you.

Think about this. When Jesus met the woman at the well, He offered her living water so she wouldn't ever thirst again. Can you imagine what people would be like if everyone chose to honestly look to God as the source of real love and acceptance? How much fuller our lives would be if a perfect God defined our self-worth — instead of Twitter?

Would Jesus Join facebook?

by Emily Osburne

“Please, spare me the lecture on texting,” I overheard an eye-rolling teenager blurt out in the grocery store. Her mom, not in the mood for an attitude, grabbed the phone and threw it in her purse.

WHAT TEENS THINK

“Why are adults always on our backs about technology? If they aren’t griping about texting at the table, they’re looking over our shoulder as we post to a friend’s wall.

“And I don’t get why magazines and newspapers preach about the dangers of online predators showing up on social networking sites. I have never allowed a random guy access to my profile. It’s all a bunch of hype, if you ask me.”

WHAT PARENTS THINK

“I just want my son back. We used to sit on the back porch and talk, but now I can’t get him to look up from his phone. He’s glued to so many screens: the computer screen, the TV screen, and the little screen on his flip phone that buzzes about a hundred times a day!”

So who is right in the technology battle? Are young people simply using a new medium to express themselves and connect with friends? Are old people out of the loop? Actually, those are the wrong questions.

The right question is “Would Jesus join Facebook (or MySpace, Twitter, or Digg)”?

NEED TO CONNECT

The technology may be new, but the question isn’t. Teens in the 80’s fought with their parents over using the phone. Teens in the 50’s begged to watch TV, just as young people in the 20’s waited for the mailman. Then would Jesus have talked on the phone, watched TV, and written letters?

Probably so. After all, everyone wants to connect. In fact, God made us to be social creatures. Since the beginning of time, guys and gals of all ages have used every ounce of creativity to draw near to their buddies. Your desire to text is no different than your granny’s desire to write a letter to her beau. Even in the Garden of Eden, when Adam was chillin’ with all the animals in the garden, God noted, “It is not good that man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18).

God created Eve so Adam wouldn’t be alone, even though Adam had perfect communion with God. We are undeniably created to be social. Social networks are proof that our hearts are designed for closeness with others.

DOWNSIDE

But can you achieve closeness through social networking? In a way, yes. In seconds, you can access your entire clan of friends. You know how many bowls of Cheerios they ate for breakfast. You can see your gal pal’s new haircut and view a random street sign that your friend thought was funny because it read, “Dips. Do not Enter.” If nothing else, social networking keeps you in the know about who broke up with whom and where to meet for pizza after the game.

Truthfully, though, the depth of conversation doesn’t go past the shallow end when communicating through a screen. Social networks and texts can never replace face-to-face interaction. Even Paul, who connected to friends through letters, said, “We made every effort to see you” (1 Thessalonians 2:17, NIV).

Everyone wants a best friend, but you probably won’t reach that level only by reading words on a monitor. How can you react to your friend’s funny face through three little letters: *lol*?

Another problem with overusing social networking is that it intrudes on life. Do you ever feel like you are ALWAYS ON, ALWAYS CONNECTED, ALWAYS AT SCHOOL? Solitude is becoming extinct along with VHS tapes and books. Your quiet time can be spent with God or simply alone with your thoughts. It’s impossible to be everything God created you to be if you’re never alone with Him, allowing Him to whisper to your soul. The beeping, buzzing, and ringing can drown out the gentle nudges God is giving you.

TAKE CONTROL

So would Jesus join Facebook? Why not? He loves people. He came to proclaim the truth, and He can use anything to reach out to those He loves. However, Jesus didn’t walk through the crowds in Jerusalem, distracted by incoming status updates on His iPhone. He was so present in the moment that He felt when a desperate woman touched His cloak, trying to be healed. That kind of awareness isn’t possible with our eyes glued to a computer screen 24/7.

Decide to take control of your technology, rather than allowing it to control you. Remember what Paul wrote: “And even though ‘I am allowed to do anything,’ I must not become a slave to anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12, NLT). You have the power to turn off the computer long enough to hang out with the fam. You own your phone; it doesn’t own you. They’re called Crackberries for a reason. With such addictive technology, be sure to set a few boundaries.

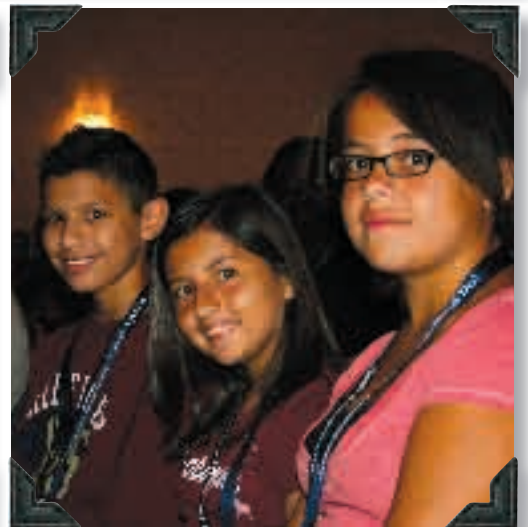
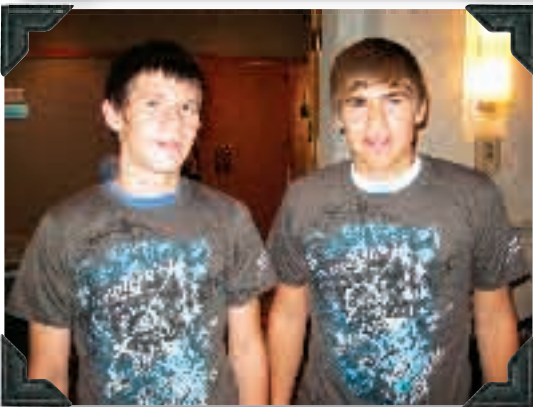
Emily Osburne writes from McDonough, GA.

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Brute Beasts, Little Horn

Daniel's dream previews world powers and predicts an apostate church.

by Robert Coulter

Serving in Babylon, Daniel saw four awesome animals in a night vision (Daniel 7:2, 3). These beasts represented four kingdoms, identical to those represented by the statue in King Nebuchadnezzar's dream back in Daniel 2. The vision of chapter 7, however, provides additional data not revealed in the king's

earlier dream. After inquiring about this troubling new information, the prophet received an interpretation that gives every Bible reader food for thought and action (vv. 15-27).

The four beasts of Daniel's vision rose from the great sea, churned by the winds (v. 2). These four kingdoms (v. 17) came into being, one after another, by warfare involving peoples and territories around the Mediterranean Sea. In prophecy, *waters* stands for multitudes of people and nations (Revelation 17:15). The *churning sea*

represents turmoil, restlessness, and conflict among the ungodly masses (Isaiah 57:20, 21).

Who are these beasts?

The first beast appeared as a lion with eagle's wings (v. 4). Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon was described as a lion that devoured and crushed Israel (Jeremiah 50:17). The torn-off wings may signify Nebuchadnezzar's seven-year insanity (Daniel 4:28-33). The phrase "so that it stood on

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two feet like a man, and the heart of a man was given to it" (7:4) indicates the restoration of Nebuchadnezzar's sanity and return to the throne of Babylon.

The second beast looked like a bear. It raised itself onto one side and had three ribs between its teeth (v. 5). This was the Medo-Persian Empire. Raising itself onto one side signified that Persia dominated the Medes. The three ribs correspond to the notable conquests of Lydia, Babylon, and Egypt by Cyrus and his son, Cambyses.

The third beast, a leopard with four heads and four wings like a bird (v. 6), represents the Greek empire of Alexander the Great. The leopard is swift; its wings stress the incredible rapidity of Alexander's conquests. The heads represent the division of Alexander's kingdom among four generals upon his death in 323 BC.

The fourth beast, not named, had ten horns. A little horn with eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully came up among the ten horns and uprooted three of them. This beast was the Roman Empire corresponding to the legs, feet, and toes of Nebu-

chadnezzar's statue (2:33). The ten horns — the little horn, in particular — describe kingdoms that arose from the ruins of Imperial Rome. The phrases "very powerful . . . [with] large iron teeth [that] crushed . . ." (7:7) and devoured "the whole earth, trampling it down . . ." (v. 23) describe Rome's ferocious nature.

In vision, Daniel witnessed the destruction of the fourth beast whose body was destroyed and burned (v. 11). Imperial Rome fell in 476, but its three predecessors, stripped of their dominions, were permitted to live on (v. 12). Their continued existence was through the territories, peoples, ideologies, and wealth that had been introduced into Roman society through its conquest of them. These characteristics were passed along to the nations (ten kingdoms, v. 24) that developed in Europe after Rome's demise.

Holy Roman Empire

The focal point of Daniel's vision is the little horn that grew up among its ten fellows and uprooted three of them (vv. 7, 8). The ten horns were ten kings with temporal dominions. The little horn was a different kind of

king (v. 24), one with a religious domain. This is implied by the nature of his work: He oppressed the saints and made war to defeat them (vv. 21, 25), and he spoke boastfully against God, trying to change set times and laws (vv. 8, 25). This vainglorious king had eyes like a man, indicating that his subjects were under intrusive surveillance (v. 8). The little horn of Daniel's dream represents the papacy of the apostate Roman Church during a lengthy medieval period.

The church at Rome was established in the first century. Early Christians experienced Imperial Rome's vacillation between persecution and toleration. Eventually, the church won acceptance in 313 when Constantine, a Christian in name, issued the Edict of Milan, legalizing Christianity. Theodosius made Christianity the exclusive religion of Rome in 395. The problem with these apparently benevolent acts toward the church was that they led the church down the road toward apostasy. While appearing to embrace the faith, its Roman patrons corrupted it with their paganism.

The bishops (popes) of Rome were well established and recognized as the undisputed spiritual emperors of the Roman church by the sixth century AD. Their aspiration to govern both the spiritual and earthly affairs of men was first realized when Pepin, king of France, bestowed temporal authority upon Pope Stephen II in 755. Similarly, Charlemagne, king of the Frankish Empire and a defender of the pope, was crowned emperor of Rome by Pope Leo III on December 25, 800, in old St. Peter's Church. This momentous event



The king oppressed the saints and made war to defeat them, and he spoke boastfully against God, trying to change set times and laws.

inaugurated an alliance between Charlemagne's civil authority and the pope's ecclesiastical prerogatives, leading to the development of a church-and-state union called the Holy Roman Empire.

Little horn judged

In a judgment scene portraying the glory of Him who truly has power to change times and seasons, to set up kings and depose them (2:21), Daniel was blessed with a preview of God's eventual triumph over His adversaries.

Daniel observed the Ancient of Days, God the Father, taking His seat on a throne (7:9). His hair and clothing were white as snow. His throne and its appointments were ablaze, and a river of fire flowed before Him. He was attended and surrounded by millions, and the books of the court were opened (vv. 9, 10).

One like the Son of man, the glorified Christ, descended in the clouds of heaven and was escorted into the presence of the Ancient of Days, who gave Him glory and sovereign power. People of every language worshipped Him. His dominion is an everlasting kingdom (vv. 13, 14), unlike that of the beasts that passed away.

Before the little horn was to be judged by the Ancient of Days for his apostasy and his warfare against the saints (vv. 21, 22), Daniel learned that they were to be subjected to his ruthless cruelties for a time, times and half a time (v. 25b). The word *time* here may also mean *year*. Counting a *time* for a *year*, the "time, times and half a time" equals three-and-one-half years, or 1,260 days. Applying the year-

**God's eternal kingdom,
Extant today through
the gospel of Jesus Christ
and the indwelling Holy
Spirit, belongs to us.**



for-a-day principle of Numbers 14:34 — a common practice in interpreting some prophecies — three-and-a-half prophetic years equals 1,260 historic years. The little horn kingdom was given unfettered power and authority to war against and wreak all kinds of havoc upon God's saints for that period (Daniel 7:25).

Concluding the vision's interpretation, Daniel described the judgment of the little horn: "The judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end" (v. 26, KJV). Thus the papacy's exalted position and limitless power over saints were taken away, beginning with the challenge of the Protestant Reformation and culminating in the pope's loss of territorial dominion and the demise of the Holy Roman Empire in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This judgment did not destroy the papacy or its church at that time. They would be permitted to continue in the world until Christ's return (2 Thessalonians 2:8) but with ever declining power and authority.

The judgment scene of Daniel 7:13, 14, 26, 27 is neither of those in Revelation 20, one

depicting the Devil thrown into the lake of fire with the beast and false prophet (v. 10) and the other describing the dead before the great white throne and annihilation of God's adversaries (vv. 11-15). The judgment of the little horn was not its annihilation but the removal of its power and ability to subject the saints to its will.

Daniel's vision ends with assurance for every saint. God's eternal kingdom, extant today through the gospel of Jesus Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit, belongs to us. It is not tangible or territorial but spiritual, composed of believers who trust Jesus as Savior and whose lives are ruled by God's Word. When Jesus appears in all His glory, God will give the power and greatness of all the world's kingdoms to the saints for their everlasting inheritance (7:27). **BA**

Elder Robert Coulter attends the Denver church.

Scripture quotations were taken from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.



“Neither Do I Condemn Thee”

A moment of shame, a leap into light.
by Dirk Anderson



Leading her lover into the bedroom, Mary grasped the drapes and pulled them over the window, darkening the room. It was happening again. She knew it was wrong, but it had become a habit. Her conscience screamed at first. Now, having been seared so often, it barely raised a whimper.

As they embraced, Mary’s mind began to wander. She remembered the sunny, carefree days of her childhood, her days of innocence. Her mind went back to the day she first made bread for her daddy. She was so proud of it. Setting the warm bread before him, she looked up expectantly into his face. Warmth and appreciation filled his eyes. He smiled that big smile that little girls love. His kind words of gratitude were music to her ears. She

felt so loved. If only she could find that love again.

* * * *

The quiet of the room was quickly broken by a storm of angry voices. Enraged faces surrounded her. In fear, she grasped for the sheet and held it tightly. The invaders rudely grabbed and marched her out into the daylight. Her ears rung with their stern denunciations: “Adulterer!” “Sinner!” She had never felt lower. In the light of day she could make out who these invaders were — the religious leaders of her city, the “good” people. Their snarling faces terrified her, and she looked down in shame.

They pushed her along to their destination, where she was dumped unceremoniously on the ground. Eyes closed, she

pressed her face into the dust of the street and listened anxiously, quivering with fear. The religious leaders were asking someone for permission to stone her to death. For a moment, death did not seem like such a bad idea. Maybe it would bring her the peace that she had never found in life. Then she heard the voice of the Messiah, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone first.”

Her body tensed as she prepared for the blows. Surely the Messiah would condemn her as a law-breaker! Was it not He who said that a man would be guilty of adultery for even looking with wanton lust upon a woman? She was far more guilty — a hardened sinner and certainly worthy of the death penalty imposed by Moses’ law.

Tears streamed from her eyes into the dusty street. What would Daddy think of his daughter when he found out how she died? How disappointed he would be! He had always wanted the best for his children. But she had made a wreck of life. If only she could have a second chance.

* * * *

With a start, she realized the street had become strangely quiet. She kept her head down, not daring to raise it even for a moment — until she heard the Messiah's voice: "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

With trepidation, she slowly looked up, wiping tears from her eyes. Her accusers were gone! Puzzled, her blurry eyes looked toward the Messiah, and in a choked voice she replied, "No one, Lord."

She looked down again, gritting her teeth to receive His stern denunciation. *He is so good and pure that He must really despise sinners like me!* she told herself.

For a moment, there was silence as thoughts raced through her mind. She remembered the healings performed by this Man and His words of love and mercy for sinners. New hope sprang up in her soul. She heard Him approach and kneel next to her. She raised her eyes and looked up into His face. Instead of a snarl, she found compassion. Tears filled His eyes, and His hand reached out to her in love. He gently touched her shoulder. For a moment, it felt as though He was sharing her pain. He knew what she was going through and felt her shame. For the first time in her life, the woman found Someone who re-

ally knew her — and understood. Was this the love that all of her adulterous affairs had failed to bring?

His voice breaking with compassion, the Messiah replied, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

Unspeakable joy flooded her soul. The Messiah lifted her to her feet. The shame was gone. She had been acquitted, given a second chance! Her innocence returned. With gratitude, she looked into the Messiah's eyes. Warmth and love filled His eyes and face, with that big smile that little girls love. She felt so loved! She couldn't help but smile as she turned and walked away — a new person.

* * * *

The Messiah turned to those watching the breathtaking scene unfold and firmly declared, "I am the light of the world." The light brightens up the world, and makes it a happier, better place. The light did not come to the world to condemn it but to revolutionize it. Most people, except for some haughty religious leaders, had already figured out they had a sin problem. The Messiah didn't come to Earth to tell people how bad they were but to

show us how good the Father is.

By His life, His light, His example, the Messiah showed people who the Father is. Every act of healing, every look of compassion, every word of mercy and love revealed that the Father loves us earnestly. He knew that condemnation does not change people. People are changed by beholding love. Like a brilliant, shining light, His example of self-sacrificing love has brightened the dark pathway of millions who are hurting, sick, discouraged, and sinful.

Are you a sinner? Have you failed? The Messiah looks upon you today with the same compassion and love that He expressed to the woman caught in adultery. He feels the pain you are suffering. The voice of Christ echoes down through history, speaking to you today, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." **BA**

Dirk Anderson writes from Jacksonville, FL, where he's helping plant a new CoG7 congregation.



The Messiah didn't come to Earth to tell people how bad they were but to show us how good the Father is.



Straight talk on homosexuality

With some trepidation, I opened this issue [June '09]. I agreed with much of what was said on homosexuality. However, there seemed to be an overwhelming desire to be politically correct and “love the sinner,” with dismissal of “hating the sin.” Yes, many sins are just as bad; the unmentioned difference is that our response to this particular sin must match the societal promotion of it.

Like abortion, homosexuality has gone from a “secret” sin to one forced upon us at every turn. How do we shelter our young in this culture? Just try to constantly deprogram them at home? Just as we cannot be silent about the travesty of abortion, so we must not allow the open practice and promotion of homosexuality to go without adequate public response. We should be outraged about the blatant sins of sexual perversion (any kind), murder, etc. If we respond with silence, then we are complicit with those sins. The gradual acceptance of homosexuality and abortion is explained in this quote by Alexander Pope: “Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,/As to be hated needs but to be seen;/ Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face, we first endure, then pity, then embrace.”

C. P.
Joplin, MO

Regarding the sins listed in the article [“Why Do We Hate Adam and Steve?” p. 14], homosexuality is the only one actively promoted by the entertainment industry, political action groups, and politicians as normal behavior and mainstream morality. Unless the homosexual agenda is recognized, it will boldly step into all aspects of our culture.

W. K. T.
Tucson, AZ

I admire how the writer established his point that sin is sin and should not be categorized in order of severity, [yet] I see the article as unbalanced. He forgot to add Jesus’ “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more” response to the woman (John 8:11). Let us not deny the wrath of God against sin as we embrace sinners, including Adam and Steve. We must also remember “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34).

K. O. L.
Ft. Myers, FL

I’m saddened and a little angered by “Unsolved Mystery” (p. 12).

I think Brother Feil does not have the correct understanding of the word *eunuch* . . . there is no way Jesus would give approval to homosexual practice, referred to as unnatural, indecent, and depraved throughout Scripture (Rom. 1; Rev. 22:15).

I feel spiritual darkness falling upon the earth faster and harder than ever. Now is not the time to be taken in by vain philosophy and empty deceit of this world. Now is the time to dig into the Word of God, cling to every word, and let the light and truth of the gospel of Jesus shine even brighter.

S. S.
Spokane Valley, WA

I agree that we must treat individual homosexuals with the love and grace of God. However, we must denounce the gay rights movement with its wicked agenda as vehemently as Christian civility permits.

Gordon Feil’s suggestion that statements about eunuchs (Matt. 19:12; Acts 8:27) might be references to homosexuals is interesting — and impossible! Neither the context nor the language of these texts will permit it.

The word translated *eunuch* is from the Greek word *unoukos*, meaning “an emasculated man.” In Matthew, Jesus’ context was marriage, and eunuchs meant those incapacitated for marriage or voluntarily abstaining from it.

In Acts 8:27-39 the eunuch’s being in charge of Candace’s treasury implies that not all eunuchs were keepers of harems. His baptism by Philip illustrates that Christ is no respecter of persons (Gal. 3:28).

Two New Testament references to homosexuality are translated from one word. Paul uses the phrase “abusers of themselves with mankind” (1 Cor. 6:9, KJV; “homosexual offenders,” NIV) and “them that defile themselves with mankind” (1 Tim. 1:10, KJV; “perverts,” NIV). These phrases are translated from the Greek *arsenokoitai*, meaning “one who lies with a male as with a female — a sodomite.”

W. C.
Denver, CO

Gordon’s belief that the word *eunuch* may mean a homosexual comes from his misunderstanding of Deuteronomy 23:1, as Leviticus 21:17 makes clear: No male descendant of Aaron with a bodily defect may approach to offer the bread of his God. The eunuch of Acts 8 was probably a Jewish proselyte, not a descendant of Aaron. If he were of the tribe of

Levi, he could not enter the congregation of God for duty because of his defect. However, God did not deny any sinner from entry to the temple for worship or for bringing an offering for justification for his sins, as long as he was an Israelite or circumcised and accepted into the nation. That would have defeated the purpose of the temple!

J. R.
Andrews, NC

Comedy and tragedy

Permit me to congratulate you: This issue is exceptionally great, inspiring, and timely. This is the only BA I've read from cover to cover. Please keep it up, and remain blessed.

B. O.
Nigeria

I used to love the BA, reading it from cover to cover. But lately, and particularly this issue, you have taken away the peace of my spirit. All this stuff on homosexuality and pornography is not uplifting. Some of the pictures are provocative. Shame on you! Please reconsider, restructure. . . .

D. W.
Post Falls, ID

In praise of courage

Shocked and saddened by letters in June's "Mailbag" [p. 24], we write in support of "Praying for Obama" [April-May '09, p. 31]. One would need a serious bias to interpret the sentiments expressed there as endorsement of our president or his policies. Thank you, President Rose, for your courage to follow God's commands.

In January 2008 I [D. S.] had an interesting conversation with my taxi driver in Atlanta. A young man from Nigeria, he did not believe Americans would ever elect a black man as president. I said I hoped he

Dinosaurs and Apostle Paul

by Barry Wawak
Houston, Texas

A primary tenet of Young Earth Creationists (YEC) is that nothing died before Adam's sin brought death to the world. Taking just Bible words, Ken Ham (*Answers in Genesis*) fails to find "death, bloodshed, disease or suffering" among humans and animals before sin came. According to Ken Ham:

God instituted death and bloodshed because of sin — this is foundational to the Gospel. Therefore, one cannot allow a fossil record of millions of years of death, bloodshed, disease and suffering before sin . . . ("A young Earth — it's not the issue!" www.answersingenesis.org).

Most geologists understand that dinosaurs died out millions of years before humans appeared on the planet — a big difference with the YEC view.

Let's look at a pivotal scripture used by the YEC to "prove" no death before Adam: "Therefore, just as through one man sin

entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

The main theological point of this verse is that sin and its associated separation from God (death) came into the world of humans and spread to all of them through Adam. No indication is here, or in the context, that the world of animals is being considered. Animals never sinned, nor did they experience the separation from God that humans did. Though some scriptural basis exists to believe that nature will benefit from humanity's reconciliation with God (e.g. Romans 8:19-22), most of the evidence indicates that humanity is the ultimate object of Christ's reconciliation.

Romans 5:12 addresses the spiritual state of people after the Fall. Adam's sin initiated human separation from God described as death. To use this scripture to "prove" no animals died before Adam, and that dinosaurs must have existed simultaneously with humanity, goes beyond the clear statement of the text. **BA**


Read a fuller version of this article at www.cog7.org/BA. **.org**

was wrong, that I believed we had grown beyond that prejudice and would elect a man of character regardless of color. I was proud to be American in 2008. President Obama is not the Messiah, but he is a man of integrity and social conscience who knows he does not have all the answers and admits he may not always be right. How refreshing!

We pray that members who rely

on Fox News or Rush Limbaugh (or who fail to check the veracity of information in "Obamanation" e-mails) will be compelled by the Holy Spirit to read *The Audacity of Hope*, by Barack Obama. If you don't have time for it all, at least read the chapter entitled "Faith."

D. S. and L. S.
Jefferson, OR



**If I stand in the middle of a
desert
And look up,
Am I alone?
Are there not cataracts of
Living Water
Forever reviving my soul?
Is not the Bread of Heaven
Manna-like
Bestowed?
Angelic voices
Choir-like
Intoned?
A cloud of witnesses
Fire-bright
Shown?
The desert does not divide
God's own.**

Baxter W. Napier III



Did you know . . .

- that the General Conference is 125 years old this year? It was organized a few miles east of Grand Haven, Michigan, by delegates from Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, and Michigan in the fall of 1884.
- that the West Coast District covers more land area than any other CoG7 district except Western Canada and that the Northeastern U.S. District has the greatest population — more than all of Canada?
- that *HeartSpeak*, written and prepared especially for youth and young adults of the Church, is found in every BA (pp. 16-18 of this issue)?



Publications

Keith Michalak, Director

For 147 years now, the Bible Advocate Press has existed to publish the grace and truth of Jesus Christ as known through the written Word.

To publish means “to announce, to broadcast, to communicate, to disseminate, to give to the world, to herald, to impart, to propagate or print, to spread, to trumpet, to utter or vent.” Accompanied by God’s Spirit, the printed Word has a long shelf life — a nearly unending potential to impact people for good.

The water of life is free, but the buckets that carry it around the world cost somebody something. It’s like that with the publications at BAP. Our philosophy for the past 40 years has been to send the magazine and other literature without charge to all who request them. Expenses are covered by offerings of readers and members who respond to our annual funding letter and who support the Church and its General Conference ministries. Thank you!

Recently our office was contacted by a lady who just discovered her husband is homosexual. We sent her a copy of the Light for Life tract *Out of the Closet: Hope and Help for Homosexuals*. How can you use Publications’ materials in outreach? Let us know how we can make your service more effective.

“The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it” (Psalm 68:11, KJV).

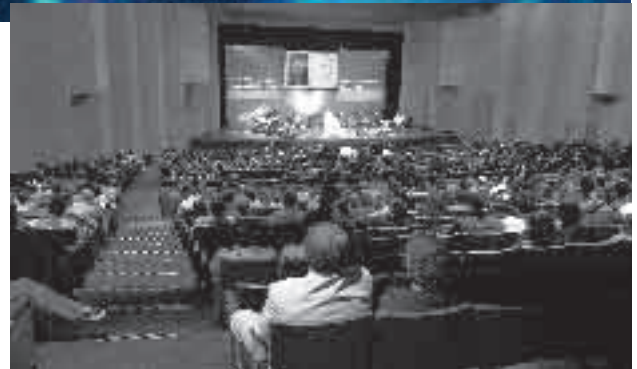
2009 Convention Report

In the warm seaside city of Corpus Christi, Texas, more than a thousand members and friends met for the biennial CoG7 General Conference convention, July 6-11. Beachside meeting and lodging facilities were delightfully pleasant; sea breezes moderated the summer afternoons. God's presence blest the assembly, inside and out.



Planning and Program Committee: Thanks to Mike and Deborah Vlad, Raul and Maria Romo, Ken and Elizabeth Keim, Nugget and Sue Gold, Phyllis Tuller, Dennis O'Banion and Charles Carr.

"Fresh Encounter" served as an inspiring theme. Messages were prepared and presented by Elders Ramon Ruiz – "Encounter Christ"; Israel Steinmetz – "Encounter the Spirit"; Kenneth Knoll – "Encounter Spiritual Discipline"; Larry Zaragoza – "Encounter Evangelism"; Calvin Burrell – "Encounter Grace"; and Whaid Rose – "Encounter the Father." CD's of these messages are available; call 303-452-7973 or e-mail offices@cog7.org.



Attendance: 1,000+ worshipers on Sabbath; 453 adults registered in business session; 117+ kids in children's program, led by Leah McGlochlin; 130 teens in the youth program, led by Kurt Lang; 100+ young adults attended several SWORD events, led by Christy Lang.

Fraternal guests: Andrew Samuels (Miami, Florida) of the Seventh Day Baptist Church; Jeff Booth of Christian Church of God (Amarillo, Texas); Charles Groce of International Church of God (Tyler, Texas); Ramon and Rebekah Ruiz (Mexico); Henry and Ruth Harley (Jamaica), representing the International Ministerial Congress.



Part of the 35-voice choir in Corpus Christi, directed by Arvella Rose (June Bobcombe, soloist).



Churchmanship Award: to Corpus Christi's own Eliseo and Maria Davila (front, center), whose ten children (not all shown) all serve the gospel of Christ in some capacity, testifying to the influence of this humble couple, married 64 years. This award is presented at each convention to recognize persons not in vocational ministry who have exemplified outstanding commitment, service, and cooperation over many years.

Extra-curricular: the Texas State Aquarium, USS Lexington, Padre Island and other beaches, C. C. "Hooks" baseball (Elder Delvin O'Banion threw the first pitch), deep-sea fishing, Ringling Brothers Circus, and other activities were all available nearby.

Church business: The conference in session amended its bylaws by extending the terms of ministerial representatives on district boards from two to three years. It called for the board to study the frequency of G. C. conventions and recommend its findings to the 2011 convention.

G. C. board for 2009-2011: Loren Stacy, chairman; Sam Holland, vice chairman; Jose Hernandez, secretary; Charles Carr, treasurer; Erik Dunn, Chip Hinds, Wayne Hrenyk, Ruben Marquez,



Spring Vale SOUND in concert

Carl Palmer, Raul C. Romo, John Tivald, and Larry Zaragoza. The board offers its thanks to Brian Larson, Dennis O'Banion, and Mike Vlad, whose terms expired in Corpus Christi.

Site for 2011 convention: To be announced.



LifeSpring student orientation



Evening service at the annual family camp, June 7-13, near Dover, OK.

International Tour

Australia and The Philippines

In April, Elders Ramon Ruiz Garza (IMC) and Bill Hicks (Missions Ministries) visited Adelaide, South Australia, for a seven-day program with a message of the gospel, missions, and the elect of God. Bill Hicks' sermon was entitled "Defining and Living the Gospel." Ramon Ruiz preached on "The Elect of God and His Purpose," his first complete sermon in English. Bill Hicks presented a PowerPoint overview of the Lord's work through Missions Abroad around the world.

John Klassek of *MessageWeek* travelled from Perth, Western Australia, to fellowship with the brethren in Adelaide and to interview Elder Hicks regarding Missions Abroad and IMC work. The interview will be available at www.message7.org and www.cog7missions.org.

On April 20 Elders Ruiz, Hicks, and Phil Kordahi from Australia departed for Manila to attend the fifty-second Philippines General Conference in Cagayan de Oro City, Mindanao, April 21-27. Pastor Mike Dizon of the Philippines and Brother Alfred Ander from Indonesia met them



at the Manila airport, and they all flew together to Mindanao.

From 600 to 800 brethren attended part or all of the Philippine conference, using the theme "Year of Fulfillment." Many others couldn't attend because of the financial situation gripping the country. A terrorist attack (bombing) on a major bridge stopped some from coming.

The opening service of the conference included a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new auditorium built by the Philippine church and a flag-raising ceremony for each district in that country. Ramon Ruiz preached the opening sermon of the conference. Later sermons from Pastors Dick Baclaan, Mike Dizon, John Villarante, and Billy Abugan were also uplifting. The atmosphere of the whole conference was something to experience!

Phil Kordahi gave a study on "The Changing Heart," and Bill Hicks preached on worshipping God in Spirit and in truth. Elder Hicks also gave a presentation of the Church of God (Seventh Day) work around the world. Brother Alfred Ander from Indonesia taught the brethren Indonesian songs of worship and organized a group to sing in the worship service. Sabbath sermons were given by Elders Hicks and Ruiz.

The Philippine church, with approximately 5,000 members, reaches out boldly to share the gospel. Recently its evangelists have had some success on the islands around Mindanao.

The team returned to Manila on April 27 to visit the Manila church, pastored by Elder Mike Dizon. The next day team members were taken on a tour of the mission area, the church construction, and the micro-financing projects in the town. They were warmly welcomed by the brethren and shared in a worship service held at the church, which will be completed very soon.

Throughout their stay in the Philippines, the team members truly appreciated the love and kindness shown to them by the brethren.

— Phil Kordahi
Zone 6 IMC Representative



Unlikely Justice

“Lo! Freedom weeps,/Wrong rules the land and waiting Justice sleeps.” Josiah Holland’s quote would have resonated with the prophet Habakkuk. His plea for justice came during the

final days of the Assyrian Empire and the beginning of Babylon’s domination (seventh century BC).

The object of Habakkuk’s concern, however, wasn’t the surrounding enemy nations but Judah itself (1:2-4). Those were dark days: Justice had disappeared, evil was rampant, and violence went unchecked.

Habakkuk’s prayer for divine intervention was met with a surprising answer: God would send the Chaldeans to judge Judah (vv. 5-11) — no solution to the prophet’s dilemma. Judah was God’s covenant people; Lord, cleanse their sin and restore their righteousness. To use the Chaldeans to judge a nation more righteous than they added insult to injury. After all, wasn’t God on Judah’s side?

Most of this prophecy is dialogue, even argument, between the prophet and his God. The exchange soon shifts from how God dealt with injustice to God’s character in light of His covenant with His people. This is a real theological conundrum.

The argument reached its zenith when Habakkuk climbed the city’s watchtower in protest (2:1). *I’ll come down when God has a satisfactory answer*, he may have thought. And what was God’s answer? “The just shall live by his faith” (2:4, NKJV). This statement, twice quoted by Paul (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11), not only informed Habakkuk’s thinking but also has been used by the Holy Spirit to spark movements that significantly reshaped the church in history.

Beyond inspiring the doctrine of justification by faith, Habakkuk 2:4’s application is that *God is sovereign*, which, rather than His temporal blessings, should be the true motivation of worship:

Though the cherry trees don’t blossom and the strawberries don’t ripen, though the apples are worm-eaten and the wheat fields stunted, though the sheep pens are sheepless and the cattle barns empty, I’m singing joyful praise to God. I’m turning cartwheels of joy to my Savior God. Counting on God’s Rule to prevail, I take heart and gain strength. I run like a deer. I feel like I’m king of the mountain! (3:17-19, *The Message**).

The tendency to serve God for material benefit has a reverse effect: We may be inclined to view such blessings as evidence of “favored-nation status” and guarantee of national security. That’s why modern Christians, especially in America, have much to learn from Habakkuk’s experience. These are dark days for our nation — “Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne” (James Russell Lowell). Enemies flex their nuclear muscles; terrorism looms. Is God on our side? Would He allow nations less righteous to judge the U.S. for its sins?

God’s answer is no different than it was for this seventh century prophet. He is sovereign and will do what honors His cause. Meanwhile, we live by faith, trusting Him amid national and world conflicts. What ultimately happens is God’s business because history is “His story.” Instead of “Is God on America’s side?” the vital question is “Whose side is America on?”

In answering the question “Where was God on September 11?” Anne Graham Lotz suggests that God was where secular culture put Him: out of our schools, out of our government, out of our businesses and system of values. God quietly backed away, removing His hand of protection.

Thomas Jefferson once said, “I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever.” A little godly fear and trembling might be in order these days, in the nation and in the church.

— Whaid Guscott Rose
General Conference President

* Scripture taken from *The Message*. Copyright ©1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

