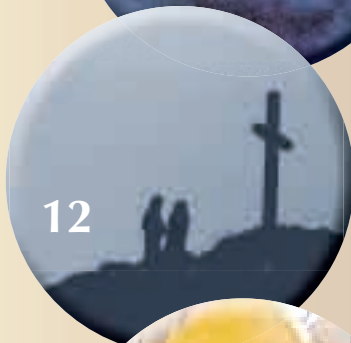
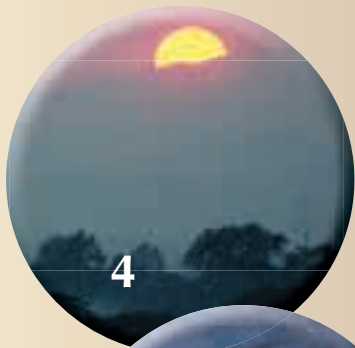




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Church Aflame

Last issue we introduced our theme for the new year: “Revitalizing to become a church of grace and truth.” Not all we publish in 2010 will hit that target, but all items marked *churchIGNITE* will aim for it, at least. In this issue, they’re on pages 11-13 and 21-23, plus a few news items and the back cover.

This BA has less *churchIGNITE* than last because we’re remembering Jesus’ death and resurrection at this time every year (pp. 4-6 and 8-10 of this issue). The Church’s annual communion service for this appointed purpose is on Sunday evening, March 28; baptized Christians are welcome. Our response to Christ’s cross and empty tomb links closely with our hope for a revitalized church, so BA urges you to attend. Let’s give our best to Him who gave it all for us.

In the December BA, our Q and A’s supported the view that the millennial and eternal reward of the righteous will be experienced, not in an ethereal heaven far away but on God’s good earth, made new for eternal habitation. We invited readers with opposing views to send their best texts supporting the common idea that Christians will, indeed, “go to heaven.” Two responded.

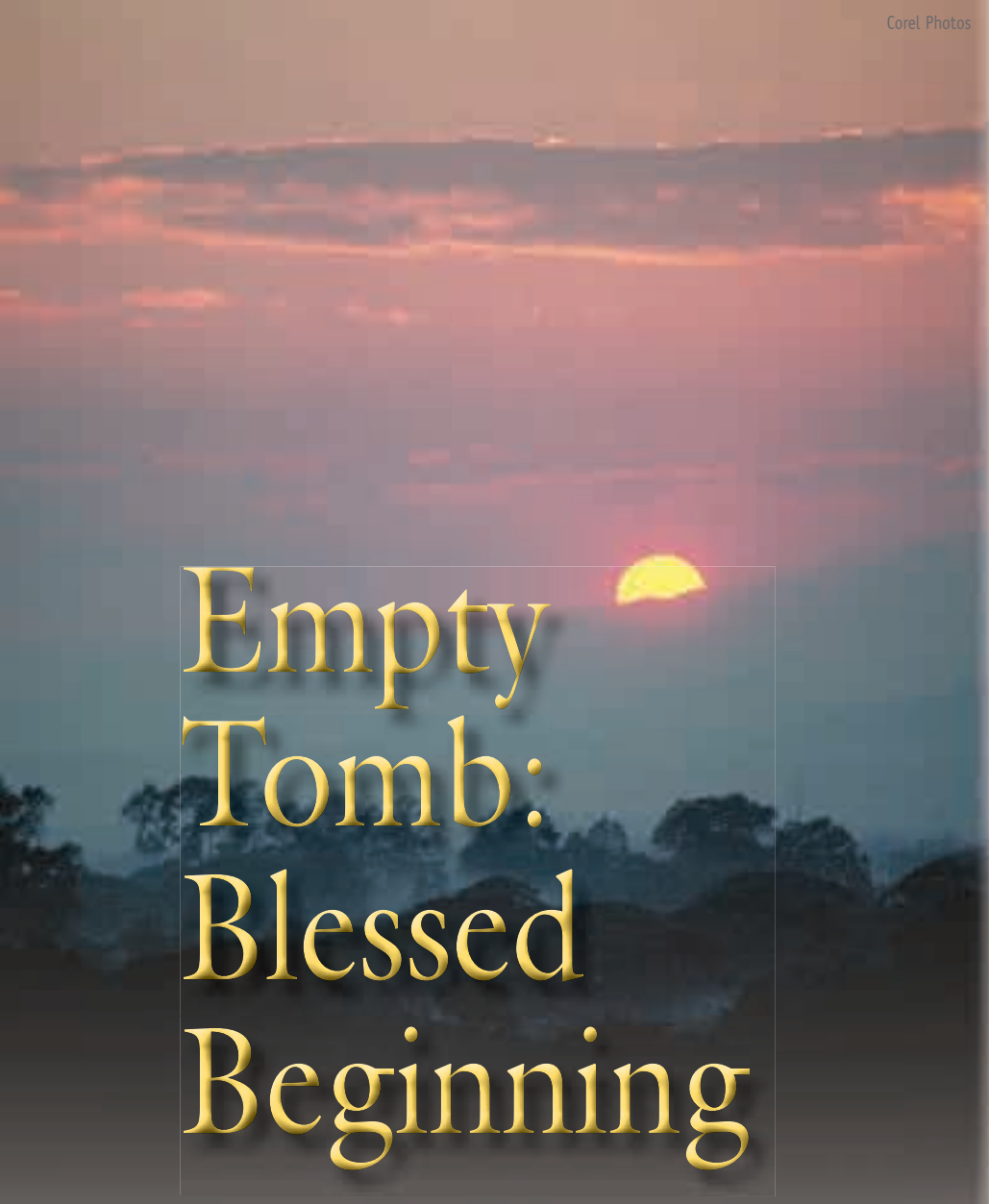
Bob Moyers of Liberty Center, Ohio, offered several texts that speak of God’s kingdom — the kingdom of heaven — like Matthew 6:10, 33; 7:21. You’re right, Bob: Love for others and Christ’s peace are central to our heavenly home.

Terrell Thomas of Wauapon, Wisconsin, found more “promises” of heaven in John 12:26; 13:36; 14:2, 3; 17:24; and 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17. In a hand-printed letter, he rehearsed God’s omnipresence — “space is not required for God’s home” — and nixed his own omniscience: “I have not even come close to fathoming all the mysteries of God’s knowledge in His Holy Word. But I will continue to diligently seek. . . .” Thanks for your humility and love for Jesus, Terrell!

This BA would be incomplete without an appeal on Haiti’s behalf; find it in our news section (p. 28). Please consider donating to this desperate need, and others that will come, through our CoG7 Disaster Relief Fund. Like a fully attended Lord’s Supper, a generous response to those in pain and poverty is a telling sign that a church is either heating up in grace and truth or already ignited and on fire.

— Calvin Burrell





Empty Tomb: Blessed Beginning

In recalling Christ's solemn crucifixion, we may insist that a true commencement came three days later.
by Ray Straub

“Now it all begins,” murmurs a dejected Sanhedrin scribe as he finds the tomb empty.

Accused of blasphemy, Jesus had been crucified and laid in the tomb of a sympathetic Joseph of Arimathea. Earlier He had claimed He would revive the third day after His death. Theft of the body would lend credibility to His prediction and inflict a di-

saster on the Jewish leadership's ability to contain the Prophet's movement. To assure that the body would remain, Roman guards secured the tomb.

In spite of precautions, rumors of an empty tomb spread quickly. Hoping to confirm they were false, the scribe rushed there, only to find the stone removed and the crypt empty. For him, this was a nightmare!

This embellished story came from scenes in a 1977 television mini series *Jesus of Nazareth*, recently shown on Trinity Broadcasting Network. Though extra-biblical, the scribe's remark carries insight: The empty tomb was like the voice of God saying, “Now it all begins!”

No event in history surpasses the Resurrection in importance. Without it the message of the Prophet might not have survived. Jesus' claim to divinity would be unconfirmed, our hopes would be faint, and our religion would lack the event that distinguishes it from all others.

To recognize and celebrate the magnitude of Jesus' resurrection is spiritual nourishment for every Christian community. Because it's the basis of our dynamic relationship with God, suggesting we bear a “seed” that eventuates in our future resurrection with the saints, we must not diminish this glorious truth.

Here we will introduce the resurrection theme — both Christ's and ours — that permeates John's Gospel; sample how Jesus' return from the dead propelled early Christian faith; see how the same hope resides in believers; and propose evidence of Jesus' resurrection.

Resurrection implications

In addition to the direct teachings of Scripture, many important truths are also implied. The fourth Gospel, for example, offers several subtle allusions to Christ's resurrection, and ours. The implicit is often more exciting than the explicit.

The first miracle John lists is Jesus' turning water into wine at a marriage feast. The critical

point of this story emphasizes that instead of the best wine being served first, the superior wine Jesus provided was served last. John observes, "He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him" (2:11).

Turning water into the best wine is miraculous, but is it also glorious? In the Greek language, that word often refers to God's luminous presence and radiance. The implication is that the first wine represents our lifetime on Earth, while the superior wine represents the glories of a future existence via the miracle of resurrection.

The next event John describes is the cleansing of the temple. The Jews wanted a sign of Jesus' authority to remove the merchandise from His Father's house. Jesus gave His forthcoming resurrection as His credentials: "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (v. 19). It wasn't until His resurrection that the disciples understood what Jesus implied, that the destroyed "temple" was His body (v. 22).

John reports other ways that Jesus revealed His divinity by mighty works during the normal course of life: healing the royal official's son (chapter 4); healing the paralytic by the pool (chapter 5); feeding the multitude and walking on water (chapter 6); healing a blind man (chapter 9). The climactic miracle on John's list of seven was not prompted by life's normal course but from its last and greatest enemy, death: Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (chapter 11). This sends a subtle message that, by God's grace in Christ, our journey too will end in an ultimate victory over death, by resurrection.

Church growth

The book of Acts describes the rapid rise of the Christian church after Jesus' ascent and the Holy Spirit's arrival. The disciples were given power for miracles that matched those of their Master, assuring them of His constant presence. Many thousands were added to the church in a short while. It seems improbable that a new religion could experience such explosive growth by conventional word-of-mouth means, unless a *mega* event like the Resurrection powered it.

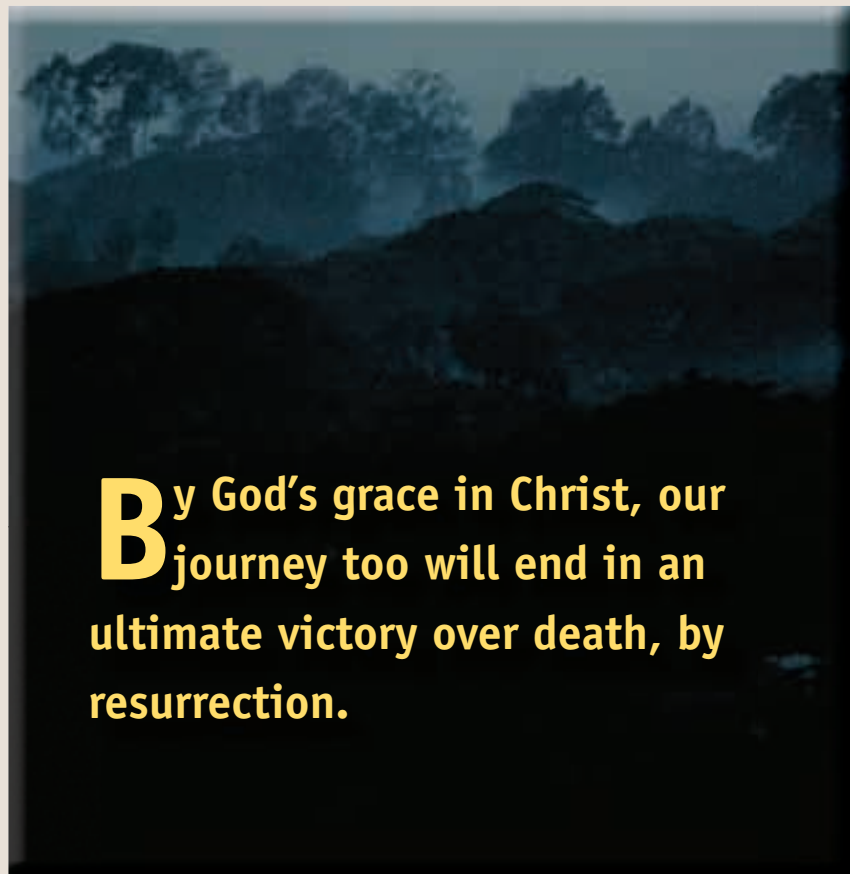
The apostles' messages reported a resurrected Jesus, seen at the Father's right hand. Peter's sermon at Pentecost announced that God freed Jesus "from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him" (2:24). Until then,

death had never permanently released anyone.

When a healing at the temple gate caused a furor, Peter declared that the miracle was done in "the name of Jesus . . . whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead . . ." (4:10).

Stephen, "a man full of God's grace and power," was summoned to respond to charges of blasphemy. His defense was unapologetic, accusing the Sanhedrin of following their fathers' pattern of persecuting and killing God's prophets. Infuriated, they "gnashed their teeth" and ordered him to be stoned, whereupon Stephen looked up to heaven and saw the resurrected Jesus standing at the right hand of God (6:8; 7:1-56)

Because Jesus arose from among the dead, the church



By God's grace in Christ, our journey too will end in an ultimate victory over death, by resurrection.

experienced a robust, Holy Spirit-fueled beginning.

Resurrection power in believers

What the church experienced then is for every Christian. Explicit biblical statements proclaim that resurrection life resides somehow, somewhere in the believer:

- “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24). This change is stated in the past tense.

- “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you” (Romans 8:11). Paul suggests that this power to resurrect is the Spirit of God abiding in the believer. Elsewhere, Paul uses seed-sowing as a metaphor, leading to resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:35-44). The believer is assured that the “seed” to revive after death is now within the redeemed.

- “We know that we have

passed from death to life, because we love our brothers” (1 John 3:14).

Resurrection proofs

Jesus’ resurrection is ultimately accepted by faith. Evidence to support this gospel truth is available, however, and this commentary would be incomplete without citing some of it.

While none of the Gospels narrates the actual Resurrection, John (20:4-8) cites important details concerning the linens in which Jesus’ crucified body had been wrapped. The cloth enveloping His head was now folded and laid separate from the others. This scenario contrasts with what would be expected had the body been stolen.

Prior to His resurrection, scant faith existed that Jesus would live afterward. Nicodemus brought seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes, enough to last much more than three days. Disciples returned to their earlier jobs. Thomas doubted even while speaking with the risen Christ. That this general sense of futility would reverse without evidence of a resurrected Lord is unlikely.

Paul’s lengthy list of witnesses

(himself included) who saw the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 15:4-8) is convincing.

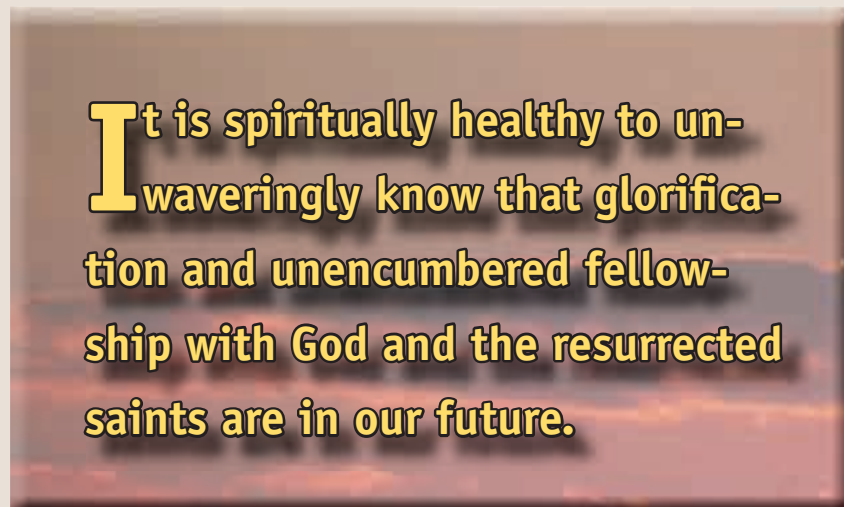
Most cultures and religions believe in an existence hereafter. Why is this dogma so universal in the minds of the masses if there is no life beyond death?

The most worthy “proof” of Resurrection is our own will to believe. It is spiritually healthy, inspiring, satisfying, and motivating to unwaveringly know that glorification and unencumbered fellowship with God and the resurrected saints are in our future.

Cornerstone

Resurrection from the dead, that of Jesus past and believers future, is the cornerstone of our faith and hope. Eternal life is the gift of God and the alternative to sin’s wages. Jesus our Lord, descended from heaven and returned there, is the one whose resurrection makes the promise of our redemption real through sacrifice of Himself, the one who promised another Helper to remain with us after His ascension, and the one who left adequate evidence of His glorious victory over death.

It all became real — it all began — at the empty tomb! **BA**



Ray Straub of Oregon spoke some of these thoughts in a funeral tribute to Albert Fischer, his South Dakota cousin who died December 28.



Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.

Questions & Answers

Q What is the Church's position on the origin of Satan? Is the Devil a fallen angel, or was he created evil at the start?

A Our CoG7 statement of faith affirms that Satan, the adversary of God, tempted our first parents in the garden (Gen. 3), is capable of transforming himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), and will finally be destroyed in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10). That leaves unanswered your question of his beginning.

The answer most often heard among us is that Satan was originally an angelic being in heaven. Created perfect, he sinned through pride and ambition against God, dragging one-third of heaven's angels to Earth with him in the fall. Bible texts that support this theory are 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Revelation 12:7-9; perhaps Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:11-19. Though well established by tradition, this viewpoint seems to stop just short of clear and compelling proof of Satan's beginning.

Another answer sometimes heard is that God, for His own purposes, created a bad devil at the start (Isa. 45:7; Col. 1:16). Proponents of this view refute the above texts: Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, for example, speak about kings of Babylon and Tyre, not about Satan. Luke 20:34-36 is cited as evidence that angels can never die, so 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 must refer to human messengers (the word can be used in this sense), not heavenly angels. The strongest single support for this "created devil" theory is Jesus' word that the Devil was a murderer and abode not in the truth from the beginning (John 8:44).

A third viewpoint says that Scripture provides insufficient evidence to settle this issue. Though we may theorize about the Devil's origin, we should leave it an open question because the Bible itself does.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Q What do you understand to be the mark of the beast?

A The mark of the beast was inflicted upon people by the two-horned beast described in Revelation 13:11: "He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon" (NIV). This description reveals the beast's dual nature: its lamb-like characteristic represents its ecclesiastical nature, while its dragon-like speech confirms that it also had secular authority.

The church of Rome and its clerics became the undisputed religious authority of the Latin world by A.D. 600. It sought to exercise dominion not only over religious affairs in the former Roman Empire but also among its political powers. This ambition was publicly demonstrated when Charlemagne, a Frankish emperor and pretender of Christianity, was crowned Emperor of the Romans by Pope Leo III in old St. Peter's church on December 25 in the year 800. This coronation established a union between church and state known as the Holy Roman Empire, the two-horned beast.

We believe that this union between the Roman church and the states of Western Europe enabled the church to inflict all manner of cruelties upon her subjects who refused to bow to her ideologies. The church became so powerful that she forced her subjects to accept her dogmas and rituals in order to carry out the normal pursuits of life (v. 17). If they refused this mark of the beast (vv. 15-17), they were ostracized from society or, in many cases, martyred.

Thus, the mark of the beast on the forehead or hand symbolized belief and participation in the idolatrous, heretical mode of worship of the state church that prevailed in Europe for more than one thousand years.

— Elder Robert Coulter

Editor's note: We solicit your questions and will consider them for publication, with our answers.

Stories of Scars

What healed wounds really tell us.
by Donna A. Tallman

Steven drives to his basketball game while I sit beside him marveling at how far he's come since he got his driver's permit. He wears one of his ratty shirts with no sleeves, revealing an ugly red scar on his upper right arm. Anxious to prove himself to his high school coach, he played hard throughout his first game, taking an offensive charge in the last minute. Falling against a grate on the floor, he ripped a hole in his arm. He got up undaunted, shot his free throws, and left the floor with blood streaming like jellyfish tentacles down the back of his arm.

The doctor glued the hole together with some kind of medical epoxy that he said would be better than stitches, but within two days the gash had peeled open and was spitting ooze through the bandage.

"No worries, Mom," Steven said. "It'll be fine." By the time the wound healed, he was left with a permanent red scar.

Scars make us authentic

America is obsessed with perfection. We use words like *sculptured*, *manicured*, and *well groomed* to describe not only our bodies but also our lawns. But there's something wonderfully real about imperfection, about the ordinary.

Jesus was perfect, but He was also ordinary. Raised the son of an everyman, a carpenter, He was so ordinary that hometown people rejected His teaching in their synagogue. They could not believe that the boy they once saw running through their streets was now preaching and performing miracles. He certainly couldn't be Israel's promised

"king"; He was too much like them!

Hanging on the cross, Jesus didn't look much like a king either. His face was bloodied and battered, yet He was presented to a watching world as King of the Jews. Stripped and nailed to the cross, His flesh torn from His back, Jesus evoked no aura of nobility or authority. Quite the contrary. Those who passed by Jesus that day hurled insults and mocked His claim as king. Why would God choose such a beaten man to be the Messiah? Who would consider following such a defeated king?

Anyone who had been beaten by the world would be drawn to Jesus. He knew pain; His scars made Him authentic. While His power declared His authority, His anguish connected Him to human suffering, opening the door for all to draw near to Him with confidence (Hebrews 4:16).

Scars identify us

Each of my family members

has a scar, the most memorable going to our son, Philip. A cow dog attacked him when he was six, and he now has a scar just above his lip. Philip never tried to hide it. All that's left now is a tiny white line. To us, it's a keepsake of the day his life was spared. Like the rest of my family, his scar distinguishes him from the others; it makes him unique.

Jesus knew that. A resurrection tops a crucifixion. Jesus didn't need to return with scars, but He did. His disciples thought they'd seen a ghost until He showed them His hands, feet, and side (Luke 24:37-40). Thomas wouldn't believe at all until he *touched* the scars for himself (John 20:25).

Why was it so hard for them to believe? Because no crucified person had ever yet shown his scars to prove his suffering. Jesus' scars were a written record that His death on the cross really did happen. Those scars verified Jesus' victory over death and uniquely identified Him.

Companion in Suffering

The Gospels mention Jesus crucified between two thieves. This fact suggests that Christ is between those who suffer injustice, poverty, persecution, illness, solitude, and indifference — even with those who suffer for their own sins. He is in the middle, not as an observer but as one who experienced each of these circumstances. He understands and accompanies us in our suffering.

Suffering is not direct punishment from God. He doesn't pursue people to harass them or rejoice when someone suffers.

Suffering is part of life, the expression of how fragile and ephemeral human existence is. Next to the suffering person and those broken by life, He is there, feeling the pain. In a fallen world He doesn't control each movement of the human race but frees us and sustains the faithful through it all. In all of life, the possibility of physical suffering and death exists.

— Raúl Cruz

Our scars proclaim that we have faced death and live. Our healing provides others with hope that their lives will continue as well.

Scars validate God's work

I wish I felt as grateful for the internal scars that have disfigured my heart; I desperately try to hide those. My greatest fear in revealing my scars is that others may see that I have glued the gaps together with an inferior solution, leaving me vulnerable to recurring infection. By not allowing my wounds to heal, I run the risk of spitting infectious ooze on those who inadvertently bump into one of them.

The Apostle Peter loved Jesus so much that He publicly proclaimed his loyalty unto death and sliced off the ear of one who had come to arrest the Lord (John 13:37; 18:10). Jesus knew Peter loved Him, but He also knew Peter would deny ever knowing Him. Imagine Peter's heartbreak after the rooster's third call, when he realized he had denied Jesus. He was devastated! From that moment on, Peter would remember his impulsive proclamation of loyalty and his utter failure to follow through. The wound in his heart would live forever. But Jesus moved into that place of painful woundedness, helping Peter turn it into a validating scar.

"Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Jesus asked and asked and asked again (John 21:15-17).

By the time Jesus asked the third question, Peter's grief was laid bare. With each question came Peter's affirmation "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." Each time Peter verbalized his love for the Lord, his broken heart healed a little more. Eventually that wound became a scar, an intimate tribute of Christ's forgiveness.

Scars give us authority

Our scars give us authority to minister to others. We are most comforted by someone who understands grief, has encountered pain, felt the sting of betrayal, or walks where we live. These fellow sufferers come alongside and do what no other can do: empathize. Our hearts' disfigurement allows us to access each other's pain to bring restoration.

Jesus was tempted in all ways as are we. Perhaps one of the greatest temptations He faced happened on the cross in the midst of excruciating pain. As the crowds jeered and mocked Him, many taunted Him to use His power to get Himself off the cross. Had Jesus opted out of God's plan for salvation, He would have no authority to speak of endurance to us. His suffering would have no meaning; his torture, no validity. It

was in the midst of obtaining His scars that He was most like us.

Every scar tells a story — of what happened, an omen of what could have been, and the relief of what wasn't. Ask Steven to tell you about the scar on his arm, and you will hear a blow-by-blow account of triumph. He won't focus on the basketball foul, the crash into the wall, or even the doctor's visit. No, Steven will tell you that in spite of his injury, he scored two free throws after he was hurt. His scar is a badge of honor!

Scars proclaim life

We all carry scars. Some of them are external — on view for the world to see. Some are so deeply etched into our hearts that we are not even aware of their presence. Each reveals a triumph: Death has once again been cheated and life remains.

Regardless of its source or effect on us, each scar is a written record of the line of God's limit, His sovereign boundary, His border of restriction. The same God who limited the oceans at the shoreline (Job 38:8-11) can set limits on your pain.

The scars of the resurrected Christ assure us that we too, though wounded now, will experience resurrection one day. Our healing and the scars that remain declare life, providing others with hope that their lives will continue with blessing as well. **BA**

Donna A. Tallman writes from Lake Oswego, OR.



The Early Church in Acts by Calvin Burrell

The birthday of the New Testament church is recorded in Acts 2. It happened on the Hebrew Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came powerfully upon the band of 120 Jesus-followers tarrying in Jerusalem, as He had instructed. It resulted in 3,000 new believers in Jesus as Savior, Messiah, and Lord. Their faith was confirmed by their willingness to repent of sins and be baptized in water, signifying salvation through Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

How did this first Jerusalem church of God begin to practice its newfound faith in Jesus?

- by regular assemblies for teaching, for table fellowship, and for prayers (vv. 42, 43)
- by generous sharing of economic resources to meet various needs (vv. 44, 45)
- by unceasing worship and praise to God, in the temple and in homes (vv. 46, 47)

The balance of this book of Acts reports how the first church obeyed the Lord's commission (1:8) to witness for Him in Jerusalem (chs. 2-7), in Judea and Samaria (chs. 8-12), and to the ends of the earth (chs. 13-28). What kind of church was this?

The early church had a simple message. Intended for its mostly Jewish audiences at the start, it focused on these core concepts:

- God's promises to the fathers and through the prophets are fulfilled; Messiah has come!
- He was killed by cruel hands, but God raised Him from the dead.
- By Him we have forgiveness and right standing with God that could never come by Moses' law.

The early church was far from perfect. It was often beset by common human failures and conflicts (e.g., Ananias and Sapphira's sin, 5:1ff; complaint over the apostles' neglect of widows, 6:1; John Mark's

retreat from missions, 13:13; Paul and Barnabas' dispute and schism, 15:36-41).

The early church walked a rough road. Opposition to and persecution of believers, first by the Jews and later by civil authorities, are the norm, starting in Acts 4. Though comparatively few died for their faith (Stephen, ch. 7; James, ch. 12) many paid a high price to follow Jesus, the Man of sorrows and grief. "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (14:22b).

The early church had much to unlearn and correct. The 30 years of Acts, starting with Christ's ascension, saw major transition among God's people. From their Jewish heritage, the first converts were more like a subset of Judaism than today's Christian church. Only gradually, for example, did they separate from temple worship (3:1; 5:12, 25; 21:26); disdain for Gentiles (chs. 10-11); circumcision and the Mosaic law (ch. 15), etc.

The early church was Spirit-empowered.

Numerous cases of divine intervention on behalf of Christ's early disciples are reported, leading some to propose the name Acts of the Holy Spirit. Today's Christians may pray, as did they, "Grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus" (4:29, 30).

Let the reader respond: How much of the early church's experience, recorded in Acts, should be considered normative for the church in every age? Its imperfections? Its tribulations? Its growth in knowledge? Its signs and wonders? Its spiritual boldness?

Grace: Encounter With the Word

What does the Bible say
about this much-used
word of the gospel?
by Calvin Burrell

A familiar hymn of faith affirms that God's grace is amazing. "I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see." The words of John Newton remain favorites, even for those of us who have much truth to learn about grace.

Most people grasp that grace is something good from God. We regard it as we would a get-out-of-jail-free card today, or as an entrance pass through the pearly gates someday. Yes, grace is crucial to our hope for the eternal kingdom of heaven, but it is much more than that. Read on!

Noah found grace

This awesome G-word first appears in the Flood narrative of Genesis 6: "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (v. 8). In this setting, grace serves as prototype and preview for all that the Bible will later teach about the way to God and life.

In the case of Noah, the stakes of grace were high; heaven's judgment had been pronounced upon a sinful people. Would anyone escape the destructive waters of the flood? Noah would, by God's grace.

Though he was a just man who walked with God (v. 9), Noah would be the first to admit that he too had sinned and fallen short of God's glory. He too had to hope and trust for better treatment than he deserved when the rains would come. To Noah's worst problem, the assurance of a favorable solution twinkled in God's eyes.

From this ten-word verse (6:8), some will see grace as what Noah looked for and found in the face of God. On the other hand, we may affirm that God

ever looks for those to bestow His grace on (see 2 Chronicles 16:9a). In those years before the Flood, His eyes landed on Noah.

What is clear from this extended passage is that Noah and his family, having found favor in the Father's eyes, landed high and dry in the ark of safety — while others perished in the waters of the flood.

Like Noah, we live in a wicked world. Again, the Lord's judgment is on its way — not by water this time, but by fire. Only those who find grace in the eyes of the Lord will escape the burning to come!

Got grace? It's the one thing that can save us from the destruction ahead.

Jesus was grace

From this glimpse of grace in the life and times of Noah, we turn to the New Testament, where the concentration of divine favor per page is ten times that of the Old. Introduced in the eyes of the Lord in early Genesis, grace is now unpacked and displayed with brilliance in the person of Jesus: He has His Father's eyes.

As a child, Jesus "became strong in spirit . . . and the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40). As a preacher, Jesus spoke gracious words that elicited marvel (4:22). An eyewitness and beloved friend wrote of Him, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Just as the Father is the God of all grace (1 Peter 5:10), so is the Son the embodiment of grace — its personification. Why didn't Christ often *spea*k of grace in

His recorded words? The answer may be in the fact that He was grace, the carrier and conveyer of God's unmerited favor to man.

Gospel truth

Together with truth, grace is a supreme quality and virtue of our Lord Jesus (John 1:14).

It is integral to His nature as God's Son and descriptive of the

gospel preached in His name. Knowing the divine person of Christ does this primary thing: It connects us to God's grace and truth — that is, to the work He accomplished in the gospel on behalf of us sinners.

We have been rescued from the penalty of sin, we are being saved from the practice of sin,

continued on page 24

Surprising fact: More than thirty consecutive occurrences of the word *grace* (or *favor*) after Genesis 6:8 use it in like fashion — as the good favor that one person finds in the sight of another. Examples:

- Lot found favor in the sight of the visiting angels and escaped Sodom (Genesis 19:19ff).
- Jacob found favor (grace) in the sight (face) of Esau, his offended brother (33:10).
- Joseph found favor in the sight of Potiphar and others (39:4, 21).
- The Israelites found favor in the sight of the Egyptians and took much spoil as they fled (Exodus 12:36).
- Ruth found favor in the sight of Boaz (Ruth 2:2-13).
- Esther found favor in the sight of King Ahasuerus as she laid her life on the line for her people (Esther 5:2ff).
- Others: Genesis 18:3; 30:27; 47:29; 50:4; Exodus 33:12, 13, 17; 34:9; Numbers 11:11; 32:5; Deuteronomy 24:1; Judges 6:17; 1 Samuel 16:22; 20:3; 25:8; 2 Samuel 14:22; 15:25, etc.

Jesus, the gospel of salvation, and God's grace are linked often in the apostolic Scriptures:

- "[I may finish] the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).
- "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand . . ." (Romans 5:1, 2).
- Others: Romans 3:24; 5:20, 21; Ephesians 1:3-12; 2:5-9; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Peter 1:10, 13.

The brief, dense language of Ephesians 1:7 ("In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace") suggests another definition of *grace* — an acronym: It is **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**.

The Too-Hard Box



One woman's radical cleaning taught her much about the need for Christ's radical sacrifice.
by Barb Eldred

Passover was looming near. Funny how it creeps up on me each year and I suddenly realize only a few weeks are left to “get this place clean” in time. Early spring is that special time when we clean the house, making sure we get out all the leaven.

“Why?” someone asks in dismay, as the annual cleaning frenzy starts. “What’s not clean?”

“Well” I was a bit stuck. I clean ‘cause the Bible says so? ‘Cause it’s a good idea? Will it

help me “go to heaven”? Why do I do it? It *is* a chore for someone who tends to be obsessive. But it’s sooo nice having the place sparkle, all that dull rainforest mildew down the drain in a green swirl of soapy water.

But why?

Do I need to keep the commandments to “get there”? Will I be locked outside the camp if I don’t find every speck of mildew? Mildew is a form of yeast, isn’t it? *What about using baking powder?* I ask myself.

Oh, no! The vacuum head won't fit into the toaster, and I can still see crumbs down there. *Remember to empty the vacuum bag, I tell myself. You always forget that vacuum bag.*

So I scrub and wash and cross rooms off my list, starting with the least important, so they won't get "dirty" again before The Day. *Don't forget the vacuum bag!* The scribbled blackness of success grows on the list as the days pass. My hands crack and the clock ticks. *Put the vacuum bag on the list!*

It's such a pleasure to look at the top floor and "see" Clean. The smell of kerosene wafts through the place, alternatively choking and thrilling. Such a fresh smell. *Vacuum bag!*

A pile of bits grows on the table; a photo frame has broken. The kids were so small, I can't throw it out, so into the Too-Hard Box it goes — the place I put things to deal with later. *What about this hat I love? Is it past its prime?* Too many memories, so into Too-Hard Box. *What about the drawings the girls did last time they were home?* No more room on the walls; Too-Hard Box.

The list wanes and the box gains as the days tick by.

The last few days fly. Clean frig, clean stove; how nice. *Why don't I do this all the time? Don't forget to dump the vacuum bag.* Headaches. Backaches. Falling asleep in church. Cracked hands.

Why do I do this? What's the purpose? Where can a clean house get me? And how clean is clean? I still have to do the Too-Hard Box!

The hour arrives and it is done! Clean house, clean body: I collapse into a chair and watch

the last rays of sun go down as The Day arrives. I've made it. What a job! A clean house is a great feeling.

Headed to the car and church the next morning, I stop in horror to see the Too-Hard Box with the vacuum bag sitting by it at the back door. From sheer frustration and exhaustion, I sit on the floor and cry.

So what *is* it all about? Does God think less of me because I couldn't do it all? How clean is clean enough for Him? How can I be as clean and perfect as He is? I simply do not have the energy or ability to figure out every source of yeast or leaven.

I look at the box by the back door and think of "stuff" in my life that I've put away in the back of my mind and not dealt with. What about that book I haven't returned, that comment I made to my sister? All Too Hard.

Then I thought of the cupboard under the stairs: The Too-Hard Boxes from last year and the year before are still there. There's more mildew and dust there than in all the rest of the house. Can't get in there for Too-Hard Stuff!

If I'm honest with myself, I can't be clean enough. So I remember what Jesus did when He died for all my Too-Hards — and why He had to. If He hadn't, get-

ting rid of them just wasn't going to happen.

Sitting in the middle of the garage floor, I realize that I had focused on an illustration process, not on the real issue. The Too-Hard Boxes had been pushed under the stairs, and the new one growing this year was pushed out of mind — while I scrubbed at things that didn't really matter.

I bow my head and thank Jesus for His love and sacrifice. He paid the price for my Too-Hard Boxes.

So why this spring-cleaning ritual at my house? No one really notices much. But for me, it drives home every year just how much I need His sacrifice and how I never could manage without it. I live that lesson, walk this sermon. I understand in my very being, body, and brain what His forgiveness plan is all about — and why. **BA**

Barb Eldred is a married mother of two (with two granddaughters) who worships with Fellowship in God every Sabbath in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.



The Too-Hard Boxes had been pushed out of mind — while I scrubbed at things that didn't really matter.

IS GOD MISSING FROM HOLLYWOOD?

by Claudia Vazquez

@ Francesco Cura—Dreamstime.com

I've been an artist since I was four — dancing, singing, acting, writing, painting. So when I was asked to comment on the topic "Is God missing from Hollywood?" I thought, *Um, no!*

I mean, I grew up in a Christian family, was baptized during my actor training, and am now working as a full-time performer in Los Angeles. It didn't immediately occur to me that this might not be the impression you guys are getting, considering all the godless programming on TV and the big screen.

The truth is, God is very present in this industry! To encourage more youth to pursue a career in the Arts (written, performance, visual), I offer the following thoughts.

We ask ourselves, "Is God missing from Hollywood?" But we can ask the same about any business. In finance, education, insurance, retail, and other areas we find corruption, but we can also find light. We know this because our parents, friends, and church family who are dedicated Christ-followers stay on course. Hollywood is the same. Unfortunately in this profession, the bad stuff often gets all the press, leaving our good work in the shadows. As in any other job, Christians like me make decisions every day that determine what we stand for.

Of course, there are Focus on the Family, *The Passion of the Christ* that Mel Gibson did, and *Veggie Tales*. But God isn't in just the Christian

entertainment market. Here in Los Angeles, the home of show biz, God is present in the work of those who create in His name. You see, Art honors God's very act of creation. And storytelling, at the heart of Hollywood, was even used in the Bible to teach and inspire. Jesus, for example, told parables to teach. The book of Esther never even mentions the name of God, but its stories speak God's word.

Some of you might think, How can a movie with filthy language and half-naked girls speak the word of God? True. But not all movies are like this. God uses artists to create messages that might be difficult to hear otherwise, or to inform us of new things.

God can use you too as an artist in the industry. If you choose to pursue entertainment as I did, or any Art, I would suggest four things:

1. Strengthen your walk with Christ. Though you should do this in general, you *must* do it in Hollywood. This business is tough and challenges your convictions.

2. Study. Art is a profession, like medicine or law. Treat it honorably and work hard at it.

3. Build a community with other Christian artists. Collaborate. Create. Anything: love songs, romantic comedy Web series. Even

Christians use laughter to heal.

4. Pray. Not everyone's called to be an artist. But if God has given you the talent, it should be noticed. Ask God for guidance and strength if this is where He leads you.

Strength is what God blessed me with through the support of my family and through the relationships I built through CoG7. They helped me stay strong. But mostly, the credit goes to God who makes His light shine in the darkest of places — even in sunny Hollywood.

Christian Connections in Hollywood

Act One, Inc
(323) 464-0815
www.actoneprogram.com
info@actoneprogram.com

Arts and Entertainment Ministries
(310) 474-7671
www.A-E-M.org
joel@A-E-M.org

The Beacon
(818) 788-4200 x131
www.belairpres.org

Hollywood Prayer Network
(323) 462-8486 x106
www.hollywoodprayernetwork.org
info@hpnemail.org

WHAT WAS I SUPPOSED TO BE?

by Lanita Bradley Boyd

I squinted against the glare of oncoming headlights. *Why was I so foolish as to keep a seven-year-old out late on a school night?* I thought. *Was the Christian concert we had driven 45 miles to hear worth it?*

I was tired and sleepy and questioning my parental judgment.

I glanced at Kelsey to see if she was asleep yet. Eyes bright, she was obviously not as drowsy as I was.

"Mom, what was that song about with all the pictures of the doctor's stuff and teacher's stuff and children and old people and with the baby's hand at the end?"

I had to think. Several of the concert's songs had used accompanying slides for effect. Then I remembered.

"Do you mean, 'What Was I Supposed to Be?'" I asked.

"Yes, that's it. What did that mean?"

I took a deep breath. I was wide awake now, praying quickly my explanation would be complete and yet not too frightening for her.

Hesitantly, I began. "Honey, sometimes girls get pregnant when they aren't married." I could tell by her look I was already in trouble.

"But how can they do that? I thought getting married was how you had babies."

"Well," I groped, "sometimes teenagers do things before they are married — well, they act like — well, they do with each other's bodies what married people do. Then the girl gets pregnant. When she does, she has various choices."

I took a breath. "The girl and boy can get married if they love each other. A lot of people do that. Sometimes it works out to be a good marriage, and sometimes it doesn't.

"The girl and her parents can keep the baby and take care of it. Or the girl can give it up for adoption." I paused, considering my next words. "The way your birth mother did you."

Kelsey brought me back to the point. "I still don't understand the song."

"The other choice is called abortion. That's when a doctor uses instruments inside the girl — a type of surgery — to get rid of the baby when it is still very tiny."

The voice beside me was also tiny. "Then what happens to the baby?"

"It's gone. The hospital gets rid of it, and the girl goes home. She isn't pregnant anymore." I hoped I was telling Kelsey what she could hear and comprehend.

"The song was written from the baby's viewpoint," I continued. "The baby was asking Jesus what it would have been had it lived to be born: 'What was I supposed to be? What were my eyes supposed to see? Why did I taste of death before I even drew a breath, hid my head at my mother's breast to sleep? O Jesus, what was I supposed to be?'"*

I had no idea whether any of this was making sense to my little traveling companion until I heard her shuddering breath. I glanced over to see tears streaming from her eyes. She caught her breath in short puffs.

Finally, she whispered, "Then that's what my birth mother could have done to me, if she hadn't loved me so much?"

I eased the car to the side of the highway and stopped. I took Kelsey in my arms, and we both sobbed and stroked each other — and loved each other even more than before.

This gift of love from an unknown birth mother had changed my life forever. Tonight this song had made my little daughter aware for the first time of one of the greatest love gifts: the gift of life.

Lanita Bradley Boyd writes from Fort Thomas, KY.

*Lyrics from "What Was I Supposed to Be?" Used by permission of Shepherd Boy Music.

God's Triumph



Two rousing chapters wrap up the destiny of Daniel's little horn and John's two-horned beast. **by Robert Coulter**

Illustrations: Janice Orr. Copyright © 2010 General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day)

In Revelation 17 and 18, John was shown the church's foes and God's victory over the apostate religious system that had persecuted His people for more than a millennium. The arch foe of the church was first seen as a "little horn" in Daniel 7:8, 24-27, where it exalted itself, warred against the saints, and spoke boastfully against God, thinking to change His times and laws.

This little horn was reintroduced in Revelation 13:11 as a lamb-like beast with two horns. We associate it with the persecuting Holy Roman Empire that united the apostate Church of Rome with the political states of Western Europe. This union yielded a church so powerful that she killed dissenters and enslaved her subjects, forcing them to accept her idolatrous ideologies and religious practices (vv. 15-17).

Now in chapters 17 and 18, the fallen church is personified as a prostitute sitting on many waters (17:1, 2). Her prostitution is synonymous with her paganism, idolatries, and vices. She embraced the godlessness of the pagan kingdoms, from Babylon to Rome, that preceded her and after which she modeled herself (v. 3).

The prostitute's depravity is symbolized by her luxurious at-

tire and precious stones. This display of excessive wealth and extravagance characterized her greed, self-serving, and self-exalting pride (v. 4). The harlot's golden cup was full of abominations and filth, analogous to unclean spirits, idolatry, and creature-worship. The inscription "Mystery Babylon the Great" on her forehead identified her as the mother of immoral vices and cruelties demonstrated by her drunkenness with the blood of the saints (vv. 5, 6).

The prostitute sat on a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns (v. 3), also described as "many waters" (v. 1), "seven hills" (v. 9), and "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues" (v. 15, KJV). She, the rider, personified all ancient idolatrous religious systems. More than just Rome, the beast she rode represented all the pagan governments from Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon and his successors through the kingdoms of Western Europe that followed Rome's fall.

The number of heads on the four beasts of Daniel 7 total seven, demonstrating that the seven-headed beasts of Revelation 13 and 17 are a composite of those in Daniel. The ten horns were kingdoms that succeeded Rome (Daniel 7:24). They gave their authority to the Roman church (Revelation 17:13), enabling her to oppress the saints for the 1,260 years allotted to her by Divine decree (Daniel 7:25).

The beast John saw who "once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction" (Revelation 17:8-11) appears to be identical to the beast of 13:3, with seven heads and ten horns, whose

head received a fatal wound and was healed (vv. 3, 13b). The ungodly reacted with astonishment and yielded themselves to the scarlet-colored beast that ascended from the Abyss (17:8) in the same manner as they responded to the beast whose fatal wound was healed (13:3b).

The ten horns were ten kings who had not received their kingdoms at the time the angel spoke to John (17:12). John received this prophecy toward the end of the first century, while living under the authority of Imperial Rome. The little horn kingdoms did not exist until after Rome fell in 476, facilitating the development of the Holy Roman Empire over which the prostitute church reigned.

The judgment

The eighteenth chapter of Revelation describes the judgment of the beast-riding prostitute first introduced as a little horn (Daniel 7) and later described as a two-horned beast (Revelation

13:11-17). God purposed that the kingdoms she reigned over would ultimately rise up against her, hate and destroy her.

An angel of great authority appeared, illuminated the whole earth, and shouted, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird" (18:1, 2). This cry of judgment was upon the harlot church that God had permitted to make war against the saints and exalt herself against Him for an extended time (Daniel 7:25; Revelation 12:6, 14; 13:5). That time had ended; now God held her accountable for her wickedness.

The 1,260 years reign and judgment of the prostitute did not occur in John's day. He was privileged to anticipate it, while we are blessed to look back on it in history. Praise God! We are heirs of the religious freedom that grew from God's judgment of the prostitute.

The Inquisition

Concerning the Inquisition that resulted in forced suffering or death for untold numbers of earnest Christ-followers in medieval Europe, it is written in *Fox's Book of Martyrs* (p. 87):

In the thirteenth century, the popedom was at the summit of mortal dominion; it was independent of all kingdoms; it ruled with a rank of influence never before or since possessed by a human scepter; it was the acknowledged sovereign of body and soul; to all earthly intents its power was immeasurable for good or evil. It might have spread literature, peace, freedom, and Christianity to the ends of Europe, or the world. But its nature was hostile; its fuller triumph only disclosed its fuller evil; and, to the shame of human reason, and the terror and suffering of human virtue, Rome, in the hour of its consummate grandeur, teemed with the monstrous and horrid birth of the INQUISITION! (Zondervan, 1926)

The Roman church became firmly established in the sixth century. Its punishment, not its annihilation, came over a millennium later through events in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By then, the Protestant Reformation had gained sufficient strength to offer viable challenges and religious alternatives to Roman Catholicism.

From a political standpoint, Berthier, one of Napoleon's generals, struck a blow to the supremacy of the papacy by occupying Rome, deposing the pope, and establishing the Roman Republic in 1798. Shortly after this, the Holy Roman Empire's union of church and state, portrayed in Revelation 13:11 and 17:3, ceased to exist. Napoleon dismantled it and organized its political constituencies into the Confederation of the Rhine on August 6, 1806. This prompted Francis II of Austria, the reigning Holy Roman Emperor, to resign his title, thus ending the empire.

Laments over Babylon's fall

John reported the lament of those whose existence was shaken by the prostitute's judgment. The first "woe" was that of the kings who had enabled her to carry out her diabolical

schemes. This was followed by the "woes" of the merchants and sea captains whom she had made wealthy by her extravagances (18:9-19).

The final wail is that of a mighty angel (vv. 21-23). The importance of this lament is its identification of Babylon's sin: "In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth" (v. 24). God charged the Roman church, personified as Babylon, with the bloodguilt of all martyrs from the beginning of history. This is reminiscent of Jesus' pronouncement of bloodguilt for martyrs, from Abel to Zechariah, upon the Jews of His day (Matthew 23:35, 36).

The lamentations over the fall of Babylon were interrupted by a brief jubilant scene in heaven: "Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged [the prostitute] for the way she treated you" (Revelation 18:20). God had vindicated His saints!

The invitation


John heard a voice pleading, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues" (v. 4). This

is a call for seekers of God to embrace the freedom now afforded them, to abandon the religious heresies and lawlessness so prevalent in the world today. It serves as a warning that anyone who does not forsake the false doctrines and ideologies that characterized the harlot church will suffer the same judgment as she.

Thank God! His judgment on the prostitute has occurred in history. It is not the judgment that will occur when the Lord Jesus returns to claim His kingdom, but it prevents the Roman church from enforcing her will upon God's universal church in our time. The dregs of her ungodly idolatries still exist in the world, creating an atmosphere of religious confusion. The invitation is for sincere seekers to come out of her godless ways and serve the living God in Spirit and the truth that is revealed in His Word. **BA**

Elder Robert Coulter and his wife, Ida, reside and attend church in the Denver, CO, area. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, except where noted.



The first three articles of this series offered basic understandings of three major Bible prophecies: the metallic man of Daniel 2 (July-August '09), the four beasts and little horn of Daniel 7 (September '09), and the two beasts of Revelation 13 (December '09). You can download these past issues at www.cog7.org/BA. 

Thank God! His judgment on the prostitute has occurred in history.

When Few Become Many

by Sarah Leteta

My mother-in-law grows a fabulous garden, full of the best veggies and most delicious strawberries and raspberries. One year she cut her gorgeous raspberry bushes back to almost nothing — just a few pathetic-looking sticks left. I had heard of pruning, but this was extreme. I couldn't figure out why she would cut them so drastically. I assumed that next year's berries would be pretty dismal.

I assumed wrong. The following summer those sticks had grown and spread and blossomed and, yes, were loaded with deep, red, juicy raspberries. *Wow!* I thought. *This is amazing!* I picked buckets of berries and thanked God for knowing His business when He created these things. I never should have doubted my mother-in-law.

I've been thinking more about those bushes, how they were cut back to nearly nothing and still thrived, and about our church. It has grown recently — not just a few new people, but lots of them. This is both exciting and shocking. We were so small for so long: tiny, itsy-bitsy, miniscule. You get the picture.

More shocking is that we didn't do much to get these new

people. No new programs, no new facilities, no new committees (not enough of us to have more than one committee anyway), no outreach, no nothing. I wished we *had* done something to spawn this growth, something bold and spectacular, so we could congratulate ourselves — a nice pat on each other's backs. Instead we just scratch our heads. *How did this happen?*

This question had been asked before, back when our church was experiencing the pain of people walking out the door rather than in. Why did people leave? Why does anyone leave any church, short of moving? Because they just don't like it. And by "it," I mean the building, the people, the politics, the doctrines, the food, the bathrooms, the carpet, and so on. It's an old story that most church people know all too well. Those who are left spend a lot of time wondering what happened and why, and whether the Holy Spirit might have walked right out the door with everyone else. Discouragement settles in, and it's hard to shake.

Can Christ take a few fish and a few loaves of bread and feed a multitude? Can He renew a fragile, tiny church? Can He help members of a congregation who could barely help themselves, a

church that had no plan at all? He can, He did, He does.

Here's my theory: Just like those pruned raspberry bushes, we too were pruned, painfully cut back to meager. What was left still held something good, it seems. We were small but spirited, disappointed but not bitter, sad but hopeful. And we continued to pray.

In the last two years, a fresh spirit of communion has visited us. We've all realized that we love each other — even when we drive each other nuts. We eat and talk and laugh and share together. Sabbath fellowship has begun to stretch; we're no longer in a hurry to leave. We are becoming authentically "church." When new people walk in, they are greeted by people genuinely happy to see them.

Much can be said about church growth: its excitement, its adjustments, its pains. Suffice it for now to say that we are happy and amazed, and that the end of it lies in God's gracious hands. May He bless all our churches, large or small.

Sarah Leteta attends the Parkland CoG7 near Edmonton, Alberta.





In 1955 a skinny 21-year-old Mexican heard God's call to missions. Fifty-five years later, many thousands of believers in ten nations have been blessed by his ministry. We recently asked him a few questions about the journey.

Tell us about your conversion to Christ and how you became a minister.

I was born to an unchurched family in Mexico. We lived beside a bar; there were always drunkards, prostitutes, and loud music. Only music had much effect on me; I memorized more than fifty songs.

I inherited my father's violent, rebellious ways. I used to arm my peers for our fights. I am convinced that God's Spirit places in lost hearts a desire not to sink in wretchedness. Just in time, at age 17, I was invited to a Bible study led by a Church of God (Seventh Day) minister. From that moment on, the Word of God captivated me. Today that passion has not diminished. Next December will be my sixtieth anniversary of having been reached by my Lord, without regressing.

Where I was, we did not have consistent ministerial assistance. God raised me up to substitute for those preachers who wouldn't show up. Without aspiring to it, I would get up and

BA Interview with

revisit a study I had previously heard. When I was 22, God drove me to Guatemala as a volunteer worker. After a year, I became a helper, the first level of ministry, and was then elevated to deacon. In 1959, at age 26, I was ordained as a minister.

How did you become a missionary to Guatemala and Colombia? What is your advice to young Christians who feel called to the mission field?

In our small church in Churubusco, Mexico, I heard the Larios family's plea for someone to come over to Guatemala and help. God touched my heart to say, "Here I am." So I went, with no official appointment or support — just a single young man willing to heed the call. God blessed His work, with 25 baptismal candidates the first year. Having no authority to baptize, I asked the leadership in Mexico to come and baptize the people. That's how the work started in Guatemala.

The same year Brother Larios and I went to El Salvador and started the work there. The next year, a young man named Otto Mois and I went to Honduras and started the work in the capital city, Tegucigalpa. Gradually the work spread to other nearby countries.

A Sister Duncan from England (via Jamaica) dreamed about doing God's work in Colombia

and went there as a missionary around 1970. Elder Andres Leiva, serving Missions Abroad in nearby Ecuador, visited the work in Bogotá and reported a small congregation of elderly women being served by Sister Duncan — in her broken Spanish.

In the early 1970s Guillermo Perilla, a Colombian living in the U.S. and seeking a missionary for his homeland, offered his house in Bogotá for the missionary to live and hold services in. From Guatemala I wrote to churches in Mexico and Central America, letting them know that Colombia needed a missionary. No response.

Since Brother Perilla insisted and nobody answered, I felt a desire and willingness to heed God's call again. At age 41 with a wife and five children, I was no longer young and single.

After 20 years in Central America, I resigned there to go to a new country without sponsorship — just believing that Brother Perilla's house would be available. Elder Robert Coulter, visiting in Guatemala, heard of my plans and said he would speak to the American church to see what could be done. That's how Missions Abroad provided financial support while I served for ten years in Colombia.

My advice to young Christians called to the mission field is to respond, "Here I am" without hesitation. You may rest assured that

Antonio Vega

God will lead and sustain you in His ministry, and keep you from all temptation. He who trusts in God will never be put to shame.

Some people say you had a theological mid-life crisis: From a teacher of law and doctrine you became a preacher of the gospel of grace and truth in Jesus Christ — something like the Apostle Paul's change in Philipians 3:4-11. Is this overstated?

I think that's a colossal exaggeration.

Coming to the church from the world, you are only interested in being set free from the power of the Evil One and your own wickedness. You don't need theological depth. Faith brings about the marvelous change in our lives.

Then comes discipleship, where you learn what the church believes. Since you are new at this, you take what you are taught as truth. As time goes by and your knowledge increases, you realize that there are things that need to be approached in a better light and that other things need to be corrected.

It happened to me in 1962 when a ministerial council in Mexico studied whether or not it was appropriate, in this time of grace, to celebrate the three annual feasts: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. We came to understand that the services we celebrated on those dates were

labeled "feasts" by us, but we were not performing the actual ceremonies of Levitical feasts. All the rituals were but a shadow pointing to the reality in Jesus Christ. I took this very seriously, and it made me examine other subjects regarding our doctrines. It was then I was able to see the greatness of Christ and the need to proclaim Him above all else.

God used the Church of God to rescue me from the world. That's why I love my church; I will finish my days on Earth serving within it. Our church has a set of approved doctrines; I profess and preach them. I also understand that our church is open to examine its beliefs.

For 20 years, you've led a multiplying body of believers in the Washington DC area. What basic principles of ministry do you recommend for younger pastors and workers?

- True conversion of the spiritual and administrative leaders.
- Constant growth in knowledge of God's Word.
- Creation of by-laws and written guidelines the local church will use to organize and work. These

can be amended any time.

- Constant communication. When there are major projects, members must be presented with written reports.
- Good organization. Allow each ministry to work freely with its own goals and objectives, yet in agreement with the church's overall purpose. The pastor simply coordinates.
- Pastors and leaders, delegate!
- The pastoral staff (spiritual leadership) must govern together with the board (administrative leadership) of the church.
- Never hurt feelings, either in personal conversation or public criticism.
- Pray for people and allow God's Word to do what it does best. **BA**



Jose Antonio Vega, his wife Alba, and their five children. Jose's main assignment these days is the vibrant Lanham, Maryland, church.



Gigantic Godsend!

All CoG7 should know how the Lord blessed the '09 mission at Spring Vale Academy in an awesome way [back cover, December '09]. The project of installing four inches of foam on the gym and school building makes me think Elder Rose should borrow Air Force One and fly over for a photo op. Talked about for 8-10 years, this insulation project looks good — come and see! — and will help pay our heat bills. The volunteers, men and women who spent up to eight weeks on this job, were the greatest. Their superior work is appreciated far beyond words. I'm overwhelmed. . . .

*E. F.
Perry, MI*

Beware deception

Christ's return is closer than ever [prophecy theme, December '09]. Matthew 24:23 warns us not to be deceived by false Christs, false prophets, great signs and miracles, etc. Good and evil have always existed side by side, but evil thinking now seems to dominate, with great deception (Matt. 24:37; Gen. 6:5). Technology exists that could make the appearance of Christ seem real, as in holograms. Change in TV programming, so-called acceptable lifestyles, and increase in abortion indicate we're moving into the "days

of Noah." My prayer is that we will eagerly watch for our Lord's return, not becoming passive, not setting dates, and not allowing deception to taint our minds.

*M. L.
Loveland, CO*

Misstatement?

A statement on p. 17 ["Inside Prison Walls"] seems to be wrong. It says that Jesus' heart was so overwhelmed in the garden that He was "sweating blood." Luke 22:44 says that "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (KJV) or "like drops of blood" (NIV). This doesn't say He sweat blood. The BA should be edited more closely. Thanks for your tremendous work.

*E. and K. M.
Shawnee, OK*

Great 2009

My warmest regards to the editor, staff, and writers of the BA; you did great things for the whole year. Thank you very much for the best magazine I've ever read. Please continue sending it to me because my son found interest in reading it.

*D. C.
The Philippines*

Beautiful or Sexy?

I am very happy to receive the *Bible Advocate* through snail mail. I have limited access to Internet. I like to have hard copy so that after reading [I can] hand it to my mom and sister when I visit them. In this latest issue [January-February '10] the difference between beautiful and sexy [p. 17] is awesome and is a must for any age and for both sexes. Thanks much for making us understand better nature and its laws.

*A. P.
India*

Grace

continued from page 13

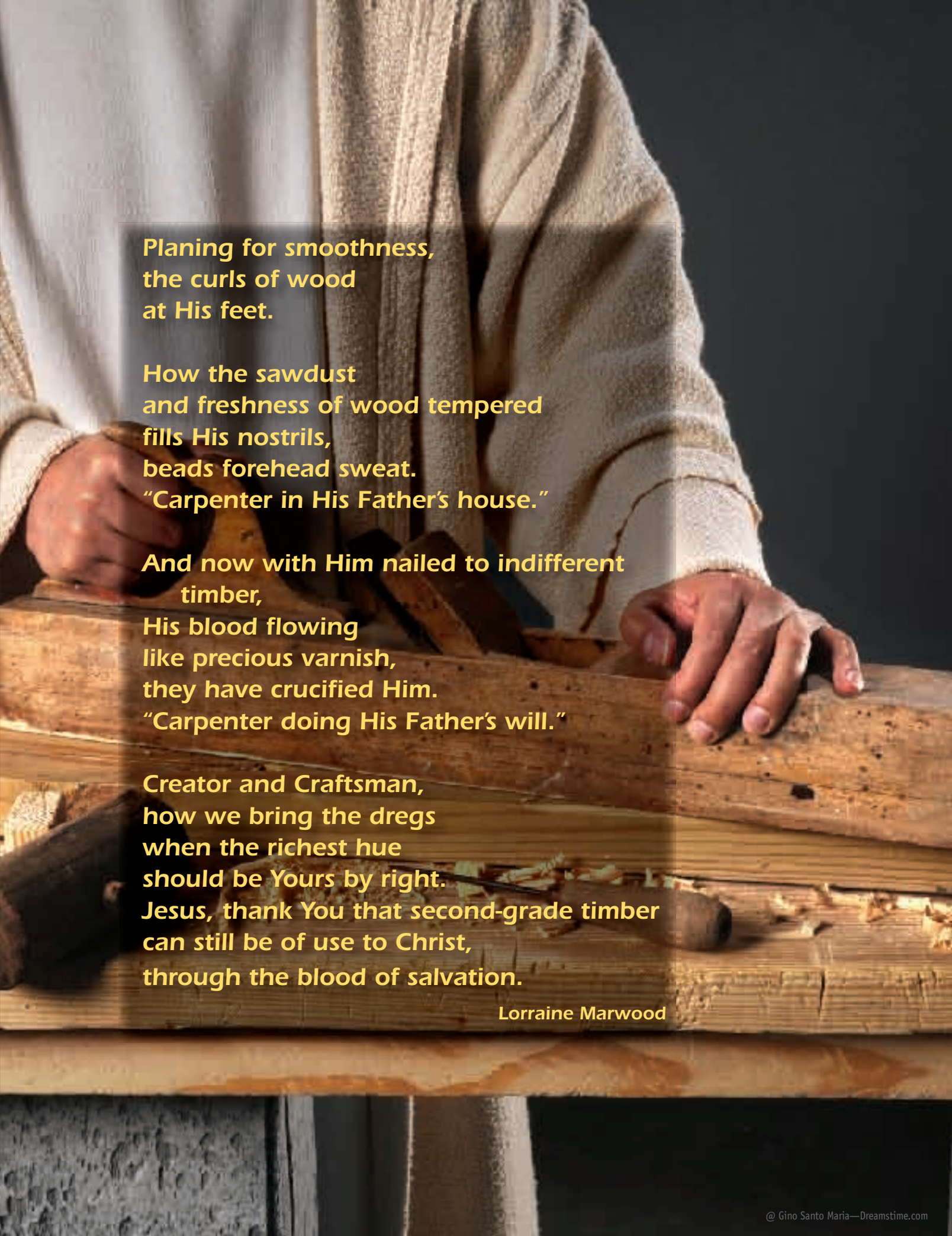
and we will be delivered from the presence of sin for eternity — not by works of righteousness we have done but by God's grace in sending Jesus to live and to love, to die and to rise again, that the world through Him might be saved.

This grace, this gospel truth, is all wrapped up in God's gift of Jesus, His only Son. The verses listed in the sidebar (p. 13) are samples of how, in Scripture, the Holy Spirit affirms the centrality of God's grace to who Jesus was and what He has done on our behalf.

God's grace — His favorable disposition toward sinners — is expressed through the person and work of Christ in the New Testament Gospels. As explained in the epistles that follow, this grace is better than good news; it is marvelous news almost beyond our ability to describe. But we must try.

Those who confess their sinful state and trust in Christ alone for its remedy enter an ongoing faith relationship with Him in which their everlasting welfare is assured. Life in God's heavenly kingdom no longer depends upon their ability to walk, serve, or obey at a certain standard. Rather, they depend fully upon God's grace to save and keep them, as they yield in faith, obedience, and willingness to be saved and kept by Him. Amazing!

Note: The next installment of this series will address the abuses and misuses of grace. BA

A close-up photograph of a person wearing a white, textured robe, likely representing Jesus, working on a wooden structure. The person's hands are visible, one holding a piece of wood and the other resting on a larger wooden beam. The background is dark, and the lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the robe and the grain of the wood.

**Planing for smoothness,
the curls of wood
at His feet.**

**How the sawdust
and freshness of wood tempered
fills His nostrils,
beads forehead sweat.
"Carpenter in His Father's house."**

**And now with Him nailed to indifferent
timber,
His blood flowing
like precious varnish,
they have crucified Him.
"Carpenter doing His Father's will."**

**Creator and Craftsman,
how we bring the dregs
when the richest hue
should be Yours by right.
Jesus, thank You that second-grade timber
can still be of use to Christ,
through the blood of salvation.**

Lorraine Marwood

Did you know . . .

- the Bible Advocate Press has a special need?

In 1973, we purchased pre-press equipment that provided cost-effective production of printed literature — then. Now, in 2010, companies making our camera's film have either stopped film production or will soon stop, due to newer digital techniques.

Our solution to this problem is to update our pre-press equipment with a system that sends printable files directly from computer to plate. This will save labor costs and spare the environment by eliminating heavy metals that wash off the film during developing.

The \$14,000 computer-to-plate system we're considering would pay for itself in about three years. If you can help with this project, call 303-452-7973 or e-mail bap.equipment@cog7.org.

— Keith Michalak



Former BAP pressman Gilbert Tuller operates the Linotype machine (mid-1970s).

Publications

Keith Michalak, Director

Sitting at my computer, I think of how things have changed over the thirty-five years I've worked with the Publications arm of the Church. Thirty years ago, we switched from lead type to computers. Now digital text and images can be sent at incredible speed to nations around the globe, via the Internet.

The next thirty-five years won't be much like the last ones, either. In 2009 the print industry suffered losses, with several Christian and secular magazines either going online only or dropping completely off the map. Publications also faced financial challenges, with declines in donations and increases in printing and postage costs. These were major factors in our decision to publish two fewer BA issues in 2010.

In addition to saving money, Publications wants to better serve a vast online market. To do this, we plan to make *BA Online* interactive, with content and communication that keep users coming back.

We also want to tap into Facebook as other Christian ministries have done. Users can become "fans" of Publications, find the latest BA content, and connect with the editorial staff in real time. The print version of BA will remain, of course, for those who prefer their magazines hi-touch over hi-tech, for church display copies, and for outreach.

Your loving support of Publications will help us weather this economic storm and continue spreading the good news. Please give generously this month.

Have You Responded?

In January 2010 a survey letter was mailed to a portion of our BA reader list to determine interest in the magazine. If you received this letter and wish to keep your subscription coming uninterrupted, you must respond to it by **April 1, 2010**.



Sister Publication

Our sister conference in Portugal (www.iujc.pt) publishes a glossy, full-color periodical titled *Comprender*, Portuguese for "Understand." The magazine's purpose is evangelistic: to open people's hearts to the excellence of God's promises.

LifeSpring

We are excited to introduce students nearing completion of requirements to apply for minister's license this year. Their full testimonies may be read at www.LifeSpringSchool.org.

Daniel Flores, Jr. (37) - Mission, Texas

Married to Kerenha 11 years; children: Salma Denisse (9), Isaac (8), Josue (7), Daniel (5)

Occupation: civil engineer; lay pastor, McAllen, Texas, CoG7

Daniel grew up in Mexico. After a CoG7 seminary session in Cuernavaca with his father, he felt God calling him. Most of his credits have come through MTS regional classrooms and Summer Sessions.

Daniel's favorite training memory is of travel with Allo Sanchez and Antonio Gomez for an '05 Summer Session in Dallas. They began the trip as brothers in Christ; they returned also as friends.



Tim Steinhauer (24) - Stanberry, Missouri

Married to Debbie one year

Occupation: construction/home maintenance; lay pastor, Stanberry, Missouri, CoG7

As a newlywed with new pastoral responsibilities,

Tim has had a busy year! He seeks the counsel of others to help balance his limited years and experience. One such moment came through an '07 MTS intensive session in Pennsylvania. Conversations with Calvin Burrell and Jeff Endecott there continue to influence his ministry.



Stephen Salazar (46) - San Antonio, Texas

Married to Lydia 25 years; children: two grown sons, one daughter, and two grandchildren

Occupation: senior technician; lay pastor, The Living Rock CoG7, San Antonio, Texas. Stephen's first credits came at Summit

School's '88 Summer Session. He attended again in '98, and God's calling became clearer. Beyond several Summer Sessions, Stephen has also attended MTS regional classrooms.

His wife and family greatly support him, as well as his church — in finances and in preaching during his absences.

Ora Miller (34) - St. Joseph, Missouri

Married to Helen 15 years; children: Amanda (14), Matthew (12), Jacob (10)

Occupation: mechanic/equipment operator

Sensing a call to ministry at age ten, Ora told God, "No." Eighteen years later, he heeded God's call while being treated for sleep apnea. His breathing became normal.

Ora began training with MTS in 2007, earning most credits via online courses while working 50 hours a week and serving his church. "It is only with the help of God that this happens," he says.



Death Notice

Elder Wesley Coulson, long-time CoG7 minister, passed away January 1 at 74 years of age. Born to a large family near Grand Rapids, Michigan, he graduated from Spring Vale Academy (Owosso, Michigan), attended Midwest Bible College (Stanberry, Missouri), and served as pastor in Saskatchewan and Minnesota. He returned home as Spring Vale's director of maintenance for eighteen years until his retirement in 2002. We extend condolences to family and friends of Elder Coulson.



CoG7 Events

Alumni Weekend at Spring Vale Academy, Owosso, MI - March 19-21; contact Christie Camero (989-725-2391 or ccamero@springvale.us)

Annual Lord's Supper service in every church - Sunday evening, March 28

SHINE Medical-Dental Missions trip to Jamaica - March 30 - April 7

National Women's Retreat; Albuquerque, NM - April 16-18; contact Grace Sanchez (651-646-1178) or Sylvia Corral (209-869-0777)

Bloomsday Youth Weekend at Zephyr Lodge near Spokane, WA - April 30 - May 2; contact Brian Larson (509-220-2276 or BrianCG7@msn.com)

Men's Ministry weekend; Camp Cimarron, Dover, OK - April 23-25; contact aburlison@cox.net
Graduation Weekend at Spring Vale Academy, Owosso, MI - May 29-30

LifeSpring School of Ministry Summer Session; Spring Vale Academy, Owosso, MI - June 6-17 (www.LifeSpringSchool.org)

Annual Family Camp; Camp Cimarron, Dover, OK - June 13-19; 918-864-5589 or jerad.ulrich@pelcostructural.com

West Coast Family Conference in Salem, OR - July 6-10; contact zman52@msn.com

North American Ministerial Council at Glen Eyrie, Colorado Springs - October 18-23 (NAMC@cog7.org or 303-452-7973)

Your Will or the State's?

Have you prepared a Last Will and Testament? This document will be your final opportunity to express personal wishes.

Even when possessions are few, a will is the legal avenue through which you may name an executor and a guardian for minors, make gifts or transfers, reduce tax liability, and avoid bond expense.

A charitable bequest to support the gospel can take many forms, including a specific dollar amount, a percentage of your estate's residual value, or a specific asset.

The Church's Office of Planned Giving stands by to assist you. P. O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233; plannedgiving@cog7.org.



'09-'10 LITES Team (L to R): Leah Wallace of Eugene, OR (third year); Opal Kelly of Stanberry, MO (first year); Bryan Cleeton of Sacramento, CA (third year). Not shown are staff of the Stanberry, MO, ministry: Marybell Sweet, Don and Janis Steinhauser, and Andrew Fernandez. For more information, visit <http://lites.cog7.org> or call 660-783-9544.

Funds Needed

Haiti. Assistance to Haiti's earthquake survivors is being funneled through our Disaster Relief Fund. Mail your donation to CoG7 Disaster Relief - Haiti, P. O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233.


Jamaica. The CoG7 Medical-Dental team, SHINE, needs funds for its March 30-April 7 mission. To assist this good cause in Jamaica, mail your gift to P. O. Box 387, Wilton, CA 95693, or to P. O. Box 33677, Denver, CO, 80233.

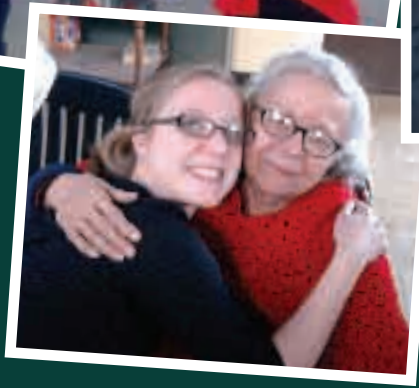
To learn more about Haiti or Jamaica, visit www.cog7missions.org, call 423-546-0374, or e-mail office@cog7missions.org.

Pioneer Missionary Training

The '09 Pioneer Missionary Training team spent a busy and productive week (December 21-31, 2009) in the Mexican city of Guadalajara, under the leadership of Pastor Monico Muffley of Nampa, Idaho. They were taught and mentored in several aspects of public gospel ministry by Ministers Isaac Santiago, Erick de la Garza, and Isaías Vázquez of the CoG7 in Mexico.

Nineteen people from age 13 to 70 made up the team. Oregon led the charge with seven (Mary Wallace, Toni Kayner, Carol Severson, Brianne Feigum, Tracey Chalus, Patrick Chalus, Danielle Selleck) and Washington had three (Velia McDonald, Johnny Hicks, Tatiana Sandford). John and Tabitha Slaughter came from Muskogee, Oklahoma; Erin Stacy and Ana Aranda from Lodi and San Jose, California; Monico Muffley and his daughter Melissa from Idaho. Rounding out the group were Arlene Owens of Mebane, North Carolina; Armando Gonzalez Lopez of Las Vegas, Nevada; and Chris Idemmili of Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Mission memoirs written by six team members are available at www.cog7.org/BA. 



International Tour



@ Kalina Vova—Dreamstime.com

Mexico, Central America, Cuba

I am very pleased to greet you as the Zone 2 representative of the International Ministerial Congress of the Church of God (Seventh Day).

Zone 2 encompasses the countries of Mexico; Central America (Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama); and the Spanish-speaking part of the Caribbean (Cuba). These nine nations represent the existence of more than 1,300 local churches belonging to the Church of God (Seventh Day). Mexico has the largest number of congregations and missions — more than 850. Guatemala is next with approximately 250 congregations, then El Salvador with about 200, Honduras with 95, Nicaragua with 26, and Costa Rica with seven. There are a few congregations in Belize and Panama. In Cuba, a second church was recently consecrated in Cojimar.

(English-speaking nations of the Caribbean, previously in Zone 2, will now work within in Zone 1.)

Late in 2008 El Salvador held the first Zone 2 leadership meet-



ing of the IMC. About 30 ministers and pastors attended as delegates of the national churches, except for Belize and Cuba. Topics like the Church's integral mission, structure and work of the IMC, and basic CoG7 theology were analyzed, and a presentation of Cristo Viene ministry was made. Also, strategies were introduced for developing the work in this zone, with the support and cooperation of each national church.

The Church in El Salvador uses two radio stations to proclaim the gospel; these messages reach Guatemala and Honduras as well. They are also building a 5,000-seat auditorium. Zone 2 delegates had the chance to visit several congregations in the country and preach the Word. This first meeting of leaders was a great blessing. God permit-

ting, we will explore the possibility of a second zone leadership meeting before the International Ministerial Congress in England in 2012.

The needs of the Church in this zone are many. In spite of limitations and obstacles, the gospel of Jesus Christ is being preached through different means, bringing growth and development to these churches. Also, construction projects of new offices, auditoriums, and Bible institutes exist in several places, as well as improvements in the Church structure to further the integral mission and extend the kingdom of God.

Please pray for the Church in Zone 2. From this region of the world, receive fraternal greetings of peace.

— Pastor Carlos Cerón
Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico



A Frowning Providence

He was afflicted with bouts of depression and despair most of his life. By age six, his mother and four of his siblings had died. He walked away from law school, abandoning his father's dream for him. A proposed marriage was aborted just days before the wedding. After several suicide attempts, he ended up in an insane asylum.

This seems an unlikely profile for a man who gave the Christian church some of its most beloved hymns: William Cowper, the English poet and hymn writer (1731-1800). How could such a troubled life bear so much fruit for the gospel?

While in the asylum, reading Romans, Cowper experienced God's grace. He saw the sufficiency of Christ's atonement, was given strength to believe, and immediately received the gospel. His bouts with depression continued but were interspersed with periods of peace and joy in the Lord's presence. During these times, his towering intellect, love for the Lord, grasp of Scripture, and gift of writing combined to produce many inspiring poems and hymns. Living between hope and despair, between delight and dark nights of the soul, he discovered the "unfathomable mines" of God. Cowper's life illustrates that we are never closer to God than in the crucible of suffering and that He works in mysterious ways to accomplish His purposes, the theme of his most popular hymn, and my favorite:

God moves in a mysterious way/His wonders to perform;/He plants His footsteps in the sea/And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines/Of never failing skill/He treasures up His bright designs/And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;/The clouds ye so much dread/Are big with mercy and shall break/In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,/But trust

Him for His grace;/Behind a frowning providence/
He hides a smiling face. . . *

A classic Christian doctrine is underscored in the fourth stanza: Providence. This word doesn't appear in Scripture, but its theme runs throughout: *God is divinely superintending all the affairs of this world and every soul He has created, to fulfill His purposes.* This is affirmed in both Testaments: "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good . . ." (Genesis 50:20); "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28, KJV). We read it also in Psalm 119:89-91; 135:5-7; Matthew 6:25-34; and Ephesians 1:11, among numerous other references that highlight various elements of this doctrine: foreknowledge, design, preservation, governance, and benevolent care.

This is the only way to make sense of life's trials, the only real source of comfort and confidence when our world crumbles. But for some, believers included, this can be a disturbing reality. When we bury our loved ones despite earnest prayers; when earthquakes hit the poorest of countries, compounding poverty and human suffering; and when believers struggle while the ungodly prosper, the reality that God is the ultimate cause of everything makes divine providence seem unkind.

Cowper calls this "a frowning providence" and reminds us that behind it hides God's smiling face. When God doesn't seem to make sense, remember that He is wise and good. He is orchestrating the events of our world and our lives to perfect His grand design. Someday with clearer vision, we will praise Him for the pattern He has planned. This thought inspired a hymn writer in an asylum; may it inspire Christians in a broken world.

— Whaid Guscott Rose
General Conference President

*Taken from www.cyberhymnal.org.

CoG7 suffers from too-few trained and inspired leaders in its pastoral ranks; the crisis deepens daily.

Will you stand in the gap?

LifeSpring Summer Session
June 6-17, 2010
Spring Vale Academy, Owosso,
Michigan

- A track for all ministry levels
- Build new and strengthen existing peer and cross-generational relationships
- Enjoy more time to relax and fellowship

Seeking 120 students.
Registration closes April 8.

For more information
and to register, visit www.LifeSpringSchool.org today.

