

City of Peace?

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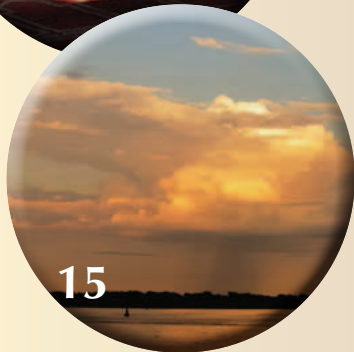
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Faith Amid Fear

More than ever, our world seems full of storms — trials, troubles, and tribulations, as they were known to an earlier generation. The struggles of life don't always make us happy, but they do contribute to making us holy, more like our Lord, if we respond to them as we ought.

They also tend to disrupt our sense of peace, to which many Americans feel entitled. For example, the migration of many Muslims into the Western world has raised the fear factor of some Christians to a new high. This, while waves of secularism and skepticism erode the vitality of the European and North American churches. Worry-prone people may view these as a dire triple threat, a sort of “perfect storm” against much that we hold dear.

In this prophetic issue, the first two articles address our fears about Islam with biblical faith and historical fact. This is an emotionally charged matter, especially to Christian readers in places like Pakistan. We aim, if God pleases, to generate more light than heat in what we publish here. You might help by writing your own perspective, supported by Scripture or experience, and we'll follow up on this topic next year.

Also in 2011, the Bible's Authorized King James Version will mark its 400th anniversary. You can expect something in every issue to celebrate the fruitful longevity of God's Word in English and other languages. We'll also tackle subjects like the search for unity amid diversity in life and in Scripture, especially the diversity of its two testaments.

Troublesome times are here, for sure, and men's hearts are failing them for fear, as Jesus foretold (Luke 21:25, 26). Christ's response to the disciples in Galilee's threatening storm still confronts us today: “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” (Mark 4:40; 6:50). When He says, “Let's cross over to the other side,” there's not much chance this boat's going down.

Mail regarding the issue of Sabbath work to meet basic needs (September-October, p. 7) is running about six-to-one against the answer proposed. For those who took it as an attack on Sabbath sanctity (I did not), your reproofs have been read with humility; several are published (pp. 22-24). I regret that the first line of the question and the first words of my note sent mixed signals about the Church's position, which remains unchanged.

— Calvin Burrell



Naming the Wild Man

The origin and destiny of Ishmael and his Islamic heirs.
by Jason Overman

@ James Steidi—Dreamstime.com

The words in Genesis 16:10 sound familiar: “I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude.” This promise is *not* spoken to Abraham or Isaac or Jacob, but to Hagar, who has learned that she is to have a son called . . . Ishmael.

This Ishmael is also the son of Abraham. We find the patriarch begging God, “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!” (17:18). It is not to be. Sarah’s only child, that miracle of covenant promise, is to be Isaac. But God has a destiny for Ishmael also: “As for Ish-

mael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly” (v. 20).

The destiny of Ishmael, however, is more complicated than this. There is also a disposition that will come to define this child born of Abraham and Sarah’s doubt: He would be a wild man, in conflict with every man (16:12).

Four thousand years later, we stand in awe at this passage. God has indeed kept His promise. The blessed-but-wild Ishmael seems as real now as ever. This promise to Hagar turns out to

be a prophetic word of cosmic proportions.

In post-9/11 America, Christians are worried about Islam. Now the news of a mosque in the shadow of the former World Trade Center only makes matters worse. The question for the church is, how do we respond as *Christians*?

Ishmael and Islam

A Christian response begins with God’s Word, which brings us back to our story of Hagar and a blessed, wild Ishmael. What is Ishmael’s relationship to Islam?

Muhammad writes: "Abraham and Ishmael built the House and dedicated it, saying: 'Accept this from us, Lord'" (Qur'an 2:127).

This line offers a critical insight about Islam: It reaches back to Abraham through Ishmael. Muhammad latched on to Ishmael's story from the start. Local tradition had it that Ishmael had settled in Mecca, so here Muhammad found a direct link not only to the sacred past of Jews and Christians but also to a destiny for the Arabs.

The text also reaches back to the "Lord." *Islam* means "surrender," and it is noteworthy that Muhammad did not think he had found something new when he preached submission to *al-Lah*, "the God." Rather, he thought he had rediscovered something his fellow Arabs had lost: the one God of Abraham.

Ishmael the blessed

In some mysterious way the story of Islam, like that of Judaism, is bound up in our own as children of Abraham. The evidence is throughout the Qur'an:

Who but a foolish man would renounce the faith of Abraham? (2:130).

After them [the prophets] We sent forth Jesus son of Mary, confirming the Torah already revealed, and gave him the Gospel, in which there is guidance and light . . . (5:46).

The Qur'an can be hostile toward Jews and Christians, but it presupposes a kinship: "Be courteous when you argue with the People of the Book. . . . Say: 'We believe in that which has been revealed to us and which was revealed to you. Our God and your God is one'" (29:46).

These affirmations of God and

Scripture echo the blessing of Ishmael and give pause to our anxious thoughts, for it asks us to admit, hard as it may be, that Islam is blessed for Abraham's sake. The father of Isaac, we recall, is also the father of Ishmael.

Ishmael the wild

There is more to this story, of course. Ishmael is not just blessed; he is also wild. It is interesting that the strictest branch of Islamic law today hails from Saudi Arabia, the very place where Muhammad wrote and warred, the same Arabia in which Ishmael first wandered.

That Ishmael's hand is "against every man" is read in the pages of the Qur'an. The sheer volume of references to "the fight" illustrates that it is a central motif. Devoid as the Qur'an is of narrative context, a plain reading of it strikes many within Islam and without as counsel to perpetual conflict. Here is but one example:

Fight for the sake of God those that fight against you, but do not attack them first. God does not love the aggressors. Slay them wherever you find them. Drive them out of the places from which they drove you. . . . Fight against

them until idolatry is no more and God's religion reigns supreme (2:191-193).

In teaching and example, Muhammad called his followers to *fight*, and fight they did. Within a hundred years of his initial revelations in AD 610, the Muslim empire stretched from Spain to the gates of India. The hand of the wild man was raised indeed.

Discerning Ishmael

Discernment is required at this point. Islam is a diverse faith; simplistic generalizations are not helpful. Two considerations, one historical and one modern, can safeguard us against caricature.

Muhammad was both prophet and politician; to distinguish religious from political goals was unimaginable. Thus the Qur'an reads a lot like Joshua in the Old Testament, where religious, political, and legal concerns are all rolled in together. As with many great leaders of history, Muhammad found war and God side by side.

To argue that "the fight" is central to the Qur'an is not to imply that all Muslims today are violent. Most have done with their "texts of terror" as we Jews and Christians have done with ours: placed them in a histori-



cal context and spiritualized the language of warfare. Religious tolerance and the practice of most modern Muslims are not in conflict.

With these cautions noted, we must still admit that *jihad* (“struggle”) is a word we are all too familiar with. It seems an appropriate term in light of God’s prophecy to Hagar. The Islamic empire of the Middle Ages has faded into history, but the idea of *jihad* has found new life as Islamic fundamentalism regards the idea as *the* central motif of the Qur’an.

Ishmael’s hand is raised still.

Jesus and Ishmael

To a remarkable degree, the founders of our two faiths embody the character of their progenitors. Christ, like sacrificed Isaac, gives Himself away on the cross, while Muhammad, like wild Ishmael, sets out on the fight of his life.

Samuele Bacchiocchi examines this contrast and what it means for disciples of each faith:

Muslims who use violence, warfare, and terrorism to advance the cause of Allah, can legitimately claim to be following the example and teachings of their prophet, Muhammad. He was both a

religious and political leader who fought until he subdued the people of Mecca and the Christian and Jewish communities living in Saudi Arabia. He taught: “Know that Paradise is under the shades of swords” (4:73).

But Christians who have resorted to violence to advance God’s Kingdom, cannot appeal to the teachings or example of Christ. They have betrayed His teachings. Christ chose to be crucified rather than to slay His enemies with the sheer power [of] His spoken word. He taught His followers to establish the Kingdom of God, not through *physical confrontation*, but through the *peaceful proclamation* of the saving grace of God.*

These insights do more than draw attention to a radical difference between faiths. They confront us with the reality that though our faith is defined by our Lord’s sacrificial act of love for enemies, we ourselves have not always faithfully modeled this story, though we are called to. *We have been wild men, too!*

Paul and Ishmael

Blessed-but-wild Ishmael is not just a person or people but a basic spiritual condition to which we are all inclined. This is seen at both ends of the Bible.

Take the story of Joseph. At the “hands” of Ishmaelite traders, Joseph is brought to Egypt and sold to Potiphar (Genesis 39:1). But we immediately recall that it was the “hands” of his own brothers that sold him (37:18-36). So who is the wild man now? All of Abraham’s children are implicated.

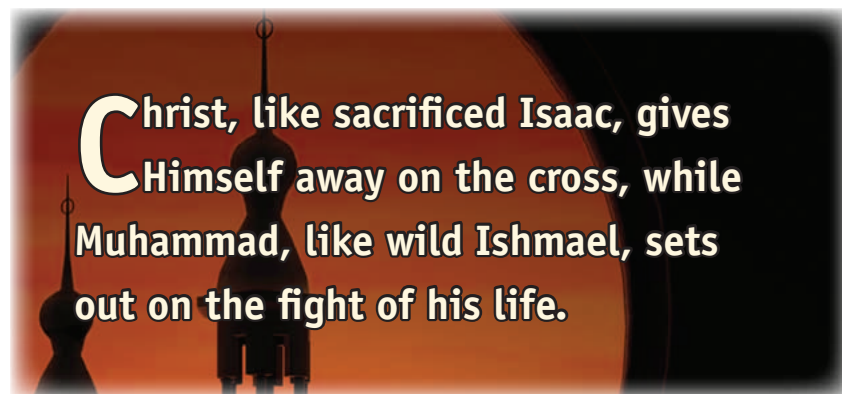
The last biblical reference to Ishmael is in Galatians. Here Apostle Paul surprises us by identifying those who trust in circumcision and the old covenant as Ishmael, while those who trust in Christ and the new covenant are Isaac.

“He who was of the bond-woman was born according to the flesh” (4:23), and so corresponds to bondage. But Paul continues, “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise” (v. 28, emphasis added), which corresponds to freedom. And just as Ishmael persecuted Isaac, so it is still that “he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit” (v. 29).

In this allegory, those identified with Ishmael are not his physical descendants but Christians who trust in the “flesh.” Likewise, those identified with Isaac are not his physical seed but those Christians who look not to themselves but to the Spirit’s miraculous work.

Taking righteousness into his own hands, Ishmael persecutes;

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* *Violence in The Koran and The Bible* — *Endtime Issues No. 85* (www.biblicalperspectives.com/endtimeissues/eti_85.html)

Q Will salvation be offered during the one thousand-year reign of Christ on Earth? If not, over whom will Jesus and the saints reign during the millennium? Won't people accept Him as Savior during this period?

A In John 5:28, 29 Jesus taught a future resurrection, both of the just and the unjust. In Revelation He reinforced His teaching of resurrections to life and to condemnation, saying that those who remained faithful in the end times would be raised at His return to rule with Him for one thousand years (20:4b-6). Later in Revelation 20, the great white throne judgment is described after the millennial reign. For this, the rest of the dead are raised and judged, then destroyed or granted eternal life if they accepted Christ during His reign. I see no text indicating other resurrections than these two.

I believe salvation will be offered to some unsaved persons during the one thousand years. A percentage of those alive at Christ's return will survive end-time events (plagues, battle of Armageddon, etc.) and continue normal life and death. They and their offspring will be taught the law and gospel from Jesus' throne in Jerusalem. If the survivors' offspring do not go up to worship Him (none of these are the resurrected faithful), they will get no rain. Not going up to worship King Jesus seems to be all-out rebellion. Refusal will bring the final resurrection and destruction — the second death. Acceptance, and they will be judged worthy to join the family of God in eternity. I see no second chance for those who reject Christ in this day of salvation.

— Elder Kenneth Lawson

With no direct answer in the Bible, supportive texts are enough to conclude that people will be saved during the millennial age when Christ reigns as King of kings.

Romans 11 speaks of Israel's present blindness,

of their being broken off by not believing in Christ (vv. 7, 8, 17, 24). Now is the time for Gentiles to hear and believe the gospel (v. 17; 2 Cor. 6:2). This chapter also foretells Israel's being grafted back in and Gentile time coming to an end (vv. 23, 25). Verse 26 says that "all Israel will be saved" — not some Jews, but all.

Zechariah 12 explains what happens when Israel sees Jesus coming the second time. It tells how He fights against those who come against Jerusalem, then how He pours upon Israel "the spirit of grace and supplications" (vv. 10, 11, KJV). A great conversion will take place, for Zechariah 13:1, 2 confirms that a fountain for sin will be open to Israel and Christ will cleanse the land (see also Jer. 23:5, 6).

God will change His faithful ones to immortality and make them to be "kings and priests" — rulers and teachers — when Christ comes to reign (Rev. 5:10). Jesus' reply to the disciples, who wanted to know what reward they'd have, supports this: "in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). Evidently Israel will be among the natural peoples of the millennium, for you do not judge immortals.

That there will be natural mortals during the millennium is seen in Isaiah 2. Here it says the Lord's government (mountain) shall be over all (v. 2), that "Many people shall come" and be taught His ways, that "law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (v. 3, NIV), and that Jesus will "judge . . . and rebuke many people" (v. 4).

Isaiah 65:17 speaks of "new heavens and a new earth." That there will be "no infant of days" (no pre-mature deaths, v. 20, KJV) in that day indicates that natural babies will be born, and only mortals give birth. Not all will accept the Lord then, for "the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed" (KJV).

continued on page 24



Learning About Islam

A Christian beginner's guide to the Muslim faith.
by Calvin Burrell

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Editor's note: In this attempt to present a balanced view, I am indebted to Muslims, Christians, and Jesus, a book by Carl Medearis (Bethany House). Nothing herein is intended to convey approval for the historic evils or modern errors of Islam, Christianity, or any other faith.

On September 11, 2001, nineteen terrorists hijacked American jetliners departing Boston's Logan Airport. They crashed two of them into the World Trade Center's twin towers in lower Manhattan, New York; one into the Pentagon building near Washington D.C.; and a fourth into the ground near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Those responsible for this reprehensible death and devastation were all fanatical devotees of a radicalized form of the religion of Islam.

Now in the tenth year since the late, great attack on America, what should we learn by the time that tragedy's tenth anniversary comes around next September?

We should learn the basics about Islam.

Before the 9/11 date that lives

in infamy, most Americans and Christians had little knowledge of or concern about the faith of Muslims. Since Islam was a mostly false faith practiced in mostly faraway lands, what had we to do with that?

Less than ten years later, our apathy has changed drastically. This "elephant in the room" is on all our minds and most of our lips. Thinking and talking about Islam, we have a responsibility to accurately reflect our subject. This is not a simple matter, because the subject is large and multi-layered. We may know the difference between a mosque (Muslim "church") and an *imam* (its leader-preacher), but what about Sufi (one version of Islam) and Shiite (another version, mainly in Iran, that opposes the Sufi version), Hamas (Google it),

and Hezbollah (ditto)? Brief summaries of Islamic history and of belief and practice are provided in the accompanying sidebars.

We should learn that Islam is related to, and differs greatly from, Christianity.

Both Islam and Christianity teach the existence of one true and living God — the almighty creator, provider, and judge of all. Allah is the Arabic word for God. Both faiths accept the truth of creation; man's fall into sin; the flood; and the revelation of God through Abraham, Moses, and the prophets — including Jesus, who is honored by Muslims as virgin-born, prophet-teacher, and miracle worker.

Islam departs from Christianity in teaching that God's primary blessing was transmitted through Abraham's firstborn, Ishmael (ancestor of Arabic peoples), not through Isaac (ancestor of Israelites). While revering Jesus to a degree, Islam denies that He is God's Son or the world's Savior via death and resurrection. Muhammad, not Jesus, is the last, greatest prophet. Though he tried to point people back to the God of Abraham, his methodology and elements of his message led Jews and Christians to regard Muhammad as a false prophet.

We should learn that not all reports about Muslims are fairly presented.

In modern media, especially e-mail and Internet, the growing threat of Islam is often stressed. We hear Christians advance the notion that Europe is now largely Muslim and that America is next in line to be overrun. Disinformation travels faster than truth and is often believed first. The result?

Failing to distinguish factual truth from emotional rhetoric, Christians are rightly corrected and critiqued by those who know their facts better than we.

Do we too often believe the worst about Muslims based on the attitudes and conduct of their lunatic fringe, rather than on the broad contours of faith as practiced in Islam's mainstream? By a fair estimate, the radical militants consist of less than one percent of all Muslims worldwide.

Do our unspoken prayers regarding Islam more nearly resemble the curses of some imprecatory psalms than they do the intercessory prayers of Jesus and Paul, who pleaded God's mercy over their enemies? Rather than accepting the realities of our globalizing culture with its greater opportunities for witness, we often resent Muslims who have migrated to Christian nations, and magnify the fear of

living alongside them.

Do we too easily observe Muslims with mistrust and avoid them as enemies, rather than loving and accepting them with the blessing that Christ taught? When we judge the faith of Islam according to its worst representatives (like the Taliban) and impute to all Muslims the bad behavior of a few (like Al-Qaeda), we practice a form of prejudice that we would rightly reject if it were applied to Christians or to our own church.

Let us seek to know all the world's peoples through the lenses of grace and truth, not the lenses of ignorance or suspicion.

We should learn what works and what doesn't, sharing with Muslims.

Generally, direct attacks on Muhammad or the Qur'an gain little with devotees of Islam.

While the Bible is far superior

Seventh Century Start

Islam began in Saudi Arabia with the teachings and conquests of the prophet Muhammad and his followers about 600 years after Christ. A leading citizen of Mecca, Muhammad traveled widely as manager of a trade caravan. Exchanging God-stories with many Jews and Christians, he became convinced that people were losing the true faith of Abraham. Islamic tradition says he was given a series of messages from God via the angel Gabriel — messages later compiled into the Qur'an.

The Muslim calendar dates from AD 622, when Muhammad and his closest followers fled the persecutions of Mecca to Medina, where his teachings were better received. From then until his death just ten years later, he unified the Arab people, gave them new religious doctrine, and won many military victories over his enemies. Without this prophet intending to start a religion, his faith spread eastward through Iran, north through Syria, and westward across northern Africa as far as Spain and southern France — all within 100 years of his death.

— Calvin Burrell

Teaching and Practice

Islam can be summarized by six articles of faith:

- Indivisible oneness of God.
- Angels as the servants of God.
- Holy books, including the Taureh (Pentateuch); the Zabur (Psalms); the Injil (Gospels); the Hadith (traditions of Muhammad); and, holiest of all, the Qur'an.
- Major prophets: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad — the last and greatest.
- Day of final judgment: Good Muslims will be automatically saved; those who don't believe in God (not meaning Jews and Christians, according to the Qur'an) will descend to hell forever.
- Predestination: Allah's absolute sovereignty brings a sense of fatalism to Muslim faith; everything happens because "God wills it."

Islam can also be summarized by five pillars of practice:

- Confession: "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His prophet."
- Fast: Devout Muslims abstain from food, drink, and tobacco from sunrise until sunset during the month of Ramadan.
- Giving: Motivated by compassion, Muslims are required to give 2.5 percent or more of their assets to the poor, the sick, travelers, or new converts.
- Prayer: Ritualized prayers are performed five times daily by devout Muslims, especially on Islam's holy day — Friday.
- Pilgrimage: Most Muslims make one lifetime journey to Mecca, home of the Kaaba shrine, and to other sites in Saudi Arabia.

— Calvin Burrell

Size and Location

The two largest religions in today's world are Christianity, with more than 2 billion adherents, and Islam, with about 1.5 billion. Large numbers of Muslims reside in Middle Eastern Arab countries (280 million), northern and sub-Saharan Africa (270 million), Pakistan and Bangladesh (230 million), Indonesia (195 million), and India (130 million). Russia, Iran, Afghanistan, and other central and southeastern Asia nations have many millions of Muslims, while the United States and the European Union have less than 10 million each. Latin America fewer than 2 million.

— Calvin Burrell

to any other so-called sacred writing, striking similarities have been observed about how it and the Qur'an are often used:

- The Bible is employed by Christians of all kinds to support and defend their version of the faith, including more and less militant responses to Islam.
- The Qur'an is employed by Muslims of all kinds to support and defend their version of the faith, including more and less militant relations with Jews and Christians.
- As the Qur'an can be "used" to show that Muslims follow a violent faith, so the Bible has been "used" to show the same about Jews and Christians.

Trumpeting the failures of Muhammad and the Qur'an, we will likely reach dead ends with our Muslim friends. A more promising approach is to engage them in matters where we find some common ground — like Jesus. Many Muslims have a deep respect for Abraham and Jesus and a desire to live together in peace.

Although denying that Jesus can be God's divine Son or the world's crucified-and-risen Savior, Islam does commend our Christ as a true and sinless prophet of God who did mighty works among the people. It is possible to build bridges of friendship with many Muslims who regard Jesus with high devotion and respect, based on the Qur'an's treatment of Him. Wise Christians can use that respect to build a relationship that God can use to grow the kingdom of Christ.

Readers who wish to pursue this thought or obtain Carl Medearis' book may visit www.carlmedearis.com. **BA**



Responding to Islam

CoG7 ministers and others offer their perspectives on a controversial religion.

@ Tandimich—Dreamstime.com

BA: How can the Christian church best glorify God in our attitudes toward Islam generally and toward Muslims individually?

No explicit reference to this religion is found in the Bible. An honest study of Islam and Christianity will reveal that Allah is not to be confused with the God of the Bible. The primary difference is in regard to the identity of Jesus Christ, whom the Bible declares to be God incarnate (John 1:1-14; Philipians 2:5-11). Islam teaches that Jesus was a prophet of God, but like other prophets and messengers, He was a created human being “who had none of the divine qualities of God” (*A Brief*

Guide to Understanding Islam, www.islam-guide.com). Scripture tells us that those who deny that Jesus is the Christ are antichrists. Those who deny the Son do not have the Father either (1 John 2:18-23). Thus, the spirit of antichrist is at work in Muslims.

Our struggle is not against people but against spiritual forces of evil (2 Corinthians 10:4-6; Ephesians 6:10-20). While we are called to do battle with the spirit of antichrist, we are also called to be ambassadors for Christ to those who are perishing under its sway (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). We do this by being vessels of the great love of God in Christ (John 3:16) and by bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23) in our interaction with Muslims, thus winning them to the gospel

— not through human warfare or condemnation but through the mercy and grace that won us to Christ (Titus 3:3-8).

— Israel Steinmetz

The defenders of Islam try to gain authority by claiming that their founder, Muhammad, was “a prophet sent by God.” The true faith does not need another head or another final prophet; Christ is sufficient. Islam is only a cult without any real foundation.

— Francisco J. Ramirez

It seems a bit sad that this question is even relevant and needed. Yet every week I open my e-mail account to find all sorts of rubbish and hateful propaganda about Islam and

Muslims, mostly coming from Christians. Any five-year-old in Sabbath school knows we should love everybody. To shellac this with Scripture, I choose 1 Corinthians 4:12: "Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure." This is one of the hallmarks of the Christian faith and our noble duty in honor of Christ's supreme example. If we are persecuted by Muslims (few readers of this probably are), then we should "count it all joy" and respond with love as Jesus taught.

An amicable attitude toward Islam should not be difficult. As an Abrahamic religion, Islam embraces monotheism and a God of revelation, as do Jews and Christians. Muslims are our brothers via God's creation and our cousins in this adventure of faith. Muslim scholars of the Middle Ages revived and translated the works of Aristotle, assisting Christianity out of the Dark Ages into Scholasticism. From this era arose the influential work of Christian thinkers such as Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham.

Let us not forget the gift of Arabic numerals. And what shall we say of the beautiful poetry of Rumi or the delightful parables of Nasrudin? God has given the world many gifts from Islamic sources. Do we now despise

the whole tradition simply because much of the Islamic world lives in poverty and so is prone to radicalism? As Christians we should employ the most clear, wide, and deep sightedness, rather than being swallowed up by fear and prejudice.

— Alex Ciurana

Although both Christians and Muslims have a deep sense of religiosity and share some Old Testament, the main point of divergence goes back to their founders. Jesus, the founder of Christianity, taught love (John 13:34, 35). The primary emphasis of the Christian faith, the force on which our faith should move, is love. We must love Muslims and neighbors alike, even when we don't feel an immediate recompense or reciprocity.

— Raul Gonzalez

We can glorify God in our attitudes toward Islam by following the Sermon on the Mount. In humility, we can honor and respect Muslims as humans and as partakers of the Abrahamic covenant. When dealing with the radical elements of militant Islam, we can love them as enemies.

We can gain factual knowledge and understanding of Islam and of the Christian and Greek

philosophical influence on it. We should remember that there are many different expressions of both Christianity and Islam, with pagan and false ideas and radical elements in both.

We can repent of our sins of prejudice and distributing false information. We can deal with our anger against Muslims and put aside our exclusive pride by gaining understanding of other religions in general. We can see insight from God as we pray about this important subject.

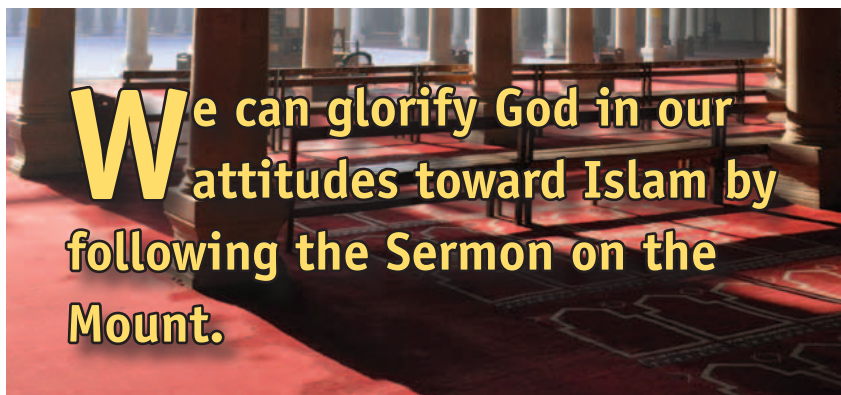
— Jim De Francisco

As with all world religions, many sects have formed within Islam. Some are responsible, and others are very violent. Christians sometimes judge Islam as a religion of the sword. It has indeed been involved in wars in the past. But so has Christianity, so we should be careful in our judgment (John 8:7).

Muslims obey nearly the same Decalogue as do Christians; they also obey the Old Testament dietary laws. *Islam* means "submission to God." It is often misunderstood. The basic article of faith in Islam is belief in one single, unique God — Allah — who has neither parents nor offspring in the human sense. Since Jesus affirms that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, one cannot be both Muslim and Christian at the same time.

There is certainly a radical, violent side to Islam but a rational, peaceful side as well. Christians responding to Islam need to follow the teachings of Jesus (Matthew 5:39-42). By living the Word of Christ, Christians stand a much better chance of converting Muslims, rather than by force.

— Glen Case **BA**



Revelation's Seven Church Letters, by Calvin Burrell

Ephesus (2:1-7)

Driving force: good works and gospel truth
Fatal flaw: lost their first love
Advice: Remember, repent, re-do what you once did, or you'll lose your place

Smyrna (2:8-11)

Driving force: suffering for the gospel's sake
Fatal flaw: none given
Advice: Fear not, be faithful; you'll receive a crown

Pergamos (2:12-17)

Driving force: steadfastness in trouble
Fatal flaw: false doctrines
Advice: Repent, or I'll resist you quickly

Thyatira (2:18-29)

Driving force: faith, love, patience, service
Fatal flaw: false doctrines
Advice: Hold fast what you have; I'll empower you to rule and shine

Sardis (3:1-6)

Driving force: a name and a few pure souls
Fatal flaw: either dead or dying
Advice: Repent, watch, strengthen what's left; I'll confess you in heaven

Philadelphia (3:7-13)

Driving force: keep My Word; confess My name
Fatal flaw: none given
Advice: Hold fast what you have; overcome; I'll write wonderful names on you

Laodicea (3:14-22)

Driving force: none given
Fatal flaw: apathy with conditions; lukewarmness
Advice: Repent fervently, trust Christ fully; you'll win, sit on My throne

Q: Do these churches of Asia Minor represent seven church ages since Christ's time?

A: Promoters of this theory have not agreed on how each church is "fulfilled" over 2,000 years. Rather, traits of each may be found in every age of church history and in most churches today.

Q: How do these church letters relate to the prophecies that fill the rest of Revelation?

A: The entire book was read by all seven churches, providing support and hope in their struggles against first century forces that were even then opposing their faith.

Q: What is meant by the "angel" of the church to which all seven letters are addressed?

A: It is not certain whether "to the angel" refers to the church's human leader — a head elder or pastor (*angel* means "messenger") — or to the essential "spirit" that typifies each. It is less likely that the term refers to a "guardian angel" in heaven, since it would be unusual and unnecessary for Christ to address His letters to perfect, celestial beings.

Q: What false doctrines were the churches in Pergamos and Thyatira guilty of?

A: The accusations against Pergamos and Thyatira (2:14, 20) use the same wording: "to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality." Such licentious conduct is called a doctrine of Balaam (the prophet) in the former case and the teaching of Jezebel (a self-styled prophetess) in the latter. These two sins were common temptations of early Christians (1 Cor. 6 and 8), and they are related to the undefined doctrine and deeds of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6, 15). We still face the issues of how much modern custom may be practiced without denying the faith once delivered. These two churches had evidently settled for too much.

Question for readers: How can we benefit from reading these letters?

ISRAEL AND BIBLE PROPHECY

by **Monico Muffley**

Earthquakes in various places, oil spills, solar flares, doomsday movies, changes in the Middle East, the growth of Islam, and acts of jihad: All these and more have piqued the interest of many to ponder the biblical signs of Earth's final days and the ushering in of God's kingdom.

Reviewing and disputing each of these alone may not prove much, but one topic brings the study of prophecy back to the table with authority: Israel.

Reading the Bible, it is difficult to miss the place Israel had, and still has, in God's eyes. A small nation among giants, there was no apparent reason that it should have been chosen over more populous and powerful nations.

Only the sovereign choice of God can explain the promise to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their seed (Deuteronomy 7:7, 8). Hear the apostle's assurance of God's lasting regard for His word to the patriarchs of Israel:

As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable (Romans 11:28, 29).

A divine providence and protection appear over this people, though often punished for their sins. One need look no further back than the 1967 Six-Day War, for example, to see it: "For thus said the Lord of hosts . . . regarding the nations that plundered you: Truly, one who touches you touches the apple of my eye" (Zechariah 2:8, NRSV).

How this small nation could play such a large part in world history is amazing. It was often caught in the crossfire of the more dominant Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and more recently, the Ottoman and British empires. By comparison, could The Philippines play a major role among Russia, China, the U.S., and the European Union? Again now, Israel is caught in the middle of world powers (Ezekiel 5:5).

For nearly 1,900 years, these people had been scattered in the world, with little hope of return. And yet, as many others have noted, they survived when other peoples vanished and kept their identity centuries after being gone from their homeland — just as prophesied.

There should be little wonder at this, unless one ignores the texts that speak of Israel's regathering from the nations:

Psalms 102:16; Isaiah 11:11, 12; Jeremiah 31:7-12; 32:37-44; Ezekiel 37:21-28; 38:8-16; Amos 9:11-15; and Luke 21:20-24, 31.

One cannot help but observe current events and compare them to the Scriptures concerning the conflict that will ensue between Israel and other nations.

I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves (Zechariah 12:2, 3).

Is it just coincidence that the same nations prophesied thousands of years ago to fight against Israel at Armageddon are today constructing their doomsday war machines?

Considering these things are happening while Israel is reconstituted among the nations and that only one city, Jerusalem, is the fuse that can ignite the whole world, we are powerfully urged to turn our eyes back to the Bible and to watch current events.

Let's bring the topic of Israel in prophecy back to the table. **BA**

With his wife and daughters, **Pastor Monico Muffley** serves the Valley CoG7, the union of the Nampa and Meridian, ID, congregations.

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



Before I knew Jesus personally, Christian relatives had exposed me to church and to the constant theme of His second coming. They seemed obsessed with it.

After conversion, this theme continued to come through loudly, and I continued to be puzzled by the popularity of a subject I saw as far, far away. Despite living through difficult personal circumstances, my nature remained innately optimistic. Looking forward to the end of this life didn't appeal to me, even as a believer.

The desire for Christ's return often seemed like an escape route from the consequences of bad decisions, rather than genuine longing to see the Lord. Didn't it also imply disregard for the unsaved?

It also troubled me that so many had been wrong in predicting the time of His coming. The apostles expected it in their lifetime. Indeed, story after story confirmed that every generation thought theirs was "the one."

So I determined to live in Christ without worrying about "when." I didn't even like to discuss it with other believers. Jesus said He didn't know when, so why should it concern me?

Yet as we get to know Scripture, it's impossible to miss the importance of Jesus' return. God's will is for us to anticipate this event with joy.

For a time, I felt guilty not looking forward to Christ's return. Truthfully, I wasn't ready. There were unsaved loved ones, grandchildren to anticipate, and much life yet to come. Jesus also promised abundant life now, and mine was.

In His infinite wisdom, God knew how to get my attention. A

Longing for Home

by Dolly Murphy

seemingly irreconcilable rift with my daughter shattered my world, and I buried myself in Christian fiction as a distraction.

I'd never read *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Reading the entire series in two weeks did what no other study had done: showed me the hope of eternity.

We were both believers, and I felt that if our relationship were never restored on Earth, we would still spend eternity together in perfect restoration. This enabled me to rest and follow the Lord's direction during interactions I'd begun having with my daughter. While God worked on my heart, I was able to step back, allowing Him to work on hers.

Mercifully, God did restore our relationship. As we each grew closer to Him, our relationship deepened in strength and love.

Still, God holds my attention, fine-tuning my perspective, turning it more heavenward. His touch is sometimes so real, it's as if He's gently grasping my chin, tilting it up to look into His face,

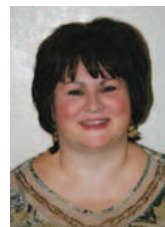
away from every earthly concern (Hebrews 12:2).

This wrestling, wanting to be in both places at once, is new to me but not unique to me. Paul wrote of it in Philippians 1. Our longing shouldn't be an excuse for not doing the work here or an escape from bad decisions.

His love has kindled the desire to know as I am fully known. My heart leaps as I anticipate the presence of my Redeemer King. Thoughts of an encounter sweeter than I can imagine have extinguished all my fears of missing out.

As we wait for that great Day of the Lord, He tells us to seek Him with all our hearts. He promises to be found (Jeremiah 29:13), a foretaste of our home sweet home. **BA**

Dolly Murphy
writes from Rio
Rancho, NM.



Don't Hurt Me Again

Hope is here for squabbling siblings and troubled teens. by Denise Holworth as told to Penny Smith

The tempo of the car's windshield wipers matched the swishing of the tires on the drenched roadway, repeating the dumb chant going around in my head: *Can't be hap-pening. Can't be hap-pening.*

But it was. I crouched lower into the seat and watched the robot-like forms of my mother and stepfather in the front. Clutching a hair pick in my hand, I tried to imagine what would happen if I'd jump out of the car. But I was in the back seat of a two-door Malibu, on my way to live with a couple I'd never met.

A crack of thunder made me jump. This is the kind of thing you watch on TV. It can't be happening to me.

As the car rounded a curve, the headlights flooded a large yellow building. We pulled into the driveway, and a stocky man came out with a small white dog. Mom, looking drawn, got out and straightened her skirt while my stepfather, Ed, pulled the seat forward for me to crawl out. I wouldn't budge.

"Hi, I'm Bud Snyder," said the man, poking his head in the car. "C'mon, honey. Everything will be all right. You'll see. Let's get out of

the rain. Mom Snyder is anxious to meet you."

Bud Snyder tugged my sleeve until I moved. He steered me toward the house. I glanced back. Mom was crying again. We didn't even say goodbye.

Numbed, I forced a sandwich down while the dog coaxed at my chair. Finally, Mom Snyder showed me to my room, and I was alone. For a long time, I listened to the frightening, foreign sounds of tadpoles and crickets.

Middler misfit

I was the "middler" in a family of three girls. Mom had been divorced, but shortly after she and my stepfather married, they started attending church, reading the Bible, and making all those dumb rules. Their rule about dating was the worst. A guy would have to be a saint to meet their criteria.

Steve was part of an amateur rock group at school and seemed older than the other guys. When he drove up in his red Corvette, heads turned. Even Ginger, my eighteen-year-old sister, was impressed. That's why I liked him.

HEARTSPEAK

[FOR YOUTH]

My younger sister, Sherry, discouraged dating Steve so I wouldn't get in trouble with Mom. Sherry was a good kid, but she didn't know what it was like to be pushed aside. For the past year, I had sneaked out with Steve, skipping school and smoking pot. Tonight Mom had caught me on the telephone, but I yelled at her that he was just a friend.

"Denise, what's gotten into you? Why are you yelling?"

"Can't I even talk on the phone without going through the third degree?" I cried.

"Wait till your father gets home. You won't yell at him!"

"Oh, no?" I shrieked. "Well, he's not my father anyhow." I pitched my sweatshirt on the sofa as I stomped to my room.

Ed wasn't so bad; I didn't know why I said that. When Ed got home, he didn't hassle me. Instead I heard hushed voices on the telephone. Then Mom told me about this couple, the Snyders, who were counselors to "troubled teens." Their last roomer left yesterday, so I was packed and in the car within an hour.

Sibling battles

For months now, Mom had claimed that I was getting "rebellious, just like Ginger." My sister left home after she graduated from high school, and good riddance. When Ginger lived at home, we shared a bedroom, but we fought constantly. It was weird. I copied almost everything she did, but my mousy brown, punk-styled hair couldn't compare with Ginger's auburn coiffure, nor my figure with her petite size 8.

Though only three years older than I, Ginger acted as though she owned me. Our frequent word battles soon got out of hand. One time

Ginger walked in on my girlfriend Lisa and I, glossing our fingernails with Ginger's polish. She accused me of being a thief.

That did it. With a lunge, I grabbed a handful of Ginger's hair and pulled. Ginger screamed and whacked me on the side of my head with her clutch bag. I pushed her across the room; she raked her long fingernails across my cheek and shoved me against the wall. When we grabbed each other's throats, Lisa panicked and split.

Afterward, I crawled into the bathroom and vomited, then sobbed out my hate. All night I stared into the darkness. Deep down, I desperately craved Ginger's approval.

After she left home, Ginger occasionally drove me to school. Once she threatened to tell Mom that I was still dating Steve, so I threatened to kill myself.

Ginger nearly ran into the curb. "Don't you ever say that again. You know it would kill Mom."

Ginger's reaction both surprised and pleased me. When I learned that suicide threats upset Ginger, I used them often. Although I wasn't serious at first, before long taking my life began to appeal to me.

Finding Jesus

After the first week with the Snyders, I couldn't help but like them. They seemed happy even when something went wrong. This aroused my curiosity.

Eventually I told them about my parents' attitude toward Steve and how Ginger and I couldn't hit it off. One evening, Mom and Pop Snyder shared how they had turned their lives over to Jesus Christ. Then it hit me — why they were different and why my parents had suddenly changed their lifestyle. They hadn't sent me away to get rid of me but

to keep me from hurting myself. I didn't know then that Ginger had told them about my suicide threats.

Mom Snyder held me as I confessed my sins to Jesus and received Him into my life. I didn't think it was possible to be so happy. Now I spent my days reading the Bible. But despite the changes in me, I still resented Ginger. Pop Snyder told me to pray for Ginger.

At first it was hard. "When you take the first step and trust God, then He will put within you His love for Ginger," he told me.

Better way

At last it was time for that first home visit. Mom, Dad, and Sherry hugged me. "Jesus shines in your face," Mom said.

We talked until three in the morning. The next day, I jogged over to Ginger's apartment and circled the block three times before I summoned the nerve to knock on the door. When Ginger saw me, her eyes filled with tears. Sobbing, I threw my arms around her, and we clung to each other.

"Please forgive me, Ginger, for the rotten feelings I've had for you all these years," I begged. "I do love you."

"Oh Denise," she whispered. "I missed you. I love you, too. Let's not hurt each other ever again."

Ginger didn't see my smile. Prayer did work. Somehow I knew that although I had tried for so long to be like Ginger, the time had come to show her a better way — a way to heal all the hurts.

Names have been changed.

Penny Smith writes from Grantville, PA.



Daniel and the European Union

by Victor N. Harrison

While many Bible prophecies have been fulfilled, the tide rolls unstopably toward divinely foretold events yet to occur. In an unsuspecting world, this does not surprise those who take seriously their Lord's advice to "watch and pray."

What time is it, and how close are we to that glorious day when all will be revealed? Many students view current events in our world as the development of that prophesied evil world government that will oppose Christ at His return.

Of the futuristic writings in Scripture, few fuel imagination or spark interest as does Daniel's book. Interpreting the terrible fourth beast of Daniel 7, Bible watchers have theorized that the loss of three of its ten horns and the rise of the persecuting little horn began to be realized in the fifth and sixth centuries AD.

When Emperor Constantine turned to Christianity and the Roman Church later forged ties with secular states, Europe became the seat of the beast system of political, economic, and religious control foreseen by Daniel. Papal Rome exercised a hegemony that dominated the continent for a millennium or more, until its decline in the Protestant Reformation (early 1600s) and its later humiliation at the French Revolution. Some believe that this fallen power is not dead but only wounded – to be healed and again exercise its iron rule over an unsuspecting world.

If the prophecy has both early and late fulfillments, Daniel's writing may portend Europe at the heart of an evil system once again. This allows for a controlling involvement by the modern European Union of nations. Those upholding this concept see Europe at the heart of a false peace process that will initiate tribulations spoken of in Christ's Revelation to John, and that will culminate in the battle of Armageddon. In the next segment, we approach

the same possibility from another perspective in the same book.

Image of Nebuchadnezzar

History is a great teacher, showing with certainty that the curtain has opened and drawn on the first four world-ruling kingdoms prophesied through Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2. His Babylonian kingdom was the first prophesied here; the Medes and Persians composed the second, and the Greeks under Alexander the Great became the third "universal" empire.

The final world kingdom was the mighty Roman Empire. The legs of the image suggest Rome's eventual split into two halves, with capitals in Rome and in Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey). Now read the Bible's description of the colossus that was Rome and how those legs connect with the feet below:

Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron . . . so it will crush and break all the others. Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron . . . so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. So the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay (Daniel 2:40-43).

This suggests an extension – partly strong and partly weak – of the fourth kingdom that will exist when the fifth and final world empire arrives to strike the feet and overpower all of the above (v. 44). Could this fourth human kingdom be advancing in the current development of the European Union?

In this scenario, the feet and toes of Nebuchadnezzar's man-image is the re-creation of the unity that was once Europe in all its power and might. In spite of the potential dominance this last form of the Roman Empire will have, clay mixed with the iron is not permanently strong, indicating that this conglomeration of states will be flawed with promi-

ment rifts and ruptures — an unworkable union that cannot last.

Europe in the post-war era

The twentieth century began with Europe, the heart of the former Roman Empire, in a state of fomentation, with competing nationalistic ambitions giving rise to two devastating world wars before the century was half over. Still, the continent's economic recovery by the mid-1950s was seen as a modern miracle. A key dilemma remained: to realize the continent's harmony of purpose and effort that was often dreamed by political theorists and intellectuals.

Strong economic dynamics, coupled with prophetic Providence, suggest that Europe was being pulled toward a pre-charted course as the old empire centered in Rome — fallen but never fully evaporated — began to take shape again! After World War II, conditions favored the confederacy of the European continent, seen by many thinkers as an escape from the intense forms of nationalism that had so recently devastated the region.

A first step toward European unity came when the French foreign minister and the West German chancellor proposed that their nations' steel and coal production be conjoined. After discussion, a six-nation European Coal and Steel Community resulted, with no other commitments that would compromise the autonomy of each national government. This minor step served as the magnet to pull the old Roman system back together.

This economic experiment gave reason to think on a wider scale. Political strategists of the region got together to map out the direction of the European continent. Fever-pitched discussions for deeper economic integration ensued, which culminated in the signing of the Treaties of Rome. What until recently was known as the European Economic Community (EEC) was established, followed by forming the European Atomic Energy Commission

(EURACOM). Signatures were put to the agricultural treaty, followed sharply by the Brussels accord, dubbed the Second Treaty of Rome.

Britain, widely viewed as part of Europe, was accepted as a member of the EEC in 1973, only after its two previous applications were vetoed by French President Charles de Gaulle. Ireland and Denmark joined the same year. A unified EU needs a common monetary system; hence the European Monetary Union (EMU) arrived in stages. The single European unit of currency, the euro, came into effect January 1, 2002.

These are signs aplenty for the attentive student to realize that our generation could see the final fulfillment of Daniel's and Christ's prophetic words. The EU is bigger than it has ever been before, despite the internal squabbles and Britain's refusing to join the monetary system.

Ten kings?

The EU presently consists of more than 25 states with a population of over 700 million. The prophetic voice mentioned only ten kings (ten toes, horns, etc.), but the union of Europe more than doubles that figure. Some see only ten core members in the EU; the others are associates. Former Eastern Bloc states have applied for membership, like the heavily Islamic Turkey. Many in Europe question this move.

The influence of the EU is growing rapidly around the world. Many see this testing the U.S. and Russia politically, economically, and even militarily. The EU is like a long-caged beast ready to be released upon a naive humanity. Many hold that Europe has long removed its ceremonial dress of Christianity and now is fulfilling its envisaged economic and political function within a reinvigorated Babylonian system — essentially ten kings having influence over the world. From this strange mixture of "iron and clay" a man of immense power will appear, who the prophet predicts will be a genius forging deals. Let us be vigilant in scrutinizing current events.

Divine control

Early in World War II, British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill addressed a joint session of the U.S. Congress with these words:

. . . I will say that he must indeed have a blind soul who cannot see that some great purpose and design is being worked out here below of which we have the honor to be the faithful servants. It is not given to us to peer into the mysteries of the future. Still, I avow my hope and faith, sure and inviolate, that in the days to come the British and American peoples will, for their own safety and for the good of all, walk together in majesty, in justice and in peace (www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org).

Could it be that this generation in Europe has a front row seat to the “great purpose” spoken of by Sir Winston, being worked out below for the ultimate glory of God and His eternal kingdom?

God is still in control. This evil system that presently dominates the world will not last forever, for in the midst of it all, God’s kingdom will appear in full power and glory to break that dominance. His kingdom will last forever.

Blest by his wife, Loraine, and three sons, **Victor Harrison** serves as an evangelist in the London area of U.K. His hobby is writing.



Naming the Wild Man

continued from page 6

oppression is the result. These tendencies may be true of Islam, but they are not unique to it. Was not Paul such a man prior to his encounter with Christ en route to Damascus (Galatians 1:13)? Ishmael is not just *them*; he can also be the face in the mirror.

A Christian response

Given these observations — that Ishmael is blessed *and* wild, that Ishmael is both man *and* type, that Ishmael is both *them and us* — how should the church respond to Islam?

A Christian response must begin with respect and humility. Respect because, by an amazing act of providence, we find that we have much in common with Islam; humility because we recognize it is God who directs history, not us. We too have been driven by the “flesh,” but God declares the end from the beginning.

A Christian response to Islam must be truthful. Instead of our destiny, *Ishmael is our decision*. As Abraham wrestled between flesh and faith, so we all must choose. The truth is that we are all Ishmael, but Christ has overcome the wild man at the cross. All “wild” branches are now grafted into God’s story by His grace, through faith.

A Christian response to Islam must be courageous. It must be said that only the cross of Christ demonstrates the “submission” that Islam so desires. The bold truth is that raised hands are not a sign of submission to God;

physical *jihad* is bondage to the flesh. Paul proves there is hope: “He who formerly persecuted . . . now preaches the faith . . .” (Galatians 1:23).

A Christian witness

Ultimately the Christian response is *Christian witness*: to love our neighbor as ourselves and to embody the mercy of God in concrete ways — even in the face of persecution.

In Psalm 83, Ishmael is among the enemies of God arrayed against Israel: “For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against You; the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites . . .” (vv. 5-8). This is history.

Into this historical peril Jesus has called His church (Matthew 28:18). We need not fear; we have seen the end of our witness.

Isaiah declares, “The Gentiles shall come to your light . . . they shall proclaim the praises of the LORD” (60:3, 6). John sees a “great multitude . . . of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb . . .” (Revelation 7:9).

Blessed Ishmael, wild no longer, will be among them. **BA**

Thanks to my friend and study partner William Bogle for his contributions to this article.

Jason Overman serves the CoG7 in Jasper, AR, with his wife Stephanie and their children, Tabitha and Isaac.



Hammondville History

Memories of Mt. Pisgah

by **Christine Millican Dersa**

Brother W. W. McMicken came to Central Alabama in 1927 to hold a brush arbor revival. My dad, Clarence Millican, had never belonged to a church. He later said he had never heard truth preached like Brother McMicken preached it.

My dad was well known in his community, which explains why they were so happy to see him a changed man, though few people knew of his “business” before God found him. Dad threw his worldly life aside and went to work for God by gathering materials for a permanent church home. He always stood proud to be a Christian, never looked back, and never forgot whose child he was.

Annie Tate and her husband got very enthusiastic, the same way Papa and Mama did. After six weeks or so of revival at the brush arbor, people decided to build a church. Mr. Tate and Papa went in our wagon with two big red horses, gathering materials and money. They went to surrounding areas where my dad was raised. Once they let my brother and me go along. It was a thrill to see those friends and relatives recognize Clarence Millican as a changed man.

Jack Mountain gave the land and helped on the building. Mr.

Tate knew how to build and guided the crew. Ms. Annie helped with dinner, and my brother and I took it to the crew about a mile from our house.

After the church was finished, Mr. Tate made benches, and all was ready. Brother McMicken held a three-week revival, seven days a week. The church was full, with people standing outside the windows so they could hear the preaching. Mr. Tate saw we didn’t have enough benches, so he got help to build sixteen more. They filled up quickly, too.

It continued there for years: the Robinsons, Mountains, Poes, Watkinses, Riodloes, Millicans, Hudgens, Tates, Whites, and Demorie Jones families. My dad joined the church, and the rest of the family followed him. So did the Robinsons and others. We had large crowds, with good singing and fellowship.

In 1929 Brother R. K. Walker came from Oklahoma with his wife and seven children, and they stayed with us. The church grew and we all got along. Eventually two of the Walker children married two of the Millicans.

Our family moved to Flat Rock, Alabama, in 1932 and helped establish a church there. We had a minister from Indiana, but he didn’t stay long because of family trouble. My parents tried to carry on with teaching at the church, but it didn’t go so

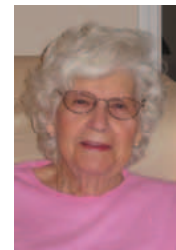
well. Eventually people scattered.

We moved back to the Central community in 1948, and the Mt. Pisgah church too was nearly gone; a lot of people had moved away. The building was eventually sold and torn down, replaced by a beautiful stone church.

The money from the sale of the old church was given to start a new congregation at Hammondville, Alabama, in 1959. First led by Herbert Buckles, that church has grown into a fine group that has been served by several pastors, including Melvin Sweet, Kenneth Walker, and Robert Coulter. Now Paul Carlin and Kenneth Pell do a wonderful job in leading our congregation. We have many things to do, and our crew works hard in keeping things going.

Dad passed away in 1959. My folks were so proud of our church group, and my dad held fast to those teachings all the rest of his life. Mt. Pisgah holds wonderful memories that I will always cherish. What a happy time we had there!

Christine Millican Dersa, 90 and living in Rainsville, AL, was eight years old under the first brush arbor at Mt. Pisgah.





'Civil' words

The author's points are the same used against the persecuted Puritans, Pilgrims, and Separatists who left England in the 1600s ["The Bible and Civil Authority," p. 11, July-August '10]. The British followed and tried to make them subservient in the new land. Those same points were arguments against the Declaration of Independence. Amid heated debate, many wanted to stay with Britain and submit to the king and his church. What would have been our fate had they prevailed?

It is a dereliction of Christian duty to submit to civil authorities if they demand we go against God's teachings. We ought to obey God rather than man. Prophets who spoke against kings at God's prompting were in violation of these principles.

Now is the time for Christians to speak out against leaders who take our country away from the godly principles we were founded upon. It is not disrespect or disobedience to voice our concerns. [We] need to pray for our leaders, that they will change or be removed from office. [In voting] we need God's wisdom for insight into the character of those seeking office.

*D. G.
Idaho*

In "Civil Authority" you prescribe Christian conduct in familiar CoG7 terms of a dumbing-down and keeping-quiet paradigm. Your monocultural article makes absolutely no allowance for additions or variations — bravely and pragmatically contending for truth — to the *pray-stay-pay-obey* churchy obligation.

*S. S.
South Australia*

I appreciate the Scriptures but can't fully agree with your understanding. Is there never a place for strong warnings, as Jesus gave in Matthew 23? Is it evil to call someone evil when they are? Can corruption and [unrighteous] policies be told to warn people? Our leaders can't implement everything in the Bible, but our Constitution allows for more than they are willing to do.

In being thankful for leaders (1 Timothy 2:1bf), "Lord, thank You for our wicked leaders" doesn't say it right. I was an ungodly man once; I am thankful for those who prayed for me rather than just telling others what an ungodly man I was. We are to love all men, including Barack Obama, as the Lord does. Let's pray and be good citizens (vv. 1-7), but there is a proper way to "appeal to Caesar" that would provide biblical balance. Your article gives half the picture.

I need to take heed, as do others who want to be "Christian political activists." There is no such calling in the New Testament. Writing to Christians under Nero's persecution, Peter taught them not to speak out but to submit to leaders as a witness (1 Peter 2:11, 12; 2 Peter 2:10) — with one exception: Acts 5:29.

*S. Z.
Oklahoma*

"The Bible and Civil Authority" is excellent instruction. It reminded me of my sometimes less-than-civil characterization of the many public figures who rarely demonstrate credibility, sound judgment, and moral integrity in their service.

"God's Caretakers" (p. 4) suggests that Genesis 1:28 establishes a mandate for conservation of the earth's resources. This text does not command conservation but bestows God's blessing upon humanity's innate ability to procreate, dominate all living creatures, and exploit the earth's resources for its comfort and benefit. Humans are to be good stewards of the earth but are God-blessed when exploiting its resources for personal well-being. Humans are not responsible for causing "climate change," if, indeed, it is changing.

*W. R. C.
Colorado*

Double-take

I did a double-take when I saw "On Religious Freedom" [p. 10]. I mistakenly read "ACLU" and wondered how they got into the BA. Then I saw it was ACLJ. Whew! Scared me. Huge difference.

*L. P.
Virginia*

Sabbath employment

What good is done by this being in the BA ["Q & A," September-October, p. 7]? Is there no accountability to those who teach others? Makes me question as to how far we will go.

*M. M.
Texas*

Thank you for finding the courage to print this . . . for those who are having trouble observing Sabbath. Everyone should strive to cease work and take the day God gave us to

rest and worship. If they cannot, we should support and encourage them while they strive to make the adjustment. I encourage the Church to lead with compassion in this matter.

R. D.
California

I worry about a church being soft on the words of the Bible [that] tell us don't add or take away any words (Rev. 22:18, 19).

J. S.
Oregon

Does this mean that the other nine may be kept or not kept depending on our circumstances?

N. K.
Texas

You should have read this article all the way through, if you didn't.

E. J.
Oklahoma

I strongly disagree. Christ instructed His followers to keep the commandments and often referred to specific ones (Matthew 5:19). Sabbath is from sunset to sunset. If one works on Friday evening, Sabbath is broken. Christ allowed His followers to pull an ox from the pit on the Sabbath; He did not allow a roundup.

So, who of us is perfect? No one. Our redemption is in Christ Jesus. Thank the Lord, we have an Advocate with the Father who knows our faults and forgives our sins. Even so, a deacon holds a position of authority in the church and is held to a higher standard. His working on Sabbath could be a stumbling block. Consider this his Goliath. Does he face the challenge head-on, or turn and run? Our advice to anyone in this position should be 1) seek

God's guidance and intervention, 2) try to reason with the boss, and 3) start looking for another job.

Whatever his decision, it is not our place to judge him. We should pray for him and pray that we'll make the right decision if we're ever in this situation.

C. G.
Texas

Forced to work?? How about if I am forced to bow down to an idol? Or to murder?

G. F.
British Columbia

You did a boo-boo . . . that will soothe the conscience of some and hurt the ministry of several.

W. W.
Arkansas

As an ordained person in a Sabbathkeeping church years ago, I watched from the inside as it changed one doctrine after another, including the requirement of the Sabbath. (Indeed, the Ten Commandments are required for those who desire to obey God as He tells us.) I witnessed the traumatic effect the teaching against the commandments had upon the faith of thousands. Eventually I found myself fellowshiping for a while in a local CoG7 and was immediately refreshed by the wonderful spirit of obedience so evident there. This became a place of healing to me. Thus, I was saddened and alarmed to read your answer. Will this be the beginning of more articles that gradually wear away at the sanctity of Sabbath? All I can say is "been there; saw that." Much more will be lost than gained by this kind of thinking.

V. S.
Missouri



This answer does not use biblical guidelines, but instead formulates them according to human logic. Taking the route advocated does not support the concept of suffering — even dying, if necessary — so as not to be disobedient to our Lord.

R. M.
California

Thanks for printing Pastor Vega's reply to the question on the Sabbath issue.

R. S.
Pennsylvania

God created the seventh-day Sabbath and set it aside for us. Where did He ever set us above it? The words of the fourth commandment, "In it thou shalt do no work," have never changed.

Are we a seventh-day-keeping church? Or just in name? Let us stand firm on God's Word and trust Him to provide. What a witness for Sabbath truth that could be.

D. W.
Idaho

When I was looking for work, I was told no work on Friday night or Saturday. Now I'm angry: I could have found a job a lot quicker if I did what this person writes.

D. F.
California

The response represents a milestone for the Church. One would not have expected to read such a position in the BA. The answer to a most important question not only gives a specific response but also is replete with extraordinary insights concerning the covenants. While not everyone will agree with its conclusion, every reader serves himself well to fully comprehend, without feeling convictions are being violated, the reasoning and application of Scripture. My personal appreciation and congratulations to Pastor Vega — whose commitment to his faith, church, and God are legendary — for sharing his typical good reasoning, and to the BA for the courage to offer it!

R. S.
Oregon

The Sabbath command was given by God to anyone who loves Him . . . not just to “Israel” as a “special covenant.”

M. A.
Texas

Do you *personally* believe that a servant of God can work on Sabbath and not violate the law of love? If so, does this mean we can fudge on the books if our “Master” demands it, as long as we’d prefer not to? Many younger members who struggle with this sin will be encouraged to continue in it. Many others have been martyred in defense of the seventh-day Sabbath (Rev. 2:10).

P. M.
Texas

Some arguments would be valid for babes in Christ, not for those eating meat. How do we suffer for Christ if we make excuses for God’s commandments? He doesn’t say that if you’re in jam and have to break My rules, it’s OK; I am gracious.

Does it seem too hard for God to keep someone through financial trouble (Matt. 6:25)? What advice can one who works on Friday nights

give to another member about perseverance, trust in God, or faith with patience?

The slaves in New Testament times never had a choice about working. The situation is different when you have a choice.

B. M.
Ontario

Special circumstances have never been an excuse for disregarding God’s laws. Sabbathkeepers all over the world keep the Sabbath faithfully in spite of their poverty.

Because I keep the Sabbath with conviction and not preference, I am protected from ever having to work more than six days in a row. In gratitude for Sabbaths off, I work Sundays, holidays, and odd hours. I was fired last year because of the Sabbath. But God has provided for us in ways we don’t even understand.

When we obey Him, we are spared the consequences that result from disobedience. If we regard His laws as suggestions and override

them, we don’t enjoy the complete benefit of the protection they were intended to give us.

It may be that a brother is stumbling in a weak moment. We have the opportunity to encourage him to stay firm for God’s Sabbath. God will bless him and provide his needs. As a leader, his example will encourage others to be strong for God.

L. L.
Washington

I’m surprised and confused that you published this. If we start taking little snippets from each commandment, then why keep any of them? I feel for the man who has to work late; our small church takes an offering [for such situations]. Believe, me, I’ve done many things not in God’s will, but I don’t ask laws to cover them. God will deal with me. I ask forgiveness constantly.

H. S.
West Virginia

Questions & Answers

continued from page 7

Revelation 20:1-6 previews the first resurrection at Christ’s return but does not give millennial content; we’ve found that briefly elsewhere. Verses 7 and 8 pick it up after the one thousand years, saying, “Satan [is] loosed out of his prison” and goes out to “deceive the nations” (KJV). These are natural (fleshly) people, for immortals cannot sin.

Then comes the great white throne judgment, where the books are opened (v. 12a). This can be none other than God’s Word, for by it we will be judged (John 12:48). Then “another book was opened, which is the book of life” (Rev. 20:12b, KJV). This indicates that individuals will accept Christ and have their names written down during the millennium, inasmuch as those whose names were in the Book prior to the millennium were given eternal life at His return.

Yes, there will be a great conversion among Israel when Jesus comes (Rom. 11:26). They will be among the natural people during the millennium. They will bear children and have the choice of accepting or rejecting the Lord at that time.

— Elder Wesley Walker

**The storms of life around me blow
to drench with rain or chill with snow,
but time has taught that skies of blue
and bright sunlight often follow
the darkest night.**

**So it will be, as God has planned,
if we hold fast to our Savior's hand.**

Carmen F. Hicks



Did you know . . .

- that the fall enrollment of 48 at Spring Vale Academy includes eight day-students in the seventh and eighth grades?
- that both dormitories on the Spring Vale campus were “wrapped” this summer with an attractive exterior insulation that will reduce heating costs for winters to come?
- that the second semester at SVA will begin in January, with openings for several more students?
- that Spring Vale Academy is now in its 63rd consecutive year of operation on its Owosso, Michigan, campus?

Contact 989-725-2391 or visit www.springvale.us

GC Ministries



G. C. Ministries

Richard Jensen, Executive Director

I have been in the role of executive director for a little over three months as I write this. So when Brother Calvin suggested that I write a short summary of my perspectives about General Conference Ministries, I thought of one word to summarize my perspective: awe!

I am honestly in awe of what our ministry directors and their staff are able to accomplish with such limited budgets. The *Bible Advocate*, for example, is one of the longest-running magazines in American history, and it continues to go out free to all! The entire Publications department produces quarterlies, youth curriculum, tracts, and now even online materials. The budget supporting this work is laughably small, yet the work goes forward.

All of our ministries, including Missions, LifeSpring, and our youth and women’s ministries, operate on a skeleton crew with impossibly small budgets. Yet the Lord multiplies these few loaves and fishes. The dedication and efficiency of the General Conference staff is awesome, and I want to say publicly that I am honored to work by their side.

The General Conference ministries are the “unsung heroes” of our organization. They keep programs for our youth going, training for our ministers progressing, evangelism among the lost proceeding, and an ever-increasing wealth of publications flowing. They are the unnoticed backdrop of our entire organization. Yet if that unnoticed backdrop were removed, its *absence* would be noticed! So I pray that you will contemplate what your ministries do for you, pray for them, and support them. We have much to be thankful for!



Farewell, Ivan

Ivan Lee Burrell of Coweta, Oklahoma, died on September 7, a week before his 61st birthday. Graduate of both Spring Vale Academy ('67) and Midwest Bible College ('72), Ivan spent much of his life on the Oklahoma farm where he was born and near where he

was buried.

Ivan also served churches in Detroit, Michigan; Brighton, Ohio; Joplin, Missouri; and Claremore, Oklahoma, as well as in his hometown of Fairview, Oklahoma. Condolences go to his wife, Linda; three surviving children (Darin, Zachary, Serena); one grandson; his mother, Vera; his sister, Linda Rich; and his extended family.

Happy Hundredth!

Elder Lawrence L. Christenson of Independence, Missouri, was born in Wisconsin 100 years ago, November 12, 1910, and is CoG7's oldest living minister.

Entering ministry more than 70 years ago, he served in Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas — in pastoral and publication work.

Elder Christenson, now residing with his daughter, Helen, is remembered for his violin playing, children's Bible stories, and creative woodcrafts.



Marvelous Women in Maryland

Author, speaker, and TV personality Hada María Morales entertained with her quick humor and knowledge of God's Word at our twenty-third annual Hispanic Women's Retreat, hosted by sisters from



LITES 2010

LITES Ministries began its eighth year in Stanberry, MO, in September. Our six students come to us from Oregon, Nevada, Missouri, and Jalisco, Mexico. Each day at LITES begins with worship followed by a Bible class, then a study of subjects ranging from worldviews to spiritual disciplines to relationship with God and others. Afternoons are spent in service projects to the elderly and handicapped and other forms of outreach and ministry to the community. To learn more about LITES Ministries and how you can be a part, visit lites.cog7.org.

(L to R) Ivonne Vega, Levi West, Abigail Wallace, Damaris Jimenez De La Torre, Samuel Steinhauer, Sandra Marquez

the Lanham, Maryland, and Washington D.C. area churches. Eva Delgado from Illinois, graduate from the Mexican School of Ministry and co-founder of an orphanage and "children of the street" ministry, brought her timely counsel and message to the retreat.

The laughter, attitude, and testimonies during a fireside service contributed to the theme of "Marvelous Women" as many attendees opened their hearts to Jesus, restored broken relationships, and acknowledged each other's contributions in sharing the gospel of our Lord. Sabbath, September 4, attendance peaked at 386!

While the rule "no men or children" still stands



for this retreat, it could never have been so successful without the cooking, serving, singing, and ready support of the D.C.-Maryland men. Pastor Antonio Vega's Sabbath evening message encouraged us to recognize the tremendous privilege and profound responsibility we share as women and members in God's family.

We encourage you to start making plans to join us at any of the scheduled retreats over the next four years — in California, Colorado, Arizona, and Nevada.

**Super Sabbath
Arizona 2010**

December 18
Dr. Richard Jensen
CoG7 Special Speaker

General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day)
6750 N. 7th Ave. • Phoenix, Arizona 85013
Gabriel Guzman (602-402-8829) or
Jonathan Marrufo (602-334-5143)

STATEMENT

Of the ownership, management, and circulation (required by the Act of Congress of August 12, 1970; Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code) of the BIBLE ADVOCATE, published eight times per year at Broomfield, Colorado for September 30, 2010.

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NFYC News

Local youth groups: It's time to begin wrapping up your "Gimme Five" journal by filling it with all the memoirs of your activities this year! The journal is a great place to record them all. Submit a copy of it to the NFYC office by February 15, 2011, and you'll receive the Gimme Five Participation Award for 2010, along with the opportunity for other National Youth Ministry awards. Send your submissions to NFYC Office, Attn: Kurt Lang, 920 LaSalle, Harrisburg, OR 97446. Or e-mail it to nfyc@cog7.org. Thanks for your participation!

NW Sword Retreat, November 12-14

Brooks Retreat Center - Goldendale, WA

Ages 18-35; cost: \$40

Contact: Kurt Stranberg, Kurtstranberg@comcast.net

California Winter Youth Retreat, December 16-19

Capital Mountain Camp - near Sacramento, CA

Ages 13-22; cost: \$120

Contact: Jorge Perez, 408-250-9985 or nazarite-mex@hotmail.com

SW District Winter Retreat, December 30 -

January 2

Camp Hoblitzelle - Midlothian, TX

Ages 13-25; cost: \$130 (by November 30)

Contact: Jason/Rose Rodriguez, 832-797-9916 or swdstudentministries@gmail.com

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BA on
Facebook!**



Have you visited our Facebook page yet? More and more people are "liking" us; why don't you be one of them? Come by anytime and post a comment or ask a question.

Level 1 Missions

Guadalajara, Mexico PMT

Is God giving you a vision for the world around you? Do you have a desire to serve on the foreign mission field? This short-term mission trip could be just for you!

Pioneer Missionary Training (PMT) is hosted by the Mexican CoG7 and facilitated by Missions, SWORD, and NFYC ministries of the General Conference. Participants learn the concepts of evangelism to the unsaved through classroom training and hands-on experience, living and working with brethren of like faith in their own country.

This year's team will travel to the Mexican state of Jalisco December 19-29. The cost of the trip, *not* including airfare to Guadalajara, is \$455 USD and includes housing, food, insurance, and transportation within Mexico.

PMT is an introductory course in foreign missions work. To be considered for future CoG7 mission trips, persons will need to have completed PMT Level 1.

If God prompts you, contact one of these for an application and details:

- Kurt Lang (NFYC): 541-517-1079 or kurt.lang@cog7.org
- Christy Lang (SWORD): sword@cog7.org
- Bill Hicks (G. C. Missions): carlylehix@aol.com
- Monico Muffley (team leader): pastormonico@juno.com

Do it now; applications must be postmarked by **November 15**.

This world can be a scary place, where questions abound. **Are you looking for answers?**

We are a church looking to the future. We're prepared to share answers that help you deal with today's problems and enjoy tomorrow's hope. We are a growing body of believers in Jesus Christ. We are . . .

Church of God (Seventh Day).

With offices in Denver, Colorado, the General Conference of the Church is in league with the global outreach of the International Ministerial Congress, with conferences and churches around the world. We invite you to join us in the harvest through our growing missions departments. For more details, visit our Web site at www.cog7missions.org.

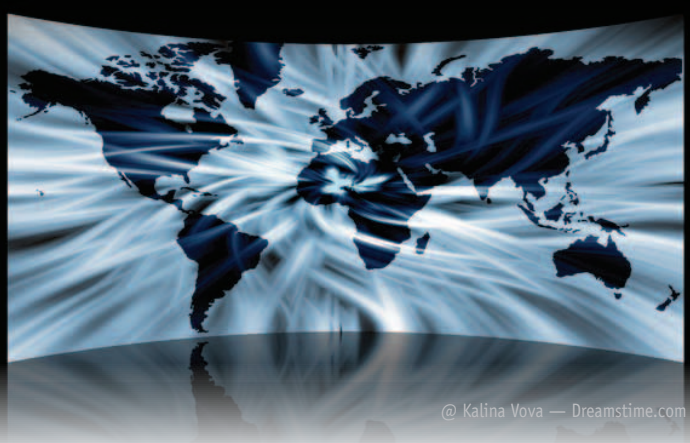
Your prayers and support are appreciated!

Travel notice. The Department of State has issued a warning about security in Mexico. While millions of U.S. citizens safely visit Mexico each year (including tens of thousands who cross the land border daily for study, tourism, or business and the nearly one million who live there), violence in the country has increased. To help insure that travel to Mexico is safe and enjoyable, it is imperative that U.S. citizens understand the risks, how best to avoid dangerous situations, and who to contact if victimized. For a complete review of this

warning, please visit http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_mexico.html.

Scholarship notice. SWORD will cover PMT registration fee for one CoG7 young adult, age 18-35, in the U.S. or Canada. Selection of the recipient will be based on answers to these questions: "Do you feel God is calling you to a certain area of ministry?" and "How will this PMT experience enhance that call?" Forms are posted at <http://sword.cog7.org>.

International Tour



Europe

International Ministerial Congress of CoG7 is represented in the United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Germany, Poland, and even Pakistan, with many other contacts across this continent. Dr. Paulo Coelho of Lisbon, Portugal, serves as the zone representative for this far-flung region.

Late in July the British Church held its convention at Slade Rd. Church in Manchester, U.K., with over 400 persons attending. International guests basking in the warm fellowship included the Nicasio Martin family of Spain, the John Lemley family of Oregon, and IMC officers Calvin Burrell (Colorado) and Henry Harley (Jamaica). The photo here pictures several of these guests (with Dr. Coelho on the right) and Ashley Crawford from England (kneeling).

Intense prayer. June 5 was a day of intense spiritual experience in the churches of Italy and Portugal, where several members had been hit by serious health problems. Besides the usual human resources and the united faith of believers, a more intense spiritual response was needed to sustain brethren through their adversity. Thus a day of prayer and fasting was declared, involving churches of both

countries and the spiritual solidarity of brethren around the world.

In Italy the Church's services expanded to a full Sabbath. Many people felt God's increasing power to support them in their difficulties and His gracious presence by the Holy Spirit's touch.

This Sabbath in the Portuguese church was marked by special prayers, in favor of not only those in Portugal and Italy but also brothers who suffer worldwide. In the main Lisbon church, a meditation was prepared on the theme of problems Christians face. When difficulties reach extreme and we feel empty of God (Psalm 13), we need God's presence (Psalm 16:8-11; Matthew 28:20b); God's hope (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10; Romans 5:1-5; Revelation 21); and God's power (Luke 24:49; Acts 2:17-20).

Members were unanimous in saying that God's presence that day would assist them in the difficulties that still exist and will arise in the future. Pastor Roberto Torre of the Italian Conference wrote, "We need to make similar, new experiences more often."

News and notes

- The Church in Germany has modified its Sabbath school to give more time to Bible study and is developing contact with other groups that recently accepted Sabbath as the day of worship. A more complete musical group, Revival, was created from several smaller gospel groups.

- After the implementation of a twenty-lesson Bible course, the Church in Almeria, Spain, has experienced an increase of persons, with baptisms. Pastor Nicasio Martin says God is blessing this group, in spite of the economic crisis and the difficulties of preaching the gospel there.

- Members and contacts in Europe are invited to e-mail their questions or comments to Paulo Coelho at jccoel@gmail.com.



Blessed Hope

Predicting the end of the world is not a new phenomenon, but it seems to

come in greater measure during turbulent times. One radio broadcaster insists judgment day will be May 21, 2011. A popular Hollywood film (based on the Mayan calendar) warns of global cataclysm in 2012, marking the beginning of the end. And fears triggered by world conditions prompt various count-downs to Armageddon.

The history of the Church of God movement also includes end-time predictions. Based on his calculation of the prophecy of Daniel 8, William Miller said Christ would return in the spring of 1843. This Advent movement ended in a Great Disappointment and eventually gave rise to major faith communities, including ours.

Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) caused yet another wave of end-time speculation. Though Lindsey didn't pinpoint a specific date, he did project it would be sometime around 1988 — one generation (forty years) from Israel's 1948 rebirth as a nation. Decades later, Lindsey is still pontificating on end-time matters, and his latest books and tapes on the subject are still patronized by gullible Christians.

What do end-time prophets do with this clear statement from Jesus: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32)? Much to his credit, Miller later admitted his error and confessed his disappointment, though affirming his conviction that "the day of the Lord is near, even at the door."

With no less than three hundred New Testament references to Christ's return, such conviction has broad scriptural basis. Therefore, to believe the Bible is true is to believe in the Second Advent. To believe in the Second Advent is to believe we have a "date with Deity," when God will write the final

period in the final sentence of the final chapter of Earth's history. And this belief should motivate readiness for that day — yearning, longing for it (Titus 2:13).

Sadly, many are so at home in the world that Christ's return is "out of sight, out of mind." I say this to my own embarrassment. Today's feel-good theology (church is about fun and entertainment) and the need for instant gratification (we don't wait for anything) render preparing for judgment day anathema. When was the last time you heard this preached or sung in your local church? Why yearn for glory when we can have our best life now? The Advent hope is seen, at best, as insurance against a far-off event. So why trade present blessings for what is future and unfamiliar?

On the other hand, the hope of Christ's return is what buoys the spirits of the persecuted, those whose bodies "groan to be delivered" from disease, and those for whom this world is an unpleasant place. Annie R. Smith says it well in this classic Advent hymn "I Saw One Weary," a familiar strain in my childhood church:

I saw one weary, sad, and torn,
With eager steps press on the way,
Who long the hallowed cross had borne,
Still looking for the promised day;
While many a line of grief and care,
Upon his brow, was furrowed there;
I asked what buoyed his spirits up,
"O this!" said he — "the blessed hope."*

So, may avoidance of end-time madness not give way to end-time malaise. May we glean from and be guided by Scripture's prophetic clues without becoming end-time fanatics. And may what we believe in theory translate into greater desire for that promised Day.

— Whaid Guscott Rose

*From www.cyberhymnal.org

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(SEVENTH DAY)
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