



THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

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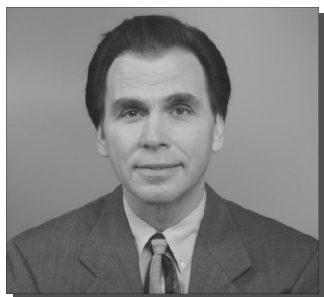
"Put on the whole armor of God"

2006

The War On Christians

Today, many people are in denial about Christian values being under siege. There is no ignoring this fact. The bias and double standard Christians suffer from the fields of academia, the arts, politics, or religion, are becoming more apparent. Things such as school prayer, the sanctity of life, the definition of marriage, and our Christian heritage—just to mention a few—are all under attack with the intent, at best, to be redefined or, at worst, completely eliminated. WHAT CAN WE DO?

by Bill Watson



Bill Watson

This was at the heart of two days of meetings in Washington, D.C., that I recently attended. Charles Groce, Benny Sharp and my wife Margie sat in on presentations and question/answer sessions concerning the issues confronting "Christians" here in the United States.

Dr. Rick Scarborough, Founder and President of "Vision America," arranged for a variety of Christian activists, radio talk show hosts, writers, former presidential candidates, senators, congressmen, judges, lawyers and Christian religious leaders to address the issue of national moral clarity in the United States and the current cultural trends in light of Christian values. It was a very eye-opening meeting and sadly disconcerting!

Many of the presentations were designed to introduce the broad scope and variety of fronts this cultural war is utilizing. The array of "cultural weaponry" and sophistication the opposition has and continues to implement is extremely startling and quite distressing. And, as if that weren't enough, unfortunately, the statistics prove that current trends indicate "hedonism" is fast becoming the defining new religion in the United States.

It was quite sobering to realize that in spite of the many decades of evangelism and the literally tens of thousands of church sponsored evangelistic meetings—from Billy Sunday to Billy Graham, along with today's multi-billion dollar evangelical movement—statistics dismally indicate "Christians" have lost ground. One vital area of consideration proving this

point is the battle for our young people. One recent survey, conducted by pollster George Barna, reported that 83 percent of our teens today in the United States believe "moral truth depends on the circumstances." Only 9 percent of *Christian* teenagers believe there is such a thing as moral truth, and only 6 percent of *Christian* teens believe that moral truth is absolute. *THIS IS SHOCKING!*

As the meeting proceeded over the two days we attended, it became apparent that our "Christian heritage" here in the United States is at a *CROSS-ROAD!* Many of the presiding leaders talked in terms of having a "window of time." They presented our country as a providential nation blessed by God over the years, and given the responsibility **by God** to be the "shining city on the hill." They spoke in terms of how burdensome the responsibility is to be a beacon of freedom and liberty for the world. And, sadly, they expressed what a shame it is that we are losing sight of the foundational beliefs our God provided through our Lord Jesus Christ, our forefathers, and the Judeo-Christian values that have been integral to the blessings and protection of this country.

Some of the speakers spoke with similar messages weaving a theme of common concern throughout their presentations. Gary Bauer, Congressman Tom Delay, Alan Keyes, Dr. Laurence White, and Janet Parshall all addressed issues ranging from the MTV factor on our youth to the methods of incrementalism of private interest groups and "legislation from the bench" by activist judges. They illustrated how all of this has contributed to a drop in Bible-believing, church-attending Americans, from 65 percent in 1945 to 4 percent in 1984 (22 years ago). Read that again! Regardless of whether you are a Sabbath- or Sunday-keeping Christian, this should be *ALARMING!*

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Christendom Astray

Put away your traditions, your "inspired" teachers and your new idea-babies. It's time to get back to the faith once delivered to the saints!

by Lloyd W. Cary



That Christendom is astray from the doctrines and practices of Christ and the apostles of the first century—from *the Bible*—is recognized by laymen and scholars alike. What to *do* about it is an entirely different matter.

Surely, few professing Christians would quarrel with Jude's exhortation to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Or *would* they? Who would be afraid to take up their Bible and compare their customs and beliefs with the word of God? Would *you*?

For the sake of freshness, let us read what Jude said from the Mofatt translation: "Beloved, my whole concern was to write to you on the subject of our common salvation, but I am forced to write you an appeal to defend the faith which has once for all been committed to the saints; for certain persons have slipped in by stealth (their doom has been predicted long ago), impious creatures who pervert the grace of our God into immorality and disown our sole liege and Lord" (Jude 3-4). This has happened in the past and is happening before our very eyes in these last days!

Jude's admonition is certainly an exemplary goal to which we all should aspire. To do so, we must be quite clear on what it means. If all have this primary goat of getting back to the

Bible and the faith and teaching once delivered, why, we must ask ourselves, are there so many denominations? Were all these church leaders "inspired" in widely divergent doctrinal directions by the same Holy Spirit? Many claim the teachings of *their* esteemed leaders are unchangeable and that all who differ from them are false. Accusations and epitaphs are cast back and forth like snowballs... and most are just as substantial.

And if each leader, church or denomination lies claim to divine inspiration *why do they sometimes admit error*—evidenced by a doctrinal change? How does one guarantee his "new" understanding is correct and his former understanding was incorrect? Isn't it just possible, therefore, that the "great teacher" simply got it wrong—or was only partially right? Was he or she "infallible"? Many leaders have claimed "divine revelation." But could his view perhaps be colored by background, by prejudice, by limited scholarship or simple lack of access to all the facts? And—*horrors!*—could some have even *set out to deliberately deceive* for money, power or recognition?

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... and much more!

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Our country is certainly at a crossroad. Without question, based on the worldview of these senior leaders, spokesmen and political insiders, American Christian culture's "window of opportunity" is fast approaching a "point of no return" if things do not change. Also, if hedonism becomes the predominant force, Bible-based values will be marginalized and ultimately even become *illegal*.



Gary Bauer, President of American Values and formerly a presidential candidate, expressed distress over the anti-God/Christian trends.

results of anti-Christian activism cannot be ignored. Clearly, Bible-believing families and our nation are distressed and under siege! History has taught us that whatever the direction the family takes, so goes the nation. *That is a sobering fact of reality!* *USA Today* apparently does not recognize this.

In summary, all of us realized that there are many other Bible-believing people who share *our* concerns about the future of this country and the trends that *we* understand are destroying the Christian heritage of the United States. Those in attendance came together for two days hoping to share their concerns, anxieties, and, yes, even some fears. The attendees shared ideas for developing ways to forestall the encroachment of hedonism, which threatens *our* moral clarity. This was an important interest to all concerned since moral clarity has been so instrumental in stabilizing the structure of our nation. They reminded us that if evil men are to prosper and gain advantage, all it takes is for *good men to do nothing*. That was the challenge presented!

Confronted with this undertaking, it would do us well as we take time to "examine ourselves" this Passover season, to review what we are doing to contribute toward fighting the forces of evil that are determined to take our *nation* down the path of destruction. And, at the same time, consider the Apostle Paul's words when he said, "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you... Therefore let us *not sleep* as do others; but let us *watch* and *be sober*. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, *putting on* the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:1-8).

So let us ask ourselves some hard questions. Are we involved with a work that is greater than ourselves? Are we teaching our children in the way of the Lord? Are we setting the best example we



Alan Keyes and Phyllis Schlafly presented information regarding judicial activism.

USA Today covered this meeting in a column that reviewed the proceedings. As expected, they attempted to minimize the content of the presentations by claiming it was "an exaggerated scare tactic aimed at grabbing attention, rallying the troops, and sowing a deeper division between the opposing sides in the ongoing debate over the proper role of religion in the public square." By attempting to marginalize the concerns of Bible believers, the article endeavored to dismiss the two days of meetings as exaggerated rhetoric designed to move the country toward a "hard-edged theocracy." The article encouraged the reader to *discount the influence* of Hollywood, the liberal news media, activist organizations, and the cultural elite, suggesting their influence is a "bit overblown" and that the word "war" is being tossed around "recklessly." Yet, the



Congressman Tom DeLay addressed the crisis Christians are facing in America today.

can of Christian virtue? Are we locking arms with brethren of like mind and devoting our time, energies and resources toward promoting and preserving the gospel truths that we know *go beyond moral clarity*? Are we allied with a larger number of true believers actively participating and exercising our skills, talents and finances for the advancement of knowledge concerning Jesus Christ? Are we actively involved in promoting the good news regarding Jesus Christ's coming world-ruling Kingdom? Are we praying "thy Kingdom come?"

If we are not, it's time to get active—or *SHAME ON US!* □

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The question must be asked—and answered—since there are so many differing churches, doctrines, and opinions out there, *can they all be right?* Logic demands that since they are all different—if any ONE is *correct*—the others must be wrong!

Since the Bible exhorts Christians to "contend for the faith once delivered" to the saints, we must seriously consider *what* was that specific faith the apostle Jude was referring to, *when* was it delivered, *who* delivered it, and *who received* it. Nothing can be more important, because the alternative is to embrace error and a false faith resulting in false "conversion."

But how, where, do we begin to unravel this gordian knot? What is the rule, or yardstick, used to make determinations? 1 Thessalonians 5:21 admonishes, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." By inference, if a thing, a doctrine—or even a cherished leader—is *not* true, not good, or is in error, do *not* hold it fast! Cast it away before it contaminates you spiritually! This, comparatively few are willing to do, due to upraising, peer pressure, and preconceived ideas. Many pseudo-scholars employ "proof texting"—hunting and searching for Scriptures, often out of context—to enable them to read their predetermined belief *into* the Bible instead of simply accepting what the Bible plainly says. There are too many "cafeteria Christians": picking and choosing what *they* want to believe and obey while ignoring those truths that may seem more distasteful.

We are exhorted in Scripture to *g-r-o-w* in knowledge (2 Peter 3:18). Doesn't this imply that we may have *imperfect knowledge* of "truth"? That perhaps truth garnered in one generation can be buried through persecution, martyrdom, deception or non-obeyance—and lost to the next generation? And later be *rediscovered*?

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Editor-In-Chief: Vance A. Stinson

Editor: Lloyd W. Cary

Contributing Writers: Orville Bumgardner, Lloyd W. Cary, Loren Chamberlain, Benjamin R. Chapman, Frank Denman, Kim Kozak, Noni McVey, James Pollatte, Bob Swimm, Bill Watson

Production: Lloyd W. Cary

Executive Vice President: Charles E. Groce

Business Manager: Benny Sharp

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FOREIGN OFFICES:

- The Church of God International, PO Box 171, Boonah, Queensland 4310, Australia
- The Church of God International 1299 Oxford St., PO Box 33034 London, Ontario, Canada N5Y 1A0
- The Church of God International, PO Box 776, Kingston 19, Jamaica
- The Church of God International, Makati Central, PO Box 2450, 1264 Makati, Metro Manila, Philippines.

CGI Web Site: www.cgi.org

CGI E-mail: info@cgi.org

Christendom, continued from previous page**Is Anyone Right?**

There is a vast difference between Biblical Truth and man-made doctrine! A study of the twentieth-first century's two thousand-plus professing Christian denominations is stark testimony to this! The dizzying array of countless organizations calling themselves "Christian" could go on and on. There are, Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Methodists, Lutherans, Mormons, and Independent. There are Churches of Christ, Churches of God, Episcopalians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Unitarians. There are Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Spiritualists and innumerable assortments in between. Can the Holy Spirit be guiding all these opposing groups into divergent teachings? Christ warned repeatedly, "Take heed that no man *deceive* you" (Matthew 24:4). Christ forewarned that many (not a few!) would come "in His name,"—saying that "Jesus is the Christ," yet deceiving many (verse 5). He gave notice that, "Many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many (verse 11). He went on to say, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders [miracle workers!], inasmuch that, if it were possible, they shall *deceive the very elect* (verse 24). Further, we are cautioned in 2 Corinthians 11:13–15, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if *his ministers* [yes, Satan has ministers!] also be transformed *as* the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." Beware! Satan can quote Scripture for his purpose... and he *does*.

In view of these and many other warnings, we must ask ourselves, "Could I be deceived? Am I a real Christian... or am I just a religious person?" Do the inspired Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16) teach one group to baptize infants, and another to baptize only adults? Do they instruct one body of believers to sprinkle, some to pour, and others to immerse? Why does one denomination insist on salvation by faith alone while another demands "works" also? One to venerate images or the crucifix, another to abhor them? One to speak in tongues, another to regard this as demonic? One to celebrate the mass and another to consider it pagan? There are those who observe Sunday and others who consider the seventh day as the Sabbath. Some keep Christmas and Easter while others consider them pagan abominations. Contrast those who believe in the trinity with non-trinitarians; the immortal soul concept with "soul sleep." Contrast the antinomian "no law" advocates with those who believe Christ did not come to destroy the law of the prophets. The list could go on almost *infinitum*! In view of this diversity of belief's, customs, and opinions we must address the question: *is anyone right*? Who are we to judge? Is there an ultimate *source* we can go to? Indeed, there is!

If all the variants above represent "the truth" (and do *any* proclaim themselves to be teaching *error*?) where does that place the Holy Spirit? Is the Spirit perhaps confused? Clearly not! "God is *not* the author of confusion" (1 Corinthians 14:23)! Jesus said, the scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35). Where, what, is the truth?

Jesus gave the answer in John 5:39: "Search *the scriptures*; for in *them* ye think ye have eternal life." He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by *me* (John 14:6). The challenge is for the Church of God to mine truth from the Scriptures! *That* is where truth lies. Not from added traditions, not from the rants of a self-proclaimed prophet, prophetess, or apostles; not from long-hidden plates dug from a mountain side, not from metaphysical or alien revelations, nor from hoary traditions of "the Fathers."

Sanity and stability can return only when we recognize that we dare not *add to*—nor *detract from*—the Word of God as expressed in the Old and New Testaments (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18–19). *Therein* lies the truth and "the faith once delivered"!

The Holy Scriptures Inspired of God

First, let us consider the writings of the "Old Testament." Few Christians would challenge the idea that these writings represent the foundational bedrock of New Testament teachings. For example, there are over six hundred direct quotations and references to the Old Testament in the New Testament. Notice, there are no quotations from Aristotle, Plato, or Socrates, Hellenized Greeks, Romans or Babylonians! The teachings of the New Testament are rooted and founded in the "Holy Scriptures"—that is, the thirty-nine books into which modern versions of the Old Testament are divided. Even such often quoted Christian teachings as "love your neighbor as yourself" is found in the Old Testament some fifteen hundred years before Jesus quoted it (Leviticus 19:18).

The apostle Paul wrote that the Holy Scriptures we call the Old Testament are "inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for amendment, and for moral discipline, to make the man of God proficient and equip him for good work of every kind" (*Moffatt*).

The "Bible" for first Christians *was* the Old Testament! They had *no other writings* from which to learn the truth! At Thessalonica Paul commended them for making "a daily study of the scriptures to see if it was really as Paul said" (Acts 17:11). This is hardly the view of most twenty-first century Christians! To those who are unwilling to change, it is easier to correct the Bible than to allow the Bible to correct them!

Jesus Himself identified these Scriptures as "the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44–45). In the language of those times, He thus described the entirety of what Protestants today call the "Old Testament" and which Judaism terms the "Holy Scriptures." For deeper understanding of these matters than can be addressed in this article, be sure to send for the free cassette tapes or CD's, *Old Testament Revealed*, and *New Covenant Theology*, both by Vance Stinson,

The Old Testament, then, is certainly a reliable source for determining "the faith once delivered to the saints." Without it the writings of the New Testament would be for the most part incomprehensible! Yet most Christians all but ignore it and relegate it to history's trash bin.

The Inspired New Testament a Continuation of the Old

The first century Church of God relied on the Old Testament writings as amplified by the words, letters, and sermons of the apostles and prophets. At that time God was directly inspiring these men to lay the foundation of Christianity. Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians, "you are a building that rests upon the apostles and prophets as its foundation, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20). Indeed Paul claimed the words he spoke were in words taught by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13). The inspired apostle Peter verified Paul's words (1 Peter 1:20–21; 3:16).

Jesus Himself predicted all the religious confusion we see today. In His final direction to the disciples just prior to His death, Jesus told them, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into the whole truth" (John 16:13). He also told them, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, shall teach you all things, and *bring all things to your remembrance*, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26).

This enabled them to preach and teach—and later to have written down—the whole counsel of God. They were absolutely inspired to perfectly bring to mind all Jesus taught them during their three and a half years in His company before His death, as well as that burning instruction He imparted to them in the nearly six weeks following His resurrection (Luke 24:32, Acts 1:3). The Holy Spirit guided His followers into doctrinal truth all the rest of their lives (John 16:13). The truth would indeed set them free—free from the errors of men (John 8:32). Christ laid out the entire structure of the Christian life to His apostles. Paul urged the young evangelist Timothy to entrust to reliable men *the same teachings* Paul had imparted (2 Timothy 2:2). There was no room for "progressive revelation" or variety of belief in the fundamentals of the faith! Other books were written for our information; the Bible was written for our transformation. It is an awesome responsibility to own a Bible—have the truth of God in your very own hands! We can never say on Judgment day, "But Lord, my church taught such-and-such," for Christ will reply, "But you had My truth in your hands—why did you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and not obey Me?"

Do you want to know what Jesus taught? Look to these Scriptures! Go to the Bible regularly, open it prayerfully, read it expectantly, live it joyfully. The Bible is the Christian's constitution. Man is responsible to God for becoming what God has made possible for him to become.

No Infallible Teachers Today!

Should you to accept a "new" teaching or "idea-baby"—some new slant—on the truth? Only if it is in perfect harmony with the writings of both the Old and New Testaments! And should you abandon a traditional teaching or doctrine of your church? Only when the change is clearly proven *without shadow of doubt* from the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The proverb, "remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set," applies spiritually as well as physically (Proverbs 22:28). "Meddle not with them that are given to change" (Proverbs 24:21).

We need both the Old and New Testaments, not the Old or New Testament. Not since the death of the apostle John at the end of the first Christian century have there been living apostles whose words are directly inspired by God. Isaiah prophesied the law and the testimony would be *sealed up among His disciples*" (Isaiah 8:16). The leadership of the churches of God is "inspired" in their words and teachings *only* as they reflect the written Word of God—though God gives His church insights in regard to the application of His Word for our times (1 Corinthians 4–6). There are *no infallible teachers* today! None. Zero. Nada, Zilch. Unfortunately, there are many who pontificate and covetously *assume* such a role for the sake of

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Feast Reports, 2005

North Myrtle Beach Feast of Tabernacles – 2005

The Feast of Tabernacles at North Myrtle Beach, SC—2005 will be remembered by many as a positive highlight, even a milestone, in their lives.

In addition to the wonderful spiritual food, there were many opportunities to spend time with old friends and make new ones. At local restaurants, our own reception, Senior Citizen Luncheon, Ministerial Luncheon, and numerous parties at the lodgings of various Feast goers, the atmosphere was truly festive.

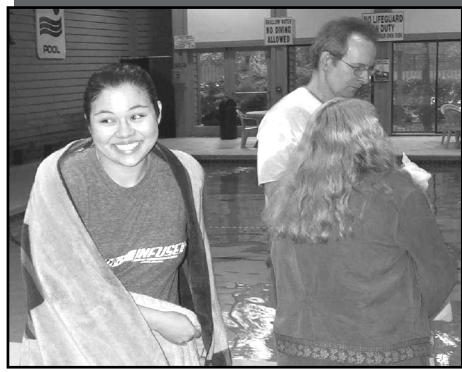
It was surely a Feast to be remembered by the Mike Nolen clan, since Michael Nolen, Jr. made his debut at his first Feast of Tabernacles ever! It was also a Feast to be much remembered by two ladies who were baptized during the Feast there.

The North Myrtle Beach Feast site took on a special international flavor since there was a large group from Bermuda in attendance. Some folks from Canada also enjoyed the southern hospitality at this Feast site.

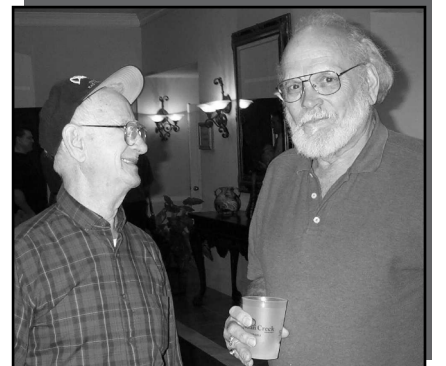
Submitted by Orville Bumgardner □



Brethren from Bermuda attending Feast at North Myrtle Beach



Lele Hong radiates happiness after her baptism as her mother, Shirley Hong, talks with Mike Nolen!



Frank Denman and Eugene Morris reminiscing



Senior Citizens Luncheon



Bob and Betty Simmons and Dorothy Denman at the Ministerial Luncheon



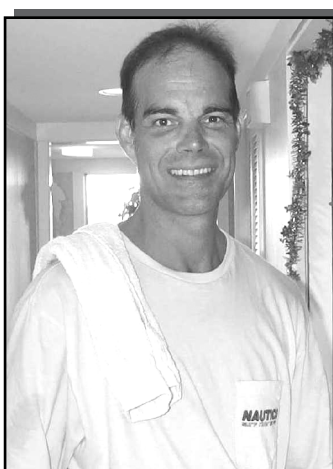
Bermuda brethren at North Myrtle Beach! From L. to R.: John Richardson, David Dill, Kae Foggs, LaVern Richardson, Joan Evans, Joan Thompson, and Latoia Richardson seated in front



Michael Nolen, Jr.—At Ease!



Work doesn't dampen their spirits! Brenda Walker of Bath, Ohio gets an assist from Lynn Wright of Sarasota, FL at the Walkers' party



Tom Walker Drafted for Kitchen Duty!



Choir Practice!



Pam Nolen & Michael Nolen, Jr.

Church News

On the Road Again—with Mike James!



Hello from Germantown, Maryland. I just wanted to pass on a little information on my initial months as an elder in the church.

Two of the highlights of my eldership thus far have been road trips I've taken to Detroit and Atlanta. I logged about 2,280 total driving miles on both trips. Driving the long distances allows me to catch up on church tapes and meditation, although during the Detroit trip I was accompanied by some members of my Maryland group who have family in Detroit.

On January 21, 2006 I spoke at the Detroit church of Mr. Bronson James. I estimate that there were about 30 people in attendance. All of the brethren in Detroit were very warm and generous to me. I REALLY enjoyed their potluck too! The church in Detroit has a nice location in a large office complex. I was impressed by their facilities for meeting and fellowship. I'd also like to thank Steve Sandy for allowing me to stay in his home the evening before I spoke.

On February 18, 2006 I spoke to the Atlanta church. I estimate there were about 25 people in attendance. Once again the brethren were very warm and the potluck was on a par with the Detroit potluck. The church in Atlanta rents space in a Unitarian church. I'd like to thank Mike and Rebecca Rogers for allowing me to stay with them

during my visit to Atlanta.

In May I plan on joining Mr. Bill Watson in New York City as he conducts a public Bible study. The exact dates are not set as of this writing due to hotel meeting room availability. We have a number of people interested in the church in New York due to the *Armor of God* program on the Word Network. If all goes well, we are hoping to try to get a group started in the New York City area.

If anyone is ever in the Washington D.C. Area, please feel free to visit our CGI group in Gaithersburg, Maryland. We meet on the 2nd and 4th Sabbaths of each month at the Casey Community Center. We have about a dozen people here, so we would really like the company. I also visit with a small group about once a month in the Baltimore (Randallstown), Maryland area. This group is called *Destiny of Hope Ministries*. Pastor Robert Woodland leads this small group that began keeping God's Sabbath and holy days a few years ago. Pastor Woodland's wife Beverly is the sister of Deacon George Ramacon from *The Church of God International* in Jamaica. Mr. Ramacon was instrumental in leading the pastor and his wife into a fuller understanding of God's truth. *Destiny of Hope* is affiliated with the CGI and they would welcome any visitors to the Baltimore area. They meet every Sabbath.

That's all for this trip. See you all later. *Zooooooooom!* □

Mike James



I'm a Travelin' Man

The 1950s/60s teen idol Ricky Nelson crooned "I'm a Travelin' Man, made a lot of stops all over the World..." And in my years serving as an elder in the ministry of Jesus Christ with Bible and sermon notes in hand, I too have been a travelin' man, making stops in Scotland and Missouri and British Columbia and Florida and Texas and back home in Fort Thomas, Kentucky.

These past four months have been no exception. The tags on my suit case read: Springfield, MO; Nashville and Knoxville, TN; Columbus, OH; Penticton, BC; Calgary, AB; plus two trips to visit the Church of God, Cincinnati; and a day of visiting classes and touring the facilities of the United Church of God in nearby Milford, OH—and of course, my home church in Fort Thomas.

In the few years since my ordination, I have had the wonderful opportunity to share the precious Gospel of Christ's Word and to fellowship with twenty-two of our congregations. That is a priceless privilege that I shall always cherish.

My visits to the Church of God, Cincinnati reacquainted with me with brethren that I had not seen nor fellowshiped with since I left the Worldwide Church of God in 1988. It felt like old times to be sure. The pastor, Mr. Jim O'Brien, who has spoken at our Tyler Home Church frequently, invites me to speak there and for our Fort Thomas church to share in worship with them in the spirit of brotherhood.

My most recent trips were my first to Springfield and Penticton; only my second to Nashville and Calgary. But everywhere I go, although the congregations are usually smallish, I am taken by Psalms 133:1 "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." No matter where I visit, I always have to think for a moment whether I am in Alberta or Tennessee.

The visit to Springfield meant a warm and wonderful reunion with the entire Register family, who have their Church of God roots back over fifty years

The itinerate travels of a Church of God International elder. by Bob Swimm

or more. We first met in 2001 at the Feast in Harrison Hot Springs, BC and shared so many memories with the Canadian brethren for four years there. While there in addition to the services, had the opportunity to take in the Branson experience and a Bobby Vinton concert with my "Feast Buddy" from Land Between the Lakes, Judy Foulks.

In late February, at the invitation John Coish, who oversees the Canadian work, I flew to Penticton, BC, for services and a Bible study. It was surely great to see old friends again. My "parents" Alex and Betty Riel took me under their wings as always, and it was so good to see newly baptized Gert Moore, who is looking forward to her first Passover at age 85. A special thank you to Jean Burke (our pianist), who with her friend Joyce took me on a delightful drive up to Summerland to Zias Stonehouse Restaurant (built 1916) for lunch. What breathtaking scenery and beauty in that part of British Columbia! Mrs. Burke is the widow of long time elder Desmond.

After the double service, and eating together two delightful meals, longtime member James Ludvigson remarked, "This was like adding an extra Holy Day." And indeed it was.

Arriving in Calgary, there was much snow and blustery wind, but the folks of Alberta think nothing of it. Just as in Penticton, we had a delightful double service and much food and fellowship. Met the local contacts Shane Pye and Keith Hunt for the first time. Mr. Hunt, born in Wales, is a wonderful singer and musician, and before I left he gave me five of his CD's. I was delighted to see Mr. and Mrs. Frank Bean drive down from northern Alberta. Frank played several tunes on his trumpet for special music. A special treat for me

was to see an old friend, Ernie, had made his way through the snow from southern Alberta. The Pyes have a son Caleb, 21, who is an example to all young church people.

The day I arrived home I received a call from Jason Nitzburg. I've known Jason from going to the Knoxville church when Jason was 15 or so; now he is 23, bearded and an ABC student at the United Church of God. He invited me to sit in on some of his classes and to visit and so I accepted. I knew Mr. and Mrs. Register's son David was there (also Judy's nephew); I had never been there and was curious, so I was anxious to see Jason and to go. I was welcomed warmly by Mr. Register, Mr. Gary Antion, and a surprise speaker, Mr. Edward Smith, who was my WCG Pastor in 1969, and who I had not seen since 1996 when he and I officiated a CGI funeral together. It was a wonderful day well spent.

This is getting long, but I trust you have found interesting the wanderings of a Church of God International itinerate elder.

Next quarter I'm lined up for more of Springfield, Columbus, Calgary, and who knows where? □

A very lively and inspiring local Ministerial Conference was held on March 19th in Columbus, Ohio. Charles Groce and Bill Watson presided, covering a multitude of topics, drawing the ministry ever closer together. Thirteen were in attendance.

Although we received no Feast Report from our Gulf Shores, Alabama site for 2005, we understand all the Feast attendees had a *wonderful* Feast in every way.

What's going on in *your* local Church area? Share it with us in "Church News." We'd love to hear from you!
The editor

A True History According to Holy Scripture

Chapter 4

Understanding the Life of the Patriarch Abraham The Father of the Faithful

by Benjamin R. Chapman



The *Holy Scriptures* are filled with incredible, almost hard-to-believe stories of human endeavor in this world. These episodes have been included in the Bible hopefully to motivate us, always to inspire us, often to titillate us, ever to intrigue us, to answer many questions, and to show us the way God wants us to

enjoy our way through life and ultimately to *become prepared* for the awesome rewards He wants us to have in His Kingdom. Prophecies are of major importance, as they reveal the nature and plan of God, either through past fulfillment or in the days and years just ahead, through awesome, incredible events that will take our breaths away!

This study is not just about ancient history, but is also about a major prophecy God has revealed in the pages of your Bible that has tremendous long-term effects on all of mankind. It has much to do with our Messiah, Jesus Christ, and what He is doing today in our lives, in His church, and in this world. Many of the things you are going to read in this study are down-right shocking, unimaginable, almost unbelievable, yet *absolutely true*! Only in the pages of your Bible could you read such an incredible story, with incredible lessons for us.

What I am most concerned with is God's Plan to *restore His government* on this earth! Adam and Eve sinned and were forced out of the Garden of Eden. And, except for a few personalities in the Bible, man has failed to really follow God. Jesus Christ came from the God Family as the Word to reveal His Father and His plan, and today awaits His Father's instructions to come back to this earth with His Father's government. What you read in the Bible is much of the story of how God is planning to re-establish His government on this earth and how we fit into His great calling.

The core of this story is God's Plan to bring His government back to this planet.

We read in the pages of our Bibles the miserable lives of mankind, and our abject failure to follow His ways, but interspersed with the occasional successful lives of some of God's patriarchs who were willing to choose and faithfully follow His ways.

Preparing the Way for the Re-introduction of the Government of God

The heart of this story begins with one man, a 75-year old "senior" citizen who lived in the far-away city of Haran in ancient Mesopotamia. Born into the family of the patriarch Terah, this man, called Abram, had two brothers, Nahor and Haran. Terah took Abram and Abram's wife, Sarai—ten years younger than he and childless—and his nephew Lot, after living for many years in the city of Ur of the Chaldees, to move to the land of Canaan, but went only as far as the city of Haran and settled down. Old Terah died there at the age of 205 (Genesis 11:32):

"And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran."

God's revelation begins in earnest in Haran when Abram had a vision or dream from God which told him to continue on his travels to Canaan, for God had an adventure for him that would make this man into one of the most outstanding patriarchs of all time, a prophet of all great prophets, a man considered in scriptures as the father of the faithful,

Editor's note: This is the fourth installment of a series by Benjamin R. Chapman on the history of the world according to Biblical data. Mr. Chapman has completed several chapters and plans to eventually publish the entire series in a single volume. Until the volume is completed and made available, we plan to run segments of the work serially in *The International News*.

and a progenitor of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. A seemingly unbelievable story, but nonetheless absolutely true.

The clue to understanding the year of Abram's birth can be found in the very next verses found in Genesis 12:1-6:

"Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

Abram did not whine or argue with God, but simply obeyed! Undoubtedly, his family had already taught him something about *faith* and the importance of *obedience* to God! His faith was to grow many fold in the future years of his life! Continuing in Genesis 12:4-6:

"So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was *seventy and five years old* when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land."

2008 A.M., Abram

The implication of these scriptures is very clear. Abram's father died in Haran at age 205. God then called Abram to move to Canaan, and he was 75 when he left shortly after his father's death. Therefore, his father must have been 205 less 75 or 130 years old when Abram was begotten. This is all the scriptures reveal on this matter, so what other solution could we have? Dr. Herman Hoeh and most commentaries agree with this conclusion. I have chosen this solution, too. We conclude that Abram was born in 2008 A.M.

2018 A.M., Sarai

His wife Sarai was born ten years later in 2018 A.M. See Genesis 17:17.

"Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?"

2083 A.M., to Canaan

Next, we come to Abram's journey south to Canaan and then onto Egypt. It is covered in detail in Genesis 12:7-10. How long this journey took is not defined in the Bible and is not significant to our study.

Notice in verses 2 and 4, God promised Abram that he would become a great nation, and in all the families of the earth, Abram would be a blessing. God then appeared to Abram again and promised him that to his descendants God would give this land. Continuing:

"And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said,

Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south. And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land."

Abram still had valuable lessons in faith to learn. The powerful 4th Pharaoh of Dynasty XI of Thebes was Nebhepetre Mentuhotpe, according to Dr. Hoeh's *Compendium of World History*, who ruled at the time Abram entered Egypt, and was the Pharaoh who took Sarai into his harem. The story continues in Gen. 12:11-20:

"And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon. Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be will with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee. And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels. And the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife. And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way. And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had."

It was true that Sarai was Abram's sister, his *half-sister*. Abram did not yet have enough faith to put his total trust in God to protect him and his wife! That great lesson of faith was to come later when God asked him to sacrifice Isaac his son!

The tie-in of the Bible to early Egyptian history will be covered in Chapter 8. You will find it fascinating!

Again, God spoke to Abram concerning His expanding promises.

"And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward. For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, *then* shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee" (Genesis 13:14-17).

Approaching eighty years of age, with no children yet, this man is promised the inheritance of the land AND many descendants! This is just the beginning of incredibly-expanded promises made to this man and his family by Almighty God. What a road God had started this humble servant Abram down! After a short visit to Egypt, where Abram learned a valuable experience in telling "half-truths" (Sarai was truly his

CONTINUED on next page

half-sister), he returned to the Negev a man very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. But the land could not sustain both the abundance of Lot and Abram, so they separated (Abram to Canaan and Lot to the environs of the wicked city of Sodom).

Amraphel was the king of Shinar, a place where a major part of civilization began (Genesis 14:1). We discussed much of this part of ancient history in Chapter 3. Next we read in Genesis 14:9-12 that Abram's nephew Lot was taken captive.

"With Chedorlaomer the king of Elam, and with Tidal king of nations, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings with five. And the vale of Siddim was full of slimepits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountains. And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all the victuals, and went their way. And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed."

Abram learned of his nephew's plight, armed his 318 trained servants, and pursued these foes to Dan (Genesis 14:14). He divided himself against them, thoroughly defeated them, and rescued Lot (verses 15-16). Amraphel, as well as the other kings, were killed. Dr. Hoeh figures this happened when Abram was in his 79th year. I cannot confirm this, but I do know from the Bible that this war occurred between Abram's 75th year (Genesis 12) and his 86th year (Genesis 16). Tying this with the dating of the First Dynasty seems to support the time of the death of Amraphel, Horus' son (4th Pharaoh of Dynasty I, also known as Gilgamesh in Mesopotamia). More details of this Egyptian Dynasty will be presented in Chapter 8.

At this time in his life, these promises were *conditional* based upon Abram being obedient. But he was still childless. God appeared in vision to Abram again in chapter 15:

"After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I *am* thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house *is* this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the LORD *came* unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness"(Genesis 15:1-6).

Abram's faith in God had grown so much that the Eternal counted his belief as righteousness! God responded to Abram's request when he asked, "How may I know that I shall possess it?" Continuing in Genesis 15:7-21:

"And he said unto him, I *am* the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land *that is* not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet full. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning

lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

The promises to Abram had expanded to all the land from the Nile River to the River Euphrates! He was now 85. (Remember, Sarai was ten years younger than Abram and still without child).

2094 A.M., Ishmael

But like many people, Sarai and Abram thought they could take some actions of their own and had to "aid" God in their childless condition. Listening to his wife, Abram took her maid Hagar to be a concubine who bore Ishmael when Abram was 86 years old (Genesis 16:16).

"And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram."

Later, Ishmael was to become the father of many Islamic peoples. The problems Hagar and Ishmael encountered are probably the major causes of the animosity and hatred the Arab people have with the Jews today. Scripture has this also to tell us about this man's future that does not foretell a very peaceful and happy people (Genesis 16:12):

"And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren."

2107 A.M., Covenant of Circumcision

Another thirteen more years passed and Abram reached the age of 99 when God again appeared to him:

"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I *am* the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant *is* with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be *Abraham*; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations" (Genesis 17:1-9).

God had established a covenant relationship with Abraham (changing his name to mean "father of a multitude of nations" and his wife's name to Sarah, "mother of nations") through the covenant of circumcision. He promised a child through his wife who was to be named Isaac. Abraham, his son Ishmael and all Abraham's male servants were circumcised to confirm their agreement to this monumental covenant.

"And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him. And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. In *the selfsame day* was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son. And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were

circumcised with him" (Genesis 17:23-27).

The expression *the selfsame day* will be visited again!

Is Anything Too Hard for God?

On His way to inspect Sodom, God and two angels appeared to Abraham, had a meal with him, and reconfirmed His promise to Abraham and Sarah that she would have a son in her old age.

"Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? *Is anything too hard for the LORD?* At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son" (Genesis 18:11-14).

Upon hearing the fate of the Sodomites, Abraham interceded for the righteous men (including his own nephew Lot) but there were *fewer than ten* (!), so God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot, his wife and two daughters were saved by the actions of the two angels (Genesis 19:15-16). They fled to the city of Zoar, then on to the mountains, but Lot's wife turned to look back on Sodom (probably still with the desire of returning there) and she was turned into a pillar of salt. To preserve seed of their father, Lot's two daughters got their father drunk, had sexual relations with him, and had sons whom they named Moab (father of the Moabites) and Benammi (father of the Ammonites).

Abraham Makes Another Mistake with "Half-Sister"

Abraham's faith was not complete yet. He journeyed towards the south country, down to Gerar, where Abimelech their king took Sarah for his wife. But this time God warned Abimelech in a dream, and though he may have been honorable in this affair, God did not allow him to sin with Sarah. It's a good lesson for all of us: Yes, positively don't sin; but always give God the credit and thanks when you don't! Always give Almighty God all the credit for any righteousness you may show! The prophet Isaiah tells us in Isaiah 64:6 that "...all our righteousnesses are considered as filthy rags." Now read on in Genesis 20:1-6:

"And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife. But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this. And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her."

By this time God had considered Abraham a prophet. See verse 7:

"Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine."

Later Abraham prayed for this king and his wife so that they could have children. Apparently God had closed the wombs of all Abimelech's house! Abraham's prayer was heard and they were healed.

We will read of Isaac's remarkable birth in Genesis 21 in the next chapter of this study. Abraham would be 100 years old and Sarah, 90. God would keep His promise to give them a son! □

Hello, my name is Kim Kozak

The Story of a Conversion



Hello, my name is Kim Kozak, a member of the *Church of God International* here in Chicago. Our Pastor, Duane Nicol asked me a few weeks ago if I would be interested in going up in front of you and giving my personal testimony, and I replied with a resounding YES!

I was born and raised the oldest of three daughters in the Midwest, in NW Indiana near Chicago. My father was an electrician for Inland Steel but was always going to a class to learn something new. He received his bachelor's degree and MBA while working and supporting a family and was my role model for staying active and learning new things. My mom stayed at home after I was born and took care of us and picked us up from our extracurricular activities. From her I learned the value of family and the importance of taking care of people and showing them compassion. As you can see, both of my parents had a tremendous influence on me. They were full of love and support in whatever we did. They also taught us how to take care of ourselves. What they didn't give us though, was a strong religious foundation. My father grew up Catholic, left the church for a few years after he divorced his first wife, and married my mom. I started catechism school in the fifth grade, where everyone else starts in the first grade. I remember being drawn to Him at that age and was fascinated with His promises of eternal life. I certainly did not want to get on God's bad side, for fear of what could happen to me. Unfortunately, my training was loosely structured. As long as I went to church and religious classes, my parents were content. They really didn't talk about our beliefs to any great degree. So, I stayed the course with the teachings of the Catholic Church and its traditions. Sadly, that was the depth of my understanding of Jesus Christ and His teachings.

I went to college and kept up with Church, but just the bare minimum. I went to Mass, participated in communion and confession, participated in their Holy Days, and thought I had a pretty good understanding of what it was to be a Christian. I've never claimed to be a theologian, but like everyone else, presumed I knew enough and that I was saved.

After getting a degree in civil engineering, I entered the work force as an engineer for a construction firm. I became preoccupied with the influence of money and what it could give me. Church and prayer became less important. I was doing fine, had a good paying job and was on my own. I didn't realize that my newfound independence and so-called wealth was leading me away from God. I remember at times feeling empty and depressed. I felt disconnected and alone in dealing with my problems.

I was blessed with doing relatively well in my career and moved out to the east coast for six years and was promoted to managing construction projects. All was well until I got a phone call in January 1999. My dad had been diagnosed with throat cancer. My world changed and so did my family's. I realized how far I strayed from Jesus, because now I was saying prayers daily, going to church every week, making sure not to miss the Catholic Holy Days of Obligation, going to First Friday and First Saturday masses, going to confession, etc. As my dad's condition worsened, I decided to move back to Chicago. I only wished I had done it sooner.

I don't blame God for the cancer that afflicted my dad. In fact, I look at myself and wonder if I caused his condition. Not directly... but did God let this happen because he knew that that was the only way to get my attention?

In the time that passed after my father's death, I was still attending church, going through the motions, saying the standardized prayers that was part of Catholic Doctrine. I thought I was on the right track until I came across a special seed.

It started with a discussion of Leviticus 11, unclean meats. Why was pork and shellfish bad? Would I have to give up lobster and shrimp and crabs and bacon and ribs? Now keep in mind that most of the knowledge we often take for granted was unknown to me a year ago. But was this really true; was it really in the *Bible*? If this is true, then *why* hadn't I heard about it before? So that night when I got home, guess what I did? You got it! I grabbed my Bible off the shelf, blew off the dust, and turned to Leviticus. After reading this, I was absolutely dumbfounded. What I thought I understood about Catholicism and Christianity was being uprooted, one precept at a time.

“Never underestimate the potential of the seed that you sow! If you stray from God, what will He have to do to get your attention?”

So, after unclean meats was the discussion of Holy Days versus holidays with a church member. This one blew me away. Why doesn't the Church of God celebrate Easter and Christmas? Everybody else celebrates it! It's the fundamentals of Christianity: the birth and death of Jesus Christ. What is wrong with that? And millions if not billions of people celebrate these holidays, so they could not all be wrong... could they?

Now of course I knew the Ten Commandments and thought I was keeping the Sabbath by going to church on Sunday. But is Saturday the Sabbath, and not Sunday? Again, back to the Bible to see if I could prove to myself that Sunday was the Sabbath, or at least reconcile why it had been changed.

In May of 2005 I was invited to attend the *Church of God International* services in Chicago. Bill Watson was visiting and gave a sermon on "Spirit Beings," and what happens to us after death. I truly believed what I was hearing; I couldn't refute it. Mr. Watson was pulling verse after verse from the Bible to prove what he was saying as God-inspired truth. From that day on I was "hooked" on learning more about what the Bible really said and the truths that Jesus Christ preached about.

A lot has changed since this past May. I've seen my life change in ways I never suspected. I've become more patient, more understanding, and most importantly, I feel so much closer to God. In the past I've gone through bouts of depression, loneliness, anger. However, those feelings have decreased dramatically. I can actually feel God's love in me. I am happy and content and absolutely beam with God's love. I also know when I am not walking with Him, that is when I let my pride get to me, or become caught up in the material world. When I am not in God's grace, I feel disconnected and burdened, and pray for forgiveness, even if I don't know what it is that I've done. That empty feeling is an awful feeling, and is something I am mindful of when I am tempted to stray from Jesus. I trust Him to take care of me and turn to Him in my time of need.

The Church of God has also had a tremendous

influence on me as well. I am studying the Bible more and have found our Bible study questions and discussions, though frustrating at times, essential for my spiritual growth. Sermons, prayers, fellowship, and celebrating the Holy Days have been inspirational. I am truly fascinated with the truths that I hear.

I have started rebuilding the foundation of my faith, and this time I'm trying with God's help to make it stable and unshakable. I'm sure it will develop cracks over the course of time, but I feel that I am more watchful of its structural integrity and will be ready to make repairs of any breeches that may happen.

I have received many blessings as well. I have been taken in by my local congregation here in Chicago, as well as other brethren I've met at the Feast; all who have been very kind and loving. I've been presented with several opportunities in the Church, and hope that God will bless me with many more.

I currently work in the construction industry as a project manager, which entails working on Saturdays.

I have prayed to Jesus to guide me in the direction He wants me to go: if I should try to work something out with my current employer, or move on. It wasn't until I started tithing that I was showing Him that I truly wanted to keep His laws. Within the last two weeks, He has provided me an opportunity to change employers, which will allow me to keep the Sabbath fully as well as the Holy Days, will pay more, and have more benefits than what I am currently receiving. I truly feel blessed. For those who say "why should I tithe?" I can give you an excellent example.

I'd like to leave you with a couple of thoughts: What seeds will you sow? And never underestimate the potential of the seed that you sow. If you stray from God, what will He have to do to get your attention?

The seed that was planted over a year ago has started to grow and become fruitful. I was certainly blessed to be baptized last August by Jim Patterson, the person who gave me that seed. But my walk in faith does not stop at my baptism, for all seeds need to be watered and nurtured. I believe that Jesus challenges us every day to come closer to Him, to understand His Way.

Thank you, Pastor Nicol, for giving me this opportunity to tell my story and for all of the help and support you've offered me. And thank you brethren, for taking me in and being so kind. I have certainly learned a lot from you as well. From your examples, I can see what *agape* truly is

Submitted by Kim Kozak, CGI, Chicago □

Hot off the press!!!

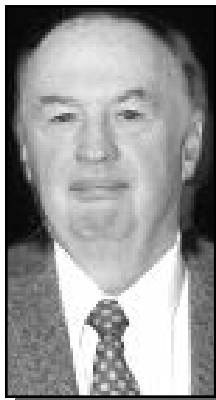
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Or call
903 939-2929

HEAVEN OR GOD'S KINGDOM...Which?

Most professing Christians believe going to heaven and the Kingdom of God are one and the same. But what does the Bible say?

by James Pollitte



King David asked this question of God: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet" (Psalm 8:3-6).

In these scriptures David asks God WHY He thinks about mankind, *mere man*. WHY does He care for him? David reiterates God's appointment of man over *everything*, including the *entire universe* He created.

The apostle Paul also offered this insight into God's sovereignty and His plan for man. In Hebrews 2:7-8 we are told, (verse 8) "...there is not anything created by God that was not placed under man's dominion; BUT NOT YET." Paul wrote this about 60 AD. If the time for everything in creation to be under man's dominion hadn't happened yet, then when was it going to happen? And just *what* was Paul talking about?

The Universe Is a Very Large Place!

Since I was a small child I have imagined being among the stars. David was inspired to write the eighth Psalm (song) after gazing into the heavens and realizing they—the moon and stars, were also included in that dominion. The universe is of infinite expanse where time and space are relative in our human realm. Our human travel is limited by the speed of light. Even at the speed of light, man can barely get to the nearest star system in a lifetime. And that's just the nearest one. We know, through the latest scientific data acquired by the Hubble Space Telescope, there are galaxies and stars some 15 billion light years in any direction. That means, traveling at the speed of light for one year (six trillion miles), it would take man 15 billion years to reach them if he could travel at the speed of light... which he cannot.

So, how does God travel in the universe? How does He get around? We know there is no place He cannot be. That's impossible for man, but plausible for God. He is able to occupy space and time as only "spirit" can. *His Spirit permeates the wholeness of the universe* in a way utterly beyond man's present capabilities. As David expressed it, "Where shall I go from thy spirit? Or where shall I go from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, *you are there...*" (Psalm 139:7-8).

The concept of an *infinite universe* is beyond our human grasp. How then will man have dominion over the universe when we are limited in time and distance? To do that wouldn't we have to be like God?

Jesus' Example

We can partly understand this if we consider what Jesus was able to do after His resurrection. His example illustrates what can be done as a "spirit" being with the appearance of a physical man. He was able to travel to heaven and back to earth, as He ascended to the Father and returned to be among his disciples. With His new "body" He was able to appear and disappear at will. While "appearing"

in His fleshly body He was even able to eat physical food. These are just a few of the things He could do after His resurrection.

Christ is the *only* man to have died and be resurrected. He experienced what awaits those yet to be transformed from flesh to spirit. Remember, Christ was the *first* of the first fruits. There remains therefore a dramatic change for those who qualify to "put off mortality and put on immortality."

I Corinthians 15:19-28 says, "If *only* for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the *first fruits* of those who have fallen asleep. For since *death* came through a man, the *resurrection of the dead* comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ *all will be made alive*. But each in his own turn: Christ, the *first fruits*; then, when he comes, *those who belong to him*. Then the end [of this age] will come, when he hands over the *kingdom* to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he *'has put everything under his feet.'* Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this *does not* include God himself, *who put everything under Christ*. When He has done this, then the Son Himself will be made subject to Him who put everything under Him, *so that God may be all in all.*"

We Are True Children of God

The apostle John writes that *we are children of God and shall be like God*, for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). The apostle Peter writes that Jesus Christ is now in heaven at the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject to Him (1 Peter 3:22). John also writes that those in the first resurrection will *reign with Christ one thousand years on this earth* (Revelation 20:6).

Notice what these two verses indicate will happen when Christ returns to this earth:

- Revelation 20:6, "Blessed and holy are those who have part in the *first resurrection*. The *second death* has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years."
- Zechariah 14:4, "On that day (Christ's return to this earth) *his feet will stand* on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south."

On that "*great day* of the Lord," Jesus Christ will stand on the Mount of Olives and He will begin ruling this earth. His direct involvement with this world will begin changing everything, as we know. It will be a remarkable time leading up to an absolutely unfathomable event!

God's Throne To Be On Earth

The apostle John writes (Revelation 21 and 22) that the New Jerusalem, the holy city of God, comes down from heaven (to this earth) and God speaks out of heaven saying: "Behold the tabernacle (dwelling place) of God is *with men*, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be their God."

So, in this round about way we can see that man will not go to heaven; rather God Himself will come down to this earth.

Here's a little more "revelation" and admonition from the apostle John:

In Revelation 22, we find that Jesus Christ says (verse 7), "*Behold, I am coming soon!* Blessed is he who keeps the word of the prophecy in this book." Continuing in verses 12-14: "Behold, I am coming soon! *My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done*. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city."

These few verses show very clearly that the saved man or woman will *NOT* go to heaven when they die. Heaven is *not* the reward of the saved. The reward of the saved is eternal life with Jesus Christ as a part of the family of God... on this earth!

May God help us to not only obey His word... but believe in His promises. He's going to keep His word. Are we going to keep it as well? □

The Rise and Fall of Nations

*Where are we now?
What can we do?*

Throughout history optimists have assured, "It can't happen here," or "Our country is different," or even, "We are a godly, 'Christian' nation." Yet history has demonstrated the average life expectancy of the great civilizations down through time is approximately two hundred years. Nearly all the great civilizations in the world have passed through this series of graduating steps or stages from birth to decline and ultimately to their demise. A very few nations, such as the British Empire, have exceeded this average, while other countries, such as the United States, are now approaching the average age in this rise and fall of nations cycle. Some historians have listed these in ten stages as follows:

1. From Bondage to Spiritual Faith.
2. From Spiritual Faith to Great Courage.
3. From Great Courage to Liberty.
4. From Liberty to Abundance.
5. From Abundance to Excess and Selfishness.
6. From Selfishness to Complacency.
7. From Complacency to Apathy.
8. From Apathy to Sexual Moral Decay.
9. From Sexual Moral Decay to Dependence.
10. Finally, from Dependence to Bondage.

The question of the day is, where are we *now* in this vicious cycle... and can we do anything to break out of it?

The answer may be found in 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

This is the good news the *Armor of God* and the *Church of God International* [www.cgi.org] is proclaiming (Isaiah 58:1).

How are we doing? □

Christendom, continued from page 3

merchandising God's people (2 Peter 2:3). And there are many thousands who willingly and gullibly are deceived by their claims!

Too often Christians will flit to a new but powerfully presented doctrine without thorough examination of the Bible texts. Again, Paul urged, "Prove all things. Hold fast to what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Elsewhere he said: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears (1 Timothy 4:3). Quite an indictment! Paul warned of "grievous wolves" entering in among God's people. "Also of your own selves," he warned, "shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:29-30). "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness [lawlessness], and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:4).

Could You Believe a Lie?

The apostle Paul gave a solemn warning that is of special application today. Writing to the church at Thessalonica about the crisis at the close of this age—our day—he warned of a time of coming worldwide deception perpetrated by a "wicked man." This wretched being "whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish *because* they received not the *love of the truth*, that they might be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). Ah, there it is! "The *love of the truth*!" Note the *Bible* definition of truth: "Thy Word *is* truth" (John 17:17)—God's Word the Bible.

If we fail to measure our beliefs against the yardstick of the divinely inspired Word of the Living God we will be led into error. The apostle Paul has a strong warning for those who *don't* love the truth: "And for *this* cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:11-1). The "delusion" is alive and well today. God judicially sends hardness of heart—a wrong spirit or attitude—on those who have rejected the truth, and gives them up in righteous judgment to Satan's delusions (Isaiah 6:9-10). Whenever man casts off the love of the truth God gives him up to Satan's delusions, and they settle down into "believing the lie" (1 Kings 22:22-23). What a fearful warning! Failure to *love* God's Word leads to creeping spiritual dementia in which the unloving end up believing Satanic lies.

Do You Love the Truth?

Do you "love the truth"? Are you willing to compare your beliefs with the inspired Word of God? When you hear "new doctrine"—from whatever source—are you, like the Bereans (Acts 17:11), eager to "search the Scriptures [for the Bereans this meant the Qld Testament!] to see if these things were so"? Or do you simply accept your friend's, church's, or some "eminent scholar's" teachings without question? It is easy to be convinced of something we want to believe anyway!

God has given us all we need to know about Himself, the way of salvation, and how we ought to behave in His Word, the Bible. Admittedly there are areas where some matters have cause for legitimate debate, but the broad brushstrokes of vital truth are clear for all who have the spiritual eye to see. God's Word is there for us to prove—personally (Isaiah 1:18)!

Virtually the whole of traditional Christianity has gone astray from God's Word and feeds off long-established teachings that are pagan beliefs gift-wrapped in Christian clothing. Both Old and New Testaments are relegated to the trash heap! Fault-finding men do not reject the Bible because it contradicts itself, but because it contradicts them.

Where do you get your beliefs? How do they compare with the Scriptures? Are you certain your view of Christian doctrine isn't just a veneer of Bible-sounding words that hide ancient lies? Let all who claim to be Christ's fine-tune their love for the truth, and earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the church in the Holy Scriptures!

If you are not yet committed to Jesus Christ and His teachings, you are invited to investigate further. True faith is built on the foundation of sound Bible knowledge. Without this knowledge you can sincerely "believe"—and yet be deceived! James asks, "Thou *believest* that there is one God; thou doest well: *the devils also believe*, and tremble"—but they will not repent or obey (James 2:19)! *The Church of God International* publishes a wide range of titles on cassette tape, CD, booklets and articles which highlight the core teachings of Scripture as free from faulty human tradition as we know how! If you have not already done so, we invite you to write for our list of free publications, our free booklets, *How To Study Your Bible*, *How To Be A Real Christian*, our *Home Study Bible Course* and a copy of the *Church of God International's Statement of Beliefs*.

Isn't it time that you return to the faith once delivered unto the saints?

□

The Tool Chests of God and the Devil

by Lloyd W. Cary

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. And the LORD said unto Satan, "Whence comest thou?" Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, "From going to and from in the earth, and from walking up and down in it."

"What is that in thine hand?" the Lord asked him.

"This is my tool box containing the tools wherewith I deceive the nations" (Revelation 18:4)

"Show Me thy wares," the Lord said.

Satan set down his tool box and removed a velvet-covered case displaying a set of fine, polished, beautifully hand-crafted, surgically sharp, but wicked-looking tools, full of hooks and barbs. The names of the tools were emblazoned on them in blood: *pride, hypocrisy, malice, deceit, envy, jealousy, greed, hatred, and sensuality*. Oddly, none of the tools had handles.

"Where is the handle by which you use these tools?" the Lord asked him.

Satan reached into his cloak and pulled out an old, blood-stained object that was so worn that the name upon it was illegible.

"What callest thou this instrument?" the Lord asked.

"It is called 'The Lie,'" Satan answered. "The Lie is the handle that fits them all."

"Thou sayest," the Lord replied.

"Show me Thy tool chest," the Devil said, "by which Thou intendest to defeat me."

The Lord produced His tool chest and opened it for Satan to see.

The Devil laughed. "Your tools are few, small, and worthless, while mine are many and great and costly. What are these sorry-looking tools and what are they for?"

The Lord gently removed each tool one by one and displayed them before the Devil. The names of the tools were emblazoned on them in pure gold. "These are called My '*foolish things*'" God explained, "and are used to confound the wise." He lovingly held up each tool and examined them after another. "These are called '*weak things*'—these confound the things that are mighty. And these are called '*base things*'—to put the ignoble to shame. Here are My '*despised things*'—to put the contemptible to shame. And, finally, these are '*things which are not*'—to put the ignorant to shame."

"And what," the Devil asked, "is the handle that fits all these contemptible tools?"

"My Holy Spirit will empower these vessels to be My sons."

"Bah! How can this *be*?" the Devil wondered.

"Not many wise men after the flesh," the Lord told him, "not many mighty, not many noble are called that no flesh should glory in My presence. Your ways of pride, vanity, and worldly wisdom are obstacles to My spirit. Your way and your fruit is corrupt. The fruit of My spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Only those who are of a humble and contrite heart are aware of their limitations they and trust wholly in Me. My servant Paul wrote 'For my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: *for when I am weak, then am I strong*' (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). These, My people, know Me and keep My commandments. Now go from My presence, O Lucifer, for soon I shall demand an accounting of thee."

And the devil gathered up his tools with trembling hand and went from the presence of the Lord.

* * *

Although the above conversation is purely imaginary, metaphorically, it raises a question. Every problem, challenge, and trial we face can take us one step closer to God... or one step further away. When facing the obstacles of life we must ask ourselves: "What kind of tool am I... a tool of God, or a tool of Satan?"

The choice, dear reader, is entirely up to you.

□

In loving memory...



Mildred Laprise

Mildred Laprise

May 13, 1924—March 17, 2006

Mildred Eileen Laprise, a resident of Chatham, died Friday, March 17, 2006 at Meadow Park Nursing Home at the age of 81. Born in Chatham, daughter of the late George Garfield and Grace Evelyn (Mills) Moore. Beloved wife of the late Harvey Joseph Laprise (1999). Dear mother of Loretta & Leland Jasper, Chatham; Jeanette and Wayne Zurbrigg, R.R. #2, Palmerston and Gary and Cheryl Laprise, R.R. #1, Charing Cross. Grandmother of twelve, Great Grandmother of nine and Great Great Grandmother of two. Sister of Clayton and Lena Moore, Chatham; Eleanor Dent, Wallaceburg and the late Morley Moore, Dorothy Holland, Beulah Holland, Orval Moore, Hazel Bessant, Reginald Moore, Carmen O'Grady and infant Charles Moore.

Friends will be received at the McKinlay Funeral Home, 459 St. Clair St., Chatham on Wednesday March 22, 2006 from 2:00–4:30 and 7:00–9:00 p.m. Funeral Service at the Funeral Home on Thursday March 23, 2006 at 1:30 p.m. with Jerry Pokornik officiating. Interment at Maple Leaf Cemetery, Chatham. Donations made by cheque to the Arthritis Society or the Ontario Heart and Stroke Foundation appreciated.

I want to take this opportunity thank each and every one of you for your prayers on behalf of my mother, Mildred Laprise, who passed away early last Friday morning, and for my family and our peculiar set of circumstances.

It has been a very difficult year, but knowing that God does not allow you to bear more than you are able to handle, and having all of you to lean on, gave me the strength to do what had to be done. Your kind words of encouragement will always be treasured.

My mother had a peaceful death, and was most definitely aware of her surroundings. Both my sister and I were present, and she closed her eyes and went to sleep as we held her.

All the arrangements have been finalized, and any of you who wish to see this wonderful lady that you have prayed for, can go to www.mckinlayfuneralhome.com where there is a picture of her.

Again, thank you for your prayers and concern,

Loretta Jasper

posed a unique challenge to him. He was captured and tortured almost fatally, bearing the distinctive marks of his torture to his grave—a sacrifice for One Nigeria. It was this event that had a great impact on his desire to know God. He prayed that God would let him die, but the Lord kept him. From this Igonibo realized that God had a purpose for his life.

In the 70's Igonibo came to America and attended the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. He originally studied Fisheries. He later earned a master's degree in Economics at Eastern Michigan University. At U of M he met and married (now ex-wife) Linda Williams and with whom he had his children. Igonibo and Linda remained close and formed a strong friendship through which they unitedly raised their children and supported each other throughout their relationship.

He worked with General Motors in the 1980's, then pursued diverse services devoted to serving others, including insurance and financial planning. His love for youth and passion to teach led to his association with the Ann Arbor public school system, where he was affectionately called "Mr. A" by his pupils until his passing. Here he met many friends and by God's grace sought to have an influence on the youth, who were always his passion and joy.

While in America, Igonibo steadily grew in the knowledge and truth of God's Word as he steadfastly searched. He visited many churches, including the *Ypsilanti Free Methodist Church*, then the *Seventh-Day Adventist Church* and finally the *Church of God International*. Throughout his life he was continuously searching for the truth. In the 80's he joined a small Bible Study where he came to the understanding of Saturday as the 7th day Sabbath and many other truths of the Word. This is how he came to the Adventist church. Here he inspired his children to also join and commit their lives to God. But it's interesting to note that while searching, he subscribed to the *Plain Truth Magazine* of the *Worldwide Church of God*. He even met with members of that church, but it was not at that time that God led him firmly to that fellowship. Upon seeing the program "Armor of God," Igonibo began to attend the *Church of God International*, a daughter church of *Worldwide*. Coming into fellowship and finally partaking in the Feasts of the Lord was a great joy. Igonibo's first feast was in 2002, which he attended in Niagara Falls, Ontario. From his joy and understanding, he again inspired his daughter to join the *CGI* congregation. The Bible passage which most reflects Igonibo's mission in life was Psalm 51:6-17, which was read at his baptism, and his favorite hymn was "It Is Well With My Soul."

It was Igonibo's greatest joy that his children were in the Lord. He was a light to them and to all he met. We take peace that he is at rest in the Lord and is awaiting, in unconscious sleep, for the 2nd coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ where he, by God's grace, will be in the soon coming Kingdom. May God comfort you all in this truth.

Igonibo always said that his father's best friend was the Bible. In many ways he himself worked to live that way. And it can be firmly stated that indeed, God was his best friend.



Igonibo H. Arinyedokiari

Igonibo Bekinbo Hutton

Arinyedokiari was born August 27, 1948 and went to sleep on the morning of March 22, 2006. He died in his sleep of cardiac arrest. Igonibo leaves behind two lovely children, son Fabiaye Bekinbo Arinyedokiari (27) and daughter Ida-Ibifaa Ila Arinyedokiari (24). He also leaves behind a host of brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, an extended cadre of relatives (both here in the US, in

Nigeria, and in other countries), and a large circle of friends—all of whom were touched by his cheerful Christian spirit, gentleness, and kindness. Igonibo was a member of the *Church of God International* of Tyler, Texas beginning in 2002.

Born in Buguma, Rivers State, Nigeria to parents Chief Hutton Tom George and Mary Beal Ombu Amachree, Igonibo was originally named Bekinbo, but at an early age he spontaneously chose Igonibo which means Sojourner, or as he liked to say, "Bearer of Truth," and that name has stuck with him since. As a young man, Igonibo was raised as an Anglican, but steadily grew in faith and understanding.

Igonibo was an exuberant man who enlivened every event and situation. He had such vigor for life and others. The Nigerian Civil War

Bruce L. Jinnett

January 28, 1925—December 6, 2005

Bruce L. Jinnett of Bradford Village in Santee, NC, died peacefully Tuesday, December 6. Funeral services were held in December 2005. Mr. Jinnett was born January 28, 1925, in Phenix City, AL, a son of the late Homer Jinnett and Ollie Bell Stilwell Jinnett. He was an Army Air Corps veteran of World War II and flew in 35 combat missions in B-17 bombers. He was called back by the Air Force to serve during the Korean War in which he flew in B-29 bombers as a tail gunner.

Mr. Jinnett was a retired division manager at American Tobacco Co. He was a member of the Four Hundred Eighty-Third Bomb Group and a member of the United Church of God. He and his late wife, Evelyn S. Jinnett, resided in Durham, NC, for 27 years before retiring to Santee in 1987. He enjoyed hunting, fishing, and photography.

Surviving are daughters, Ms. Beverly Jinnett of Hillsborough, NC, and Ms. Barbara J. Sykes of Raleigh, NC.

Man Without God

by Noni McVey



Noni McVey

Throughout the eons God has not changed His purpose, His plan for life. He is Life.

He is the Creator of the breath, blood and spirit of every living creature. Creation itself reflects the awesome nature and handiwork of God and it is magnificent! However, when sin entered into the world the effects were immediately seen and it was a grim picture.

Adam and Eve had to leave the garden and their special fellowship with God. They were separated from everything God had provided for them. Pain, suffering and death were going to be a merciless part of human life. Sin is deadly and it is the *opposite* of everything God is. But, thanks to God, even Satan's wicked influence couldn't destroy God's plan.

In His great mercy He made a way for us to not be separated from Him and to have life. We know the "way," and that way is Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Deliverance from the deadly results of sin can be found in Jesus Christ and only through Him.

The Long Road

After delivering His people from slavery in Egypt, God had to educate the Israelites on *who* He was, *how* to worship Him and Him alone. They had been living in a society that served many gods. Their lifestyle had to be corrected.

While overall, as a people, they had retained knowledge of their beginnings and history; they were still strongly influenced by their long sojourn in this strange country. They needed to know the true God. But, if God were to dwell among them, there needed to be a way for the imperfect man to approach the perfect God.

In its original state the Tabernacle provided tangible reminders to man of a most holy God, and the results of sin. Its very purpose also reveals the redemptive nature of God, for it wasn't the death and blood of bulls and goats that God really desired.

Samuel said it well, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better

than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams" (I Samuel 15:22). We can see the steps a Christian takes at becoming one with God reflected in the Tabernacle worship.

God gives us instructions today just as He gave Moses at Sinai when it came to the building of the Tabernacle. God gave Moses specific instructions concerning the nature, construction and furnishings of the Tabernacle (Exodus 25:40). These instructions were not the imaginative decorating schemes of Moses, but the definitive directions of God. Showing a lack of respect and faith in God's instructions always bring serious consequences to the one who neglects to listen to God's wisdom. It seems that from the beginning mankind had a nature that says, "I'll do it *my* way. Why should it matter?" Or, as Cain probably thought, "Why should God not accept what I am willing to give? Am I my brother's keeper? What's the harm?" It's a tragic fact: *Man, without God, does not see the deadly nature of sin.*

Look Back, Look Forward

God led Israel out of slavery in Egypt with mighty miracles. He delivered them from the slaughter of the pursuing Egyptians with walls of water. He provided a light by night and shade during the day. He fed them; and led them to a place to reestablish His Way of life among His people.

In this awesome tableau, we see a reflection of the plan God predestined for all people who come out of the slavery of sin; pass through the waters of baptism, are fed, sheltered, illuminated and led by His Firstborn Son.

Praise is to God that our High Priest is Jesus Christ. We do not need a human priest to intercede for us. We may now kneel in prayer at any time day or night and ask for forgiveness of sin. This is because Jesus Christ tabernacles in our heart and mind.

Jesus, the Firstborn, the King of kings, Lord of lords, will lead many other brothers and sisters, changed from mortal to immortal, into the Kingdom of God. And ultimately God the Father will come down



The Tabernacle

from heaven to live with His children.

When God receives our prayers, which is like the incense burning in the Tabernacle, He sees Jesus Christ, our High Priest and Mediator, who intercedes for us. He sees we are Christ's and therefore we are *His*. What a plan!

Are You Powered Up. . .

or are you suffering from a spiritual power shortage?

by Lloyd W. Cary

A blue-white flash of lightning splits the night sky. A solitary car wearily threads its way through water-filled ruts in a parking lot. A figure hunched against the driving rain dashes furtively to a weathered door framed in the side a large building, fumbles momentarily with a lock, and steps inside. After a moment a light goes on deep within the building. Another. Soon the entire factory lights up. Steam pipes crack and thump as the temperature rises. Generators hum to life. Machinery is powered up. By 7:00 o'clock the millwright has the plant all fired up and ready for another day's production.

As Christians, we should experience a similar "powering up" every morning. We are not ready for a day of Christian production until we are properly "warmed up" by reading a chapter or two of Scripture, followed by a morning conversation with God, our Father, and a few moments of meditation. We are then "powered up" to meet the challenges of the day.

Power is an awesome word, often associated

with strength, force, and control. We, God's people, are powered up—not by human might or power—but by God's spirit (Zechariah 4:6)—a supernatural strength imparted directly to us by the Almighty. Each day holds its moments of uncertainty. We especially need God's power when we are facing sore trials or undergoing periods of depression, loneliness, or sickness.

We were promised spiritual power upon receiving God's Holy Spirit at baptism. "But ye shall receive *power*, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This power is available only to those who have God's Spirit. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no

might He increaseth strength" (Isaiah 40:29).

Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," (Philippians 4:13) and prayed that Christ's followers would be "strengthened with all might, according to His glorious *power*, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness" (Colossians 1:11).

Power is misused all too often by man to manipulate, control, and enslave others, while God uses His power to set us free from the power of sin, enabling us to grow in the fruits of His Spirit, and qualify to become the very Sons of God (John 1:12).

"Finally, my brethren," Paul said, "be strong in the Lord, and in the *power* of His might," (Ephesians 6:10). This daily power surge is acquired by prayer, Bible study and meditation.

Do you begin each day fully "powered up" to be a productive Christian. . . or are you suffering from a spiritual power shortage? If lacking, what are you going to *do* about it?

LOYALTY—A Great Virtue!

**One of the great characteristics God desires to build into
His children's character is the attribute of loyalty.
Where do your loyalties lie?**

by Loren Chamberlain



**Loren
Chamberlain**

Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). To have that kind of relationship with the Lord God we must develop the great virtue of "Loyalty."

Notice that the word "*develop*" was used in the last sentence. Loyalty does not just happen—it is a virtue that must be developed in every avenue of life. One of the first places in the Scriptures we find the necessity of loyalty is in the book of Genesis when God explained to Adam, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). The word "united" can mean cleave, cling, stick, hold, hold fast, adhere, fuse, be joined, be faithful, be constant, be true, and stand by. God's intention for Adam and Eve was that they should be so *united* and cleaving so tightly together that over time it would be as if they were one flesh. The fact that the woman is made from the man establishes what can be called a "flesh-line" that is stronger than a bloodline and causes him to seek her out. A part of him is missing and is, in effect, beckoning him. This is why divorce is so terrible, because it is a ripping asunder of flesh.

Loyalty is the mortar of a strong foundation for a successful marriage. Unfortunately it is a condition of our times that "Loyalty" is often praised, but as a rule is seldom practiced. Loyalty is shown when marriage partners seek out opportunities to confirm their devotion to each other. For example, it is better to refer to "our" rather than to "my"—"our friends," "our children," "our home," "our experiences," and so on. When husbands and wives make plans and decisions, whether regarding housing, employment, child rearing, entertainment, vacations or religious activities, they would do well to consult one another, taking into account the feelings and opinions of the other mate. "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed" (Proverbs 15:22). Loyalty will bring durability to marriage. Difficulties and trials come to all marriages sooner or later, but when loyalty is present in both mates, the union will remain secure. When marriage partners resolve to be loyal to each other, it helps both of them to develop a commitment to righteous principles in all areas of their life.

An additional benefit of loyalty in marriage is that the children raised in a loyal, loving family will find it easier to act responsibly toward their future mates as well as toward their parents.

Loyalty and Friendship

Jesus said, "You are my friends if you do what I command" (John 15:14). In those days, the disciples of a rabbi were considered his servants. Jesus changed that relationship. The disciples were not

his servants any longer because they did what He commanded. Therefore, He considered them His friends. Jesus considered them loyal and faithful, telling them everything He had heard from His Father. Jesus trusted them to receive these communications and then pass them on to others as the gospel.

Many have found that they can be happy without a marriage mate, but find that it's difficult to be happy without a friend. A good friend is more than a casual acquaintance. True friendship requires an investment of time, energy and emotional commitment. It is an honorable thing to be someone's true friend. While a warm friendly relationship is a wonderful privilege, it also involves responsibility and accountability.

***The Bible makes it clear that
choosing friends who do not
share our values and morals
can be disastrous!***

Good honest communication is an important part of any worthwhile relationship and is vital between friends. We all have trials in life and needs, and there is no substitute for a good friend in whom we can confide in, knowing that what we may say will be held in the strictest of confidence. Distance need not be a barrier to communication among friends. In this day and age of telephones and e-mail, a daily dialogue can be carried on with ease.

We must remember, however, that loyalty remains vital if we are to have a long and healthy relationship with a friend near or far. Another important fact to be aware of is that our friends in one way or another influence how we think, feel, and act; therefore, it is important that we make friends with people whose way of life will have a positive effect upon us and whose way of life is compatible with our own. For example, it will be to our advantage to cultivate friendship with those individuals who have the same belief system, the same moral viewpoint, and the same standards of right and wrong. Compatible friends will help each other reach goals instead of hindering. The Bible makes it clear that choosing friends who do not share our values and morals can be disastrous. "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm" (Proverbs 13:20).

Learning Loyalty

The more we make an effort to practice loyalty, the easier it becomes. This is why the example of loyal parents is so important. By setting the standard for their children early in life to be loyal within the family, the easier it will be for them to develop long lasting friendships based on loyalty. These strong durable friendships may possibly pave the way for loyalty in a future marriage.

Loyalty begins within the family, and if children do learn the importance of this virtue early in life, it will be much easier for them to develop a loyal relationship with Jesus Christ. Being loyal to Jesus brings rich rewards. He will never let us down or disappoint us. "Do not let your hearts be troubled, Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; (offices and re-

sponsibilities) if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:1-3). □

One Sentence Sermons

- Give Satan an inch and he'll be a ruler.
- Be Fishers of Men... You catch 'em, He'll clean 'em.
- Don't wait for 6 strong men to take you to church.
- God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called.
- We don't change the message, the message changes us.
- Give God what's right, not what's left!
- Wisdom has two parts: 1.) Having a lot to say. 2.) Not saying it.

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Thomas the Doubter

Sometimes even Christ's own disciples had doubts... temporarily!

by Frank Denman



Frank Denman

Thomas was one of the disciples of Jesus. His name appears in all the Gospel accounts. But it seems this apostle, Thomas, had the tendency to view things negatively, or look on the dark side, as is evident when Jesus was telling the disciples the way to salvation. "Thomas saith to Him, 'Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?'" (John 14:5).

When Jesus reported the death of Lazarus and informed His disciples that He was going to Bethany, where Lazarus died (John 11:14-15), Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (verse 16). Thomas knew the Judeans had tried to stone Jesus there, and that to go back would likely mean death for Jesus and His companions. The expression "doubting Thomas" is derived from an account in John's Gospel. Jesus had appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, and for some reason, Thomas wasn't there that day (John 20:24). When the disciples told Thomas what had happened, Thomas said, "Except I shall

see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe" (verse 25). Here was momentary—but downright—unbelief! He stated most emphatically, "I will not believe." Of course, he later recanted (verse 28). To this day there are unbelievers such as "doubting Thomas" was, refusing to believe in a risen Christ, or doubting that the resurrection was a literal historical event.

Sometimes there is a little
"Doubting Thomas" in all of us

Jesus told the religious leaders of His day, "[You are] making the Word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do" (Mark 7:13). Today, so many people, instead of looking to the Word of God for direction, tend to look at the other side just as Thomas did for a while, doubting, even *refusing* to believe the Scriptures telling us the truth of Christ's death and resurrection. But after

Thomas had seen Jesus, his unbelief vanished. Seeing the risen Lord with his own eyes, he said, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Jesus replied, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (verse 29).

Today, many doubt the Biblical accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection; or, if they do claim belief, they cling to the traditions of Easter, even including bunny rabbits and eggs to bolster their unbelief in the truth of the Bible.

Passover season is coming soon, and the true believers of Jesus Christ and of His death and resurrection will be meeting to commemorate the event. As Jesus told Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." So we, though we haven't as yet seen Christ in Person, abide in the assurance of faith that He is the way to salvation. "I am the way, the truth, and the life," Jesus assures us. "No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). □

infuse retreat '06

KEEPING YOUR
INSIDE CLEAN

BATH, OHIO
JUNE 16TH-18TH

"...whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him...evil things come from within and defile a man." -Mark 7:18-23

Come join us as we inquire into the meaning of Mark 7:18-23. If what enters us can't defile us, why do we keep the food laws? How can I control what I think, say and do? We will address these and similar questions this June in Bath, Ohio.

For more information, including a schedule, accommodations, location details and registration, contact Mike James at (301) 916-6767 or visit <http://infuse.cgi.org>. Registration is free. Deadline for registration is May 12th.

INFUSE SCHEDULE:

Friday, June 16th.

- 6 pm: Dinner at Ghent Christian Church
- 7 pm: Icebreaker.
- 7:40 pm: Scriptures Supporting Food Law by Mike James.
- 8:25 pm: Planning for Infuse at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Saturday, June 17th.

- 7 am: Breakfast at Ghent Christian Church.
- 8 am: Controlling Your Language by Mike James.
- 9 am: Scriptures Used Against the Food Law by Bill Watson.
- 10 am: Free Time.
- 11 am: Church Service.
- 1:30 pm: Potluck Lunch.
- 2:50 pm: Controlling Your Actions by Jeff Reed.
- 3:55 pm: Planning for Infuse at the Feast of Tabernacles.
- 5:15 pm: Free Time.
- 7:30 pm: Activity and Dinner at Summit Mall.
- 11 pm: Return to Hotel.

Sunday, June 18th.

- 7 am: Breakfast at Ghent Christian Church.
- 8 am: Controlling Your Thoughts by Anika Sandy-Hanson.
- 9 am: Health/Nutrition by George James.
- 10 am: Game Addressing Retreat Sessions by Herb Hanson and Anika Sandy-Hanson.
- 10:40—11:20am: Planning for Infuse of the Future..

... And much, *much* more!

Harvest of Firstfruits

Firstfruits: a perfect type of God's people!

by Bob Swimm



Bob Swimm

“**A**nd you shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall ye number fifth days” (Leviticus 23:15,16).

That is the command God gave to His people concerning counting the day of the Feast of Weeks, better known in the New Testament Church of God as Pentecost.

The 49-day period (seven weeks) of spring harvesting culminates on the festival day of Pentecost. Since Pentecost is the spring harvest (first), it anticipates the fall harvest (final)—the seventh 1000-year period represented by the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day.

Anciently the Feast of Weeks (or Ingathering, or Firstfruits) was a day of thanksgiving for the spring harvest. But in A.D.31 this day, which became more commonly known as Pentecost, took on greater significance and importance than before.

We, too, flourish with the “Miracle Grow” of prayer

In Acts 2 we learn that on this day Jesus’ disciples received the Holy Spirit (verses 1–4); His disciples were given the gift of languages (versus 4-15); Joel’s “Day of the Lord” prophecy was cited (verses 16-21); Peter preached his powerful sermon of repentance (verses 22–40); 3000 were baptized; and the New Testament Church of God was established (verses 41-17).

From this point forward, God set His hand toward harvesting His firstfruits. He became a Farmer, if you will. He prepared the field—planted, watered, fertilized, provided light, pruned—and ultimately prepared to reap.

So many Biblical parables and lessons have analogies and parallels with farming and agriculture, and whether you’re talking about a farm of hundreds of acres or a simple backyard garden, there is much work involved in harvesting a successful crop. Much can go wrong. Once major hindrance is weeds, or tares.

In the aptly named “parable of the wheat and the tares” (Matthew 13:24-30), Jesus talks of the enemy (Satan) sowing among the wheat, and allowing the tares to grow alongside the wheat until the harvest. Early on you cannot tell the difference between the begotten children of God and people “playing church”—religious hobbyists. Just as the reapers will ultimately bring in the wheat harvest and burn the tares, so too will the Master Farmer separate His firstfruits from chaff.

Nearly everyone with a piece of ground or a pot of dirt on a patio grows tomatoes. There are many spiritual lessons to be gleaned from harvesting tomatoes. Tomatoes are harvested all during the growing season. Sometimes you get bushels and bushels, as in the spiritual harvest of A.D. 31 and in the 1960’s and 1970’s, when God’s church grew by leaps and bounds; at other times, just a handful.

Tomatoes need a lot of water. God draws an analogy between water and His Holy Spirit. That Living Water is necessary for the firstfruits to be harvested (John 7:37-39). Tomatoes grow bigger and better with fertilizer, notably *Miracle Grow*. We, too, flourish with the “Miracle Grow” of prayer, Bible study, meditation, and fasting. You have to be vigilant watching for suckers on the tomato plant. Like weeds growing with the wheat, they look just like the healthy shoots, but they bear no fruit. They merely siphon the water intended for the plant, suck the nutrients from the soil, weaken the plant, and lessen the quality of the fruit. God is continually pruning his “tomato plants,” pulling off the “suckers” (John 15:1-8).

Usually tomato plants are hardy. Not so with green peppers (we call them “mangos” in Cincinnati/Northern

Kentucky—don’t ask me why). In the beginning the plant is very fragile, as is the white flower bloom that will develop into the pepper. They are late bloomers—you have to be extremely patient with them. Many of God’s firstfruits are very similar in their Christian walk. [As a personal aside, it took my dear mother nearly thirty years until the “light bulb” finally lit, and the desire to join God’s Family became a reality.] And the ultimate Husbandman is patient beyond measure and admonishes the more mature to exercise the same patience (2 Timothy 2:24). God knows that just as the once-delicate pepper plant, properly tended to, will develop into a small tree with hearty yield, so will the slower-maturing firstfruit (Psalm 1-3).

When lettuce is left in the ground too long, it begins to grow wild and sometimes bitter. It must be harvested at just the right time. If a killer frost is approaching, measures must be taken to protect the crop. If a thunderstorm servers a limb of nearly ripe fruit, the branch must be grafted back in, wrapped, and supported to be reattached to the trunk for nutrition.

God knows the precise time to harvest. Might this be a possible explanation for the premature (to our way of thinking) death of some of God’s saints? Perhaps He sees problems, trials, and tribulations on the horizon that the firstfruit could not survive—a killer frost, or a spiritual thunderstorm. Many farmers and gardeners will bring in not-quite-fully ripened fruits and vegetables to save them from destruction.

When a farmer is finished harvesting, he stops working. He calls in his workmen and equipment and savors his crop. When God has brought in all of His firstfruits, He, too, will rest and relish the spiritual harvest. The symbolic seven-week period of reaping will conclude on that seventh Sabbath followed by the joyous celebration of spring harvest—the **Day of Pentecost**. God haste that Day! □

SHARE THE VISION!

Come, SHARE THE VISION with us!

Question: Who, what is the “Church of God International?”

Answer: It is perhaps the best-kept secret within the culture of the Sabbath-keeping churches today!

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Over the years we have received countless requests asking *who* we are *what* is our mission and what do we *teach*? Whether you have heard of us through our TV program, *The Armor of God*, seen one of our many publications, or heard of us by word of mouth, thousands have wondered *who* is the sponsoring organization behind this Work and *what* we are doing. *That’s a fair question!*

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Learning to Think Like God

It's easier than you think!

The Bible is a mystery to most people. When we begin studying God’s Word, we soon notice a glaring contrast: *We don’t think like God!* Our way of doing things isn’t usually God’s way. God says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:89).

Seeing the differences between our ways and God’s ways forces us to decide whether or not we will *obey* God. For instance, many think the excuse, “everybody’s doing it” justifies any behavior. The Bible makes it clear, however, that God commands us to obey even if it seems no one else seems willing (2 Corinthians 6:16–18). unassuming obedience is the *key* (See Mathew 7:21, Mark 7:79, and Luke 6:46).

As we learn to *obey* God, we soon discover that the Creator of life knows how life should be lived better than we do. The Bible is God’s “instruction manual” on how to live and think. Through humble obedience, we actually begin to “rewire” our thought processes. We discover our minds gradually changing, becoming more like God’s. Because we are focusing on *God’s* thoughts, we begin to think the same way He does and our lives begin to change. This process is called “conversion.” There is a powerful description of how this works in the Book of Romans. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but *be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind*, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”(Romans 12:1–2).

If you have not already done so, request our free publications, *Who, What Is God?*, *How To Study Your Bible*, *How To Be A Real Christian*, and *Can A Christian Be Unconverted?* As an after thought, you’ll be glad you did. □

CHURCH BULLETIN BLOOPERS

THESE SENTENCES ACTUALLY APPEARED IN CHURCH BULLETINS OR WERE ANNOUNCED IN CHURCH SERVICES.

- Let us join David and Lisa in the celebration of their wedding and bring their happiness to a conclusion.
- The class on prophecy has been canceled due to unforeseen circumstances.
- Jean is leading a weight-management series on Wednesday nights. She has used the program herself and is growing like crazy.
- The Pastor's seminar on fasting will be held this Saturday morning at 9 A.M. in the Fellowship Hall. Coffee and donuts will be served.
- On behalf of Barbara Smith and her family, our sincere thanks to all those sending cards and flowers and contributing to the death of her husband.
- The "Spiritually Spontaneous" rally will begin at 4:15.
- Illiterate? Rite to the church office for help.
- Because the class on time management went overtime, we will move children's praise to the gym this morning.
- Church Rummage Sale: A good opportunity to get rid of anything not worth keeping but too good to throw away. Bring your spouse.



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