



THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

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"Put on the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:13)

Fall 2011

An Interview With Charles Groce and Vance Stinson from *The Journal*

Over the years, the Church of God International moved away from authoritarianism—here's why....

by Wesley White



Charles Groce



Vance Stinson

TYLER, Texas—"The Churches of God continue to demonstrate their ability to divide rather than unite."

So say two ministers of the Tyler-based *Church of God International* (CGI).

In March 2011, in a conversation with this writer, these gentlemen expressed their concern with what they say is a dangerous trend among some of the "breakaway" Church of God groups toward "cultism" and "mind control."

The following are excerpts of an interview by this writer with Mr. Groce, CGI Board Chairman, and Mr. Stinson, CGI Editorial Director.

Founded in 1978

Wes White: For those unfamiliar with the CGI, could you provide some background?

Mr. Groce: The *Church of God International* emerged from the WCG (*Worldwide Church of God*) in 1978 and was established in Tyler, Texas. It was founded by four former members of the *Worldwide Church of God*.

Garner Ted Armstrong was the president of the church until he resigned and formed the ICG, the *Intercontinental Church of God*, in 1998. (See "Garner Ted Armstrong and CGI Parting," *The Journal*, Issue No. 12, dated January 30, 1998.)

Since that time, the CGI has gone through quite a learning curve, placing an emphasis on the message of the Gospel rather than its messengers.

The CGI retains a strong fidelity to the teachings and doctrines the organization had when it began. We advance our beliefs through our television program titled *Armor of God*, and have congregations in the United States, Canada, Jamaica, Australia, the Philippines, along with our affiliates in Africa.

Who Was the Founder?

Wes White: You say former WCG members founded the CGI. Is it not correct to say it was founded by Garner Ted Armstrong?

Mr. Stinson: Let me speak to that point. Yes, it would be correct. Most everyone in the Churches of God views him as the founder. However, others were involved: Shirley Armstrong, Benny Sharp, and Guy Carnes. All were former members of the WCG.

Wes White: Did the WCG disfellowship GTA because of his involvement in the founding of the CGI?

Mr. Stinson: No, he was disfellowshipped before he founded the CGI.

Wes White: What is your title and primary responsibility in the CGI?

Mr. Stinson: I serve as a minister in the local Tyler congregation and provide editorial oversight for our publications. I also serve on the board of directors.

Wes White: Charles, there seems to be some confusion regarding your position in the CGI. Some see you as the president or top man. Are you the president, vice president, pastor general, or what?

Mr. Groce: It is correct to say I am presently chairman of the board of directors, a position subject to reelection every three years. We certainly do not have a pastor general. If asked how I should be introduced, minister and pastor works well.

Wes White: Can you please give us an update on where CGI is at this time?

Where the CGI Is

Mr. Groce: It's hard to believe, but the CGI has been in existence for more than 30 years. Those of us around in the late '70s and '80s can remember there was a lot going on in the Church of God movement then. It's easy to forget, and maybe we should, given how traumatic those days were.

There was a crisis in leadership. Those in charge resorted to a primacy-of-Peter type of authority, and this quickly turned into spiritual abuse. The outcome was devastating.

At the time, the CGI was pretty much an unknown. To some degree, the same is true today.

Wes White: Why is this true today?

Some Like to Marginalize

Mr. Groce: In the late '70s and early '80s, there was a perception molded by the WCG ministry that any group other than the "one true church" was somehow illegitimate.

GTA had been marked, and this negative branding not only delegitimized him, but it also carried over to the handful of people who joined the CGI in its earliest days.

Growth came very slowly. Our viability was marginalized. In retrospect, we didn't fully realize how we were perceived.

The negative publicity circulating about GTA in the middle '90s further contributed to the questions about our viability. For understandable reasons, we pretty much dropped off the radar.

It's safe to say that the CGI of 2011 is different than the one three decades ago. Organizations can learn from their past. We have.

Paul explained there would be differences of administrations or service, and a diversity of operations or workings. We've experienced what he referred to as manifestation of the Spirit, having learned a good deal more about demonstrating Christian love.

INTERVIEW, continued on page 3

Why Not Make This Your Best Feast Ever?

Year by year we hear mention of “the best Feast ever.” How can this be? Does this just “happen” ... or is there something you can DO to assure each Feast will be your best Feast ever?

by Lloyd W. Cary



Lloyd W. Cary

It's coming! “FEAST FEVER!” Can you feel it in the air? Do you find your temperature rising with excitement as you think and plan for this year's Feast of Tabernacles? I can.

We hear much talk about this being “the best Feast ever.” How is this possible? How can each Feast be better than the last? Does it just “happen,” or is there something you can do to assure it? To keep from having an “accidental Feast,” some planning is necessary. There is an old saying, “Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.”

Let's examine some ways to assure this year's Feast is the BEST FEAST EVER.

Make a Checklist

Begin a small notebook and make a checklist of the things that you need to do before leaving for the Feast and the items you want to take:

- ☐ Notify work or school well in advance
- ☐ Stop mail and newspaper
- ☐ Make arrangements for pets
- ☐ Motel reservations
- ☐ Maps, tour book, GPS
- ☐ Traveler's checks
- ☐ Car: tune-up, oil, lube, filter, tires
- ☐ Bible, pen, and notebook
- ☐ Camera
- ☐ Alarm clock

Foresight saves stress. Now you will have to admit that if you went to the Feast and forgot any of these items, then this could have created some stress for yourself at the Feast.

Plan Several Activities Ahead of Time

Each Feast site is unique. Each site offers something special, perhaps the beach, waterfalls, theme parks, amusement rides, skiing, horseback riding, camping, hiking, historical attractions, etc. To find out about activities and restaurants, you can write to the Chamber of Commerce of the festival site city and request information. You could also get on your computer and search out information or contact your automobile association for maps and information. Perhaps the best way is to talk to friends and people who have been there before.

Talk to the family after you receive your information on activities and plan some activities ahead of time. This helps to build excitement in going to the Feast, especially for your children.

Pray for the Best Feast Ever

- Start praying ahead of time that God will bless this year's Feast of Tabernacles.
- Pray for the sites where God will be putting His name.
- Pray that these sites will be safe havens for God's people, where they can worship God in peace and harmony, eat good clean food and participate in wholesome activities and recreation.
- Pray that God would inspire the speaking and the hearing.
- Pray that the sermon messages will be positive, uplifting, and beneficial to all the brethren.
- Pray for God's protection for all of God's people while they are traveling to, during, and from the Feast.
- Pray for a positive attitude for yourself, your family, and all of God's people. It seems that at this time of year, Satan tries to influence us with trials and tests to see if he can get us into a bad attitude. Don't let little annoyances bother you while you are at the festival site. Be patient. When you go to a restaurant or a recreational activity, there will be longer lines to wait in due to the influx of people attending the Feast.

James 5:16 says: “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Pray for the BEST FEAST EVER.

Serve the Best Feast Ever

Plan now to serve at the Feast. Volunteers are priceless! There are many, many ways to serve: For example:

- Make someone new in the church feel welcome.
- Volunteer to be an usher, sing in the choir, or work in the first-aid room or mother's room.
- Volunteer to give rides to services.
- Send cards or phone those at home who were unable to attend.
- Keep your hotel room neat. Plan to leave a generous tip for the maid. Others are observing us.
- Leave generous tips for the waiter or the waitress.
- Offer to babysit so a couple can attend special events.
- Plan to have an evening alone.
- Invite fatherless children and their mothers to an activity.
- Include those with non-member mates in your activities.
- Pick up scraps of paper and trash on the floor.
- Serve up a smile. Proverbs 18:24 says, “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly.”

The main ingredient in being friendly is to *smile*. It's FREE! It does not cost anything to smile. You can use your smile to break the ice in talking with a stranger. Your smile will put both of you at ease, so you can begin a conversation with your new friend.

In summary: 1) Develop a checklist; 2) Plan several activities ahead of time; 3) Pray for the best Feast ever; and 4) Serve at the Feast. If you apply these four points, you will have the BEST FEAST EVER. Ω

Visit us at



www.cgi.org

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We feel our efforts to reach out to all people, including other COG (Church of God) groups, is what Jesus expects us to do. To that end, we have co-sponsored festivals with other COG groups and invited their speakers to speak at our services. We look for opportunities to bring members of the body together rather than keep them apart.

Wes White: When you say “Church of God movement,” I assume you mean the Sabbath-keeping Churches of God that can trace their roots back to the WCG. Can I assume that for some reason you are not including the Church of God Seventh Day in this?

Mr. Groce: That’s right. The Church of God Seventh Day was viable long before the WCG. And since you mentioned the Church of God Seventh Day, I think it would be remiss of me not to mention the courtesy of their leadership toward the CGI.

For many years, many of us in the Church of God movement were told CG7 (Church of God Seventh Day) was “Sardis” (a reference to a congregation on a mail route mentioned in Revelation 3), or spiritually dead.

Nothing could be further from the truth. They—imagine this!—find it within themselves to speak honorably of different Sabbath-keeping ministries. We should do the same toward them.

Wes White: Just what do you mean “manifestation of the Spirit?” Can you give an example?

Using Gifts

Mr. Groce: The use of “manifestation of Spirit” is meant to be understood as Paul presents it to those at Corinth. He’s acknowledging their individual gifts, which reflect the Holy Spirit at work in them. He exhorts them to use their gifts.

He was not advancing glossolalia, or outbursts of unrestrained chatter or behavior at church. If someone has a recognizable gift—let’s say in preaching or being compassionate—allow them expression within the church.

Old WCG Doctrines?

Wes White: Are the doctrines of the CGI still pretty much the doctrines of the old WCG?

Mr. Stinson: Our basic doctrines remain the same. We have debated items such as the third resurrection and the two goats of the Atonement ritual, but we’ve made no formal changes.

Unfortunately, the CGI is sometimes accused of changing doctrines, or at least holding doctrines it does not hold.

For instance, according to a PowerPoint presentation apparently used in one of the larger COG’s as part of its pastoral training program, one of the doctrinal differences between that organization and the CGI is that the CGI teaches tithing is personal, and not a law.

I don’t know where that idea came from, but it certainly didn’t come from the CGI’s official *Statement of Beliefs* and practice, which states plainly that the church teaches the giving of tithes because it is the law of God and that the withholding of one’s tithes, which violates that law, is a sin.

I wrote to that organization about this and other misinformation in their PowerPoint presentation, but I haven’t received a response yet.

No Magisterium

Wes White: So how do CGI doctrines differ from those of other Sabbath-keeping Churches of God?

Mr. Stinson: We do not have a version of holy tradition or a magisterial office as a source of truth alongside the Bible.

HWA (Herbert W. Armstrong, who founded the *Radio Church of God* in 1927 or 1934), was a man of vision and did a great work, but he was not the prophesied “Elijah.”

Those who claim he was have created their own version of holy tradition which is similar to the Catholic and Orthodox view. Their understanding of Scripture is guided by HWA’s teaching or the current “apostle’s” interpretation of holy tradition.

The guys who hold the “HWA was Elijah” view are trying to knock each other off the apostolic throne. This seems to be the primary teaching authority of the so-called Philadelphia church. (Philadelphia was another Revelation 3 congregation.)

By contrast, the CGI and a number of the other Churches of God are much closer to the earlier years of HWA’s ministry, when he opposed the primacy of Peter and the use of titles such as “apostle.”

Those who believe as an article of faith that an infallible magisterial office was established in the ministry of HWA are being consistent when they insist that doctrines such as church eras and the place of safety are dogmas of the true faith.

But any group that believes the Bible alone—*sola scriptura*—is our authority for establishing truth, as HWA did for at least the greater part of his ministry, has absolutely no business dogmatizing such ideas as those.

Philadelphia Church

Wes White: When you say “Philadelphia church,” what are you referring to? Gerald Flurry’s group? The sixth church as mentioned in Revelation?

Mr. Stinson: First, I have in mind the belief that the seven churches of Revelation represent seven successive eras of the true church, and that the Philadelphia era exists today.

Second, I am thinking of those who believe their group is the Philadelphia church. Readers of *The Journal* will know which groups I have in mind.

Third, I’m referring to a mindset that has grown out of the old WCG’s “Philadelphia Church—We’re Special” sentiment.

Generally, those who claim a special divinely appointed apostolic or prophetic office think of their followers as the faithful remnant, and other COG groups as defective, if not outright apostate—or simply as “Laodicean.” Read the ads in *The Journal* and you’ll find examples.

It is a serious mistake to give such importance to an idea that is, at best, speculative. Christ Himself tells us what the seven lamp stands of John’s vision in Revelation 1 represent. They represent the seven churches of Asia, and we’re told precisely where the seven churches are located.

If we say the seven churches may represent seven successive eras, we must admit that the Revelator Himself does not say so. Therefore, we must conclude that, at best, the eras view is a theory. It is not something we can prove, and certainly not something we should hang our eschatological hats on.

Now, it is possible that someone will claim God directly revealed to him that the seven churches are seven church eras.

Okay, fine. But, if I accepted that person’s claim as a dogma of faith, then I would be relying on a source of information outside the Bible. When I say we cannot prove the church eras theory, I have in mind people who take the Bible as the only source of divine revelation.

Administrative Matters

Wes White: How is the CGI different in administrative matters?

Mr. Groce: We get this question a lot. People want to know how the CGI differs from *United*, *Philadelphia*, *Living*, etc.

It is easy to point out doctrinal differences where they exist. But those differences don’t fully explain the corporate and associated member resistance to not only the CGI, but any group outside their own.

Some COG groups tend to avoid each other because they worry about losing their members.

We’ve experienced this when CGI congregations have extended the hand of fellowship to all COG groups within a certain area through a picnic, sharing speakers, etc.

Almost without exception, the larger corporate organizations resist or ignore the invitation, while some splinter groups are more inclined to participate.

We realize God’s people are not a corporate possession. CGI members know brethren worship in organizations outside our own, and can

choose to associate and worship with them without recrimination.

Some members in other organizations who would like to do more with the CGI and other groups, but feel they can’t, will often say, perhaps out of futility, they have to accept that it’s going to be that way until Christ comes back, and then He’ll get us all together.

Well, it doesn’t have to be that way. Let’s not give up what God’s Spirit moves people to do; let’s give way to it.

It makes more sense if you really want to live Matthew 5, 6, and 7, to have cooperation now so we will be serving together then—when He returns.

Learning to Serve

Wes White: You often say the CGI is learning a “servant leadership” type of ministry. What does that mean?

Mr. Groce: Many people who discover the CGI tend to come from a hierarchical church structure.

By the time they come to one of our services, they have heard a lot about government from the top down. They have a perception that the minister is in a position of divine authority over them. It’s as if they have been policed rather than nurtured.

Those in fellowship with the CGI find an emphasis on helping each other’s joy. CGI members are encouraged to respond to their natural impulse for serving however they can.

The CGI is becoming increasingly familiar with servant leadership. We are learning to openly trust the authority of Scripture rather than blindly trusting those who claim they have authority over us.

Some people don’t like the experience. Others do. From what we’ve observed, those who struggle with servant leadership don’t understand how it works, or they haven’t actually given it a good try.

We feel there is administrative guidance to Jesus’ instruction in Luke 12:41–48. He taught the disciples that the faithful and wise steward was and is, in fact, the servant mentioned in verse 43. We are to be servants one to another, respecting each other’s gifts.

We are discovering that *primus inter pares*, or first among equals, is a biblical principle rooted in humility. It is not competitive or jealous; it is complementary and supportive.

Walking alongside each other is different than having to walk behind all the time. Learning to trust each other is an eye opener.

Approaching Prophecy

Wes White: Many Sabbath-keeping Churches of God seem to have a totally different approach to preaching the Gospel and teaching prophecy from what the WCG did years ago. Has the CGI changed in this regard?

Mr. Groce: I’ll talk about the preaching of the Gospel. Vance, maybe you’d like to talk about prophecy.

Mr. Stinson: Sure. You first.

Mr. Groce: Like so many COG groups, we too are attached to the mission of preaching and publishing the Gospel. We have booklets, Bible study lessons, CDs, an *Infuse* program for young adults, and a weekly television program, *Armor of God*.

Presently, the telecast is viewed on two primary networks. In Canada, we’re on the *Vision Network*, and in the U.S., we’re on *Word*.

We have a variety of speakers hosting the program, each with their own appeal and approach.

CGI supporters are drawn to Jesus’ personal imperative to seek and save the lost. Our collective efforts are analogous to a community that’s working together to find those who are lost.

Although each of us will go looking on our own, there is something to be said for looking together. There’s no doubt that individual, personal effort is important, but look at what could be accomplished collectively.

It seems such a waste of resources to have so many organizations peppering the weekend television slots with their brand of the truth.

Some will say it’s better that way. I don’t think so. It’s a proven

fact that too many choices cause people to not choose at all.

Has anyone counted the number of God's true churches today? The lost see organizations clamoring to be the one and only true church. I don't believe that is what Jesus had in mind for a witness to the world.

Program for Young Adults

Wes White: A few minutes ago you mentioned something called "Infuse." What is that?

Mr. Groce: *Infuse* is a program designed for young adults. It isn't just for CGI. It's open to young people in other churches.

The program is led by qualified volunteers who turn to the ministry for oversight. Their mission is to teach biblical principles and help young adults establish and maintain their relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

The age group that *Infuse* caters to is 18–30, but it does involve older adults who help support the program. *Infuse* members produce a quarterly magazine called *Infuse*. They maintain their own website, and they work together to serve their local churches and communities.

Collective Impossibility

Wes White: You seem to think the Churches of God, including independents, should do more together. Is such thinking realistic?

Mr. Groce: Apparently, at least for the present, it appears it is not possible for the various Church of God organizations to work collectively together.

I've heard it said that church leaders are the problem. I can't dispute that reasoning. Too many leaders see themselves as being special.

Look at all the claims to being the end-time Elijah, or one of the two witnesses, or God's apostle. Where did all that come from?

Why do we have to be someone special? To my knowledge, no one today has proven themselves to be publicly gifted in prophecy or healing. Those who claim to have those gifts have, at best, a very spotty record.

If you want to find the special ones, look at the people we serve. They are the ones who have survived the gristmill of ministerial abuse, self-proclaimed importance, farcical predictions, cultic manipulation, and hypocrisy.

The fact that a body of believers even exists is a miracle. Serving them is a privilege that has to be earned.

I wish there were some way for God's people to really work closely together. The collective voice would be substantially greater than the lesser voices that speak apart.

Going Forward

Wes White: Looking ahead, what is the CGI doing for its future leadership?

Mr. Groce: The ministerial council of the CGI—the administrative body which responds to ecclesiastical needs—has adopted a program for leadership development.

This program, based upon personal mentoring and trust, is known as the Ministerial Apprentice Program, or MAP.

Those involved are encouraged to identify their particular gifts, whether as those who, as the apostle Peter put it, speak as the oracles of God, or those who minister while using the abilities which God gives.

In broad terms, those are serving descriptions which speak to the competence of elders and deacons.

We have focused on discovering how these appointments are represented in Scripture.

Understanding the role of church leaders as well as that of church members has not been easy. We realized our perspectives were skewed because of decades-long exposure to controlling church authority.

Unfortunately, in a hierarchical structure, the ability of deacons and elders to complement each other as they serve the church demands one be above the other. Our leadership is learning there is no elevated status to serving. We are to work together as firsts among equals. You learn to trust each other's gifts.

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Do Programs Control?

Wes White: You talk about the problem of control practiced by other church organizations. Some might argue that the CGI's administrative body is doing the same thing with a so-called leadership program. Aren't leadership programs an attempt to control?

Mr. Groce: Some are, some aren't. Ours isn't. We provide a venue for men and women to come together to learn about serving God and each other. They volunteer to participate. They are encouraged to identify their personal gifts, those natural and spiritual abilities they have to serve the church.

Headline Theology

Wes White: Vance, how about the question of prophecy?

Mr. Stinson: I think we have a more balanced approach to prophecy than in past years.

We don't do the "Time magazine in one hand and the Bible in the other hand" when we study or preach prophecy. We call that "headline theology."

There is nothing wrong with connecting current trends with prophesied events, but we need to recognize that doing that almost always involves some amount of speculation, and we must be careful to avoid dogmatizing our speculative ideas.

When I look back through that big pile of *Plain Truth* magazines (published by the *Radio/Worldwide Church of God*) from the '60s and '70s, I see all those articles on things going on at the time. Just because some current event seems—and let me emphasize that word *seems*—prophetically significant, doesn't mean it is.

Christians of past generations who experienced horrible plagues that killed tens of thousands, devastating earthquakes, wars, famines, and what appeared to be signs in the heavens, thought the end of the age was upon them.

Some set dates for the Second Coming. Others thought they could determine the general time of Christ's return. But they were all wrong. When it seemed that the end was in sight, conditions improved and time went on.

We sometimes think things couldn't get much worse. But actually, they could get a lot worse.

But by the same token, things could get a lot better. How do we know that conditions will worsen in the next few years? We don't.

An important message of the Olivet prophecy is to be prepared at all times regardless of the conditions we see around us.

Watch Out

Wes White: So do you keep up with world events?

Mr. Stinson: I certainly do watch world events. I watch TV news and read magazine and newspaper articles on things going on in the world. I think people ought to be informed on what's going on.

But let's be clear on this. When Jesus said "watch ye therefore," He most definitely did not mean to watch world events.

I remember being particularly annoyed by a statement one self-proclaimed watchman made. He said, "When I see all that's going on in the world, I couldn't take a steady diet of love, faith, and hope."

In other words, he couldn't understand how anyone could focus on things like love, faith, and hope when there were so many news reports that can be easily tied to various prophetic texts. The same watchman made fun of the CGI, claiming that we were no longer watching.

Given the long history of failed predictions—and the COG has had its share—wisdom demands that we stay away from dogmatism, and especially date setting, when it comes to linking current events to cherished prophetic scenarios, some of which may turn out to be in need of revision.

How God Calls

Mr. Stinson: And let me add a point about the preaching of the Gospel. We at CGI absolutely do emphasize preaching the Gospel.

In our tradition, we hear a lot about God calling people to the truth. It is critical to understand how God calls. He calls through the preaching of the Gospel.

He may use other things—events in a person's life, etc. But we must not fail to see that God's calling certainly involves the preaching of the Gospel.

The Holy Spirit acts synergistically with the preaching of the Gospel. When Paul said in Acts 17 that God is commanding all men everywhere to repent, he meant that God's command to repent is going to all men through the preaching of the Gospel.

When Jesus, in John 16, spoke of the Holy Spirit convicting the world, He didn't mean this action of the Spirit would take place apart from the preaching of the Gospel.

The preaching of the Gospel is the calling—or part of it, at least—and the preaching of the Gospel is not merely an announcement about a soon coming Kingdom, a strong hand from someplace, or the difference between the "give" and "get" ways of life.

It is an invitation to repent and believe. It is an effort to help bring people to conversion.

Make no mistake. God does the calling, as we've heard countless times, but He calls through His use of willing human agents.

No Prescreening

Wes White: Many a COG group out there requires passing certain tests before you can be considered part of that group. Is the CGI that way?

Mr. Groce: Our fellowship is not exclusive. It is inclusive. It includes anyone in whom God is working, including imperfect people, and this certainly extends to all COG members. There is no screening or qualifying of new people.

It helps if we don't erect middle walls of partition, as mentioned in Paul's writings. These are already broken down by Christ. Christ promoted acceptance. Maybe all of God's people, including church leaders, should try and do the same.

Not too long ago, I came across an interesting question. The writer asked what does loving one another in the church look like.

Jesus provided the answer and a description: "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another."

The writer who asked the question went on to say, "If the world can know we are Christians by our love for one another, the world can also fail to recognize us as Christians if we don't love one another."

Gandhi said, "I like your Christ, but I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."

Maybe it's time for all of us to try to look for ways to advance the unity expected in Christ rather than continuing to work only apart.

Discipleship is the result of a relationship. It's centered on Christ and each other. Friendship among Christians—yes, even those outside your own organization—may not be everything, but it is a place to start.

More Like a Family

Wes White: The CGI is a legally incorporated entity like most of the other groups, isn't it?

Mr. Groce: Although the *Church of God International* is a corporate entity, it is more so a family. It's been that way since 1978.

Our fellowship is a diverse group of men and women with a remarkable faith in Jesus Christ. Their examples of service are inspirational.

Christianity and discipleship are really about relationships. It's what people do to people, converted or not.

The CGI thrives where people are genuinely concerned for each other, not because they have to be, but because they want to be. Time has a way of smoothing out the sharp edges of painful transitions. At least for the present, moving forward is a little easier than it used to be.

Contact Info

Wes White: How can people find you?

Mr. Groce: Our home office is located at 3900 Timms Street, in Tyler, Texas. Our weekly Sabbath service is held at 11 AM and is broadcast live over our website, www.cgi.org. Our office number is (903) 939-2929. Ω

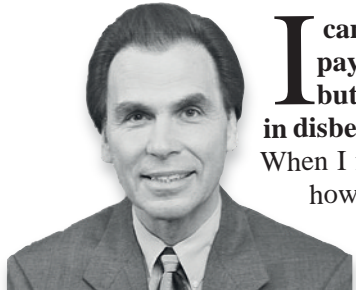
(Mr. White and his wife, Nancy, live in Big Sandy, Texas, and attend with the Church of God International in Tyler.)

A World In Transition

—Part 8

The world is different today! Many nations are very troubled. There is a lot of uncertainty, and for some, it's very disturbing, because it's finally beginning to personally affect us. Is there something we can do that will help us cope as this approaching global train wreck gets closer? Jesus Christ said, "...I will give you rest" and "...be of good cheer..." What exactly did He *mean* by these statements?

by Bill Watson



Bill Watson

I can assure you, every time I consider what I'm paying for a gallon of gas, a loaf of bread, milk, butter, eggs, or a cotton shirt, I shake my head in disbelief of just how much the world has changed.

When I find myself going through an airport, I realize how different the world is. When I walk through a shopping mall and see armed police on occasion, I recognize the world is not like it once was. Knowing there are varying degrees of national turmoil, regime overthrows, terrorist

alerts, and assassination risks for leaders throughout the world, and from time to time the general public, I'm reminded we live in perilous times. When I watch television or go to a movie, I understand it's a far cry from *Gone With the Wind*, *Father Knows Best*, or *Leave It To Beaver* and *Gunsmoke*, obviously indicative of a much simpler time. Even cartoons and video games today are considerable contrasts when compared to *Pac-Man*, *Mickey Mouse*, or *Mr. Magoo* and *Tom Terrific* with his mighty dog *Manfred*.

When I hear of crimes like the Green River serial killer in Seattle, Washington, who may have allegedly killed as many as 80 people, or the Kensington Strangler who may have killed as many as seven or eight women, or Anthony Sowell who allegedly killed 11 or more women in Cleveland, Ohio, I'm in shock! Combine that with mothers killing their children in very gruesome ways while at the same time occasionally committing suicide, too—compounded by the unfortunate abuses of young children, including a horrible number of pedophiles which sadly include *people of trust* like teachers, priests, and yes, even policemen—it's enough to tear your heart out!

Clearly, most of us would agree, the world is *quite* different and has gone through some very *shocking changes* in just the last 25–30 years. As was said at the outset of this series, we are now having debates about issues that shouldn't be debated. They range from legalizing marijuana to normalizing homosexuality, plainly leading to redefining marriage. Additionally, we contend with whether we should be allowed to kill an unwanted baby, while disguising it all under the broad category of human or civil rights. Also, we are losing the art of civility that comes with the responsibility of "free speech." The rhetoric and name calling of leaders from opposition parties, as well as some of the organizations pushing or resisting the political/social "change" is occasionally downright ruthless and uncouth. We have finally come to a place that can honestly be described as "reprobate" in behavior and judgment!

The Apostle Paul makes it brutally plain that people's losing of their moral compass is simply due to the fact they "did not like to retain [acknowledge] God in their understanding..." Notice the context of this statement from Paul: "Professing themselves [mankind in general] to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man... Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness... Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature [creation] more than the creator... for this cause God gave them up unto vile affections... And even as *they did not like to retain God in their knowledge*, God gave them over to a *reprobate mind*, to do those things which are not convenient" (Romans 1:22–28).

Read this whole passage. It's a stunning indictment against homosexuality, and how this is a reflection, or an effect, of improper judgment. But *more importantly*, with respect to the broader scope of his point, it illustrates mankind's desire to circumvent and undermine God's influence in their lives as a guiding force for *defining* right from wrong! That's what Paul really wants us to comprehend. Unfortunately, this resistance to God underscores the variety of issues, movements, and attitudes we find ourselves wrestling with—be it in our personal lives, or to the bigger picture of what's driving the geopolitical initiatives on a global scale.

Clearly, mankind's problems stem from the reality that he (mankind) *does not have* a relationship with the *real living God* of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who are the spiritual fathers we as His creation need to remember, lest the world be cursed with a curse (Malachi 4:6). If mankind would recognize these are the fathers, i.e., the lineage, the connection, that leads to the *true God*, humanity would eventually be turned to the Messiah and Savior of mankind, *Jesus the Christ!* Obviously, this would lead to worldwide repentance, with His created creatures representing the "God kind" avoiding the troubles we

have been outlining throughout the course of this series. Call me a realist, or perhaps a pragmatist, but considering the worldwide trajectory humanity seems to be on, the "curse" that could be avoided appears to be unavoidable!

I hope I'm wrong!—but if I'm not, *the script has been written*, and we are on course to collide with a destiny that is presented in no uncertain terms as viciously horrific! As a matter of fact, Christ Himself said, "For then shall be *great tribulation*, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be [there has never been a time like what's coming]. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved [the world would end as we know it]: but for the elect's sake [those called-out ones, the church] those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:21–22). This is quite a *chilling warning* from our Lord.

What Can We Do to Prepare ?

This question has been at the forefront of every generation having to confront difficult times. Throughout history, mankind has faced difficult periods, unfortunately resulting in a lot of destruction, pain, anguish, and suffering. Think of civil rebellion and international wars, natural disasters like famines, drought, starvation, earthquakes, tornados and hurricanes—or murder, corruption, extortion, and thievery—man's history is loaded with it! God has conceded the notion that there is no end to the evil man can cause. The *evil* that mankind has perpetrated has been relentless! Jeremiah confirms this when he claims that man's heart is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it" (Jeremiah 17:9)? This has been man's legacy. His track record is littered with injustice, malfeasance, depravity, fraud, violence, and dishonor. Naturally, this has led to the downfall of many empires, nations, families, and individuals throughout the eras of time, including our own!

The Bible tells us, "The ways of peace they know not." Also, "the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead." Regrettably, mankind has not learned the conclusion of the whole matter of life. Solomon wrote and identified it in the book of Ecclesiastes. He said, "Let us hear the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). This is key to the success of man's existence, but he has failed to recognize it, and insists on doing things *his way*!

It becomes important we prepare, since it's evident our world is about to repeat a cycle of *immense devastation* as it geopolitically shifts into the *times of the Gentiles*. It is obvious that the stranger (foreigner) has risen up and is now making the modern day Israelite cultures the "tail," while they (the Gentiles) become the "head" (Deuteronomy 28:43–44). The emerging markets of Asia, the Middle East, South America, and Russia's recovery attest to this fact; they have become the beneficiaries of the affluence of the United States' and Britain's material wealth and international leadership that has influenced the community of nations for the last 400–500 years, and especially since World War II. The exploitation and prodigious amounts of borrowing have run its course, and now weighs heavily on the United States, Britain, and the European Union as well!

Western money has given rise to what will become the "Frankenstein factor" for much of the world as the American dollar continues its decline and the United States becomes derailed. It's erroneous to think the United States is a superpower any longer, when it's the world's largest debtor country on the globe! We are only kidding ourselves, and our allies know we are delusional. The United States is well on its way, going the same direction its *brother nation*, England, has gone; and it appears the dollar will also go the way of the sterling—losing its status as the world's reserve currency at some time in the future! Hosea the prophet said to the people of his nation Israel, prior to the time of the Assyrian invasions (about 770–760 B.C.E.), "Ephraim [an inclusive term in this context for the U.S. and Great Britain] is joined to idols: let him alone. Their drink is sour: they have committed whoredom continually: her rulers with shame do love [or her rulers love shame, confusion, ignominy, dishonor], Give ye [let them have it]. The wind hath bound her up in her wings [the nation will be taken away], and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices" (Hosea 4:17–19). And so it is again today!

Admittedly, this is a statement for Israel in Hosea's time, but when applying it in parallel as "prophetic duality" to the modern day cultures of the

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remnants of Israel today, it's a *stunningly cryptic warning* for the cultures of the United Kingdom and its loosely associated commonwealth nations, and the United States!

So, how do we prepare for the inevitable? What is it that Jesus Christ would want His followers doing to prepare for this coming international storm—this *time of the Gentiles*? Interestingly enough, in Matthew 24, this same topic was on the disciples' minds. They asked Him, "Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3)? He proceeded to explain some "signs of the times," but then became rather specific and personal about how to get ready for the coming times of trouble.

Jesus Said: Now Learn a Parable

Consider what Jesus said after He listed these signs of the times: "Now learn a parable of the fig tree." He then went on to describe an example, likened to what He suggests we do in order to get prepared for the changing of the yearly seasons. And the very first thing He suggests is to eschew denial. *Accept* the season is changing!

Notice, after explaining that summer can be foretold by means of recognizing the evidence of leaves budding on the fig tree, He then appeals to those listening: "when you shall see all these things, KNOW [be resolved, be sure] that it [the time of the end and Christ's return] is near, even at the doors" (Matthew 24:33). This word "know" is the same as in the previous verse that says we should "know" with equal surety that summer is near when the leaves on the fig tree begin to bud. That's how confident and sure we should be as well, about the *prophetic times* in which we are now living. In other words, *have the courage* to recognize things for what they are so you don't lose heart and become discouraged when conditions accelerate and become increasingly more disturbing in this *changing prophetic season*.

With this in mind, it's obvious that the sooner we begin to *accept* things for what they are, and concede the *times of the Gentiles* is fast approaching, we will be better for it. This should help us to clearly understand that the marginalization of the United States' and the United Kingdom's worldwide influence and military/political power will soon be upon us. Therefore, upon realizing an enormous downturn and reduction of personal wealth, coupled with rising costs for the staples of life and the loss of purchasing power due to inflation and a declining dollar is coming our way—along with additional social decay, followed by more political disappointment/gridlock and potential anarchy increasing in the United States and much of the world—we must be determined to be more emotionally mature, focused, and firmly established in our minds and hearts about what our Lord continued to say in this portion of Scripture.

Notice and listen to what He says: "Watch therefore: for you know not what hour your Lord does come... Therefore be you also ready: for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man comes. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord has made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season" (Matthew 24:42–45)? This is the question we need to answer in light of the coming social, political, and global unrest. What is it that we can do that will afford us to be profiled by our Lord as a faithful and wise servant? This is a very poignant question for all Christians to face and answer!

Now notice: "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he comes shall find *so doing*. Verily I say unto you, that he [Christ] shall make him [you] ruler over all his goods" (Matthew 24:46–47). But what is it that Jesus Christ considers "so doing"? This needs some definition. As this theme continues, we pick it up in the next chapter. Notice: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left" (Matthew 25:31–33). Jesus is describing the Day of Judgment, and He is about to detail why those who were awarded entry into the Kingdom of God were considered acceptable, while others were rejected. This is a very significant disclosure He's about to reveal. He describes certain acts of charity, and claims that those who gained entry did these things (Matthew 25:35–37). He then proceeds to detail and identify these individuals participating in

particular acts of charity, which obviously is what He expected, because it resulted in rewarding them with the promise of entry into the Kingdom of God.

It is interesting, because His statement stunned those who were being rewarded for the many acts of charity they allegedly performed. They didn't quite understand what He meant, so they asked: "When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee" (Matthew 25:38–39)? And He simply answered them by making it plain that when they served their fellow man, they were doing it equally to Him (Matthew 25:40). This should be at the foundation of our Christian way of life. At the end of the day, a Christian with *no evidence of charity* is not a Christian. We read this same lesson in James 2:15–26. There must be a level of love (care and affection—*agape* in the Greek) that generates behaviors of charity—actual giving, which results in real benefit to others. This is what Jesus claims makes the difference between His true followers and those who are just pretending (John 13:35).

On the other hand, He says this to those on the left, those He rejects: "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink" (Matthew 25:41–42). The point of this is simple: Those of us who are not developing a way of life that exemplifies "giving" are missing the lesson concerning the foundational premise underscoring the Christian way, which simply is built on charitable works. *This is at the heart of the teachings of Jesus Christ*. This is an important fundamental if we are going to be found "so doing"—because that is the definition of what "so doing" is! For some of us, this will become a harder characteristic to express as we become more entrenched in the *tumultuous trials of circumstances* coming our way. But regardless, it remains an expectation of our Lord, no matter how hard the times may get, because this is what we are being called for—to become servants to mankind.

But, Is That All There Is?

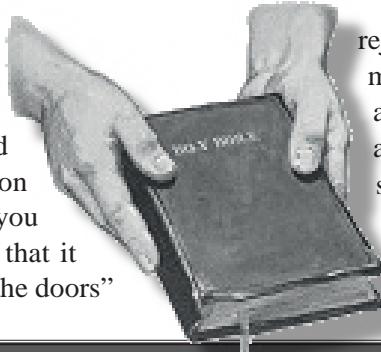
Going back to Matthew 24, we find there is an additional precautionary observation mentioned, warning us about a few things. He describes the latter days as being like it was in the days of Noah. In other words, it would be rather typical, comparably speaking. People would be going about their daily lives doing what they would normally do within the society of the time (Matthew 24:37–38). However, He illustrates an interesting point of consideration. Those who were *taken away* by the flood (the event) were completely clueless, oblivious, and completely ignorant of the times they were living in. Notice: And [they] knew not until the flood came, and *took them all away*; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:39).

What didn't they know? That the "buds on the fig tree" were budding! Figuratively speaking, they were totally unaware of the significance of the times—of the *prophetic season* they were living in. They *didn't see* the buds—or perhaps, they *wouldn't accept* what they saw, and therefore refused to place any significance on the signs of the times they were surrounded by. For whatever reason, they allowed their lives to consume them. They became distracted with the secular, humanist, and materialist interests of life in general. They allowed their lives to get away from them, causing them to drift from the more important objective of why they were born. This caused them to get blind sided. They weren't prepared spiritually to deal with "the event!" And so, some were taken away as by the flood—those caught unawares—while others were left behind to *be with God* as Noah's family was, upon entering the ark (Matthew 24:40–41).

Jesus recommends we *watch* to remain *vigilant*. He likens it to a "good-man" watching his house to protect it from a thief. He explains that if we watch and remain prepared, staying motivated with the understanding that being urgent and ready at all times will prevent the loss of our goods (figuratively referencing our salvation—Matthew 24:42–44)—that it is *this* individual who is considered a faithful and wise servant, because he remains motivated to be charitably "so doing," even in times of trouble (Matthew 24:45–47).

As the chapter concludes, we discover a warning against complacency (Matthew 24:48–51). This theme is carried through into chapter 25, and is again characterized in the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1–13). Interestingly enough, this subject is

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"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" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

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expanded upon with the additional instruction of growing in grace and knowledge, as illustrated in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30). It then concludes with the graphic narrative of Christ's expectations of charity, accentuated with specific explanations of particular acts that are considered acceptable by God's standards, covered previously.

Are You Building Your "Ark"?

The Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God would come. He cautioned that it was not from observation, or by outward show, but rather *through Him*, because He claimed it was "among them." In other words, He was among them, and in that respect, the Kingdom of God had finally come to earth—first, however, to suffer, then to rule. Unfortunately, the Pharisees didn't understand that (Luke 17:20–21).

He then continued this conversation with His disciples and explained a similar story, as recorded by Matthew. He warned them that the day would come "...when you shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and you *shall not see it*" (Luke 17:22). Some would argue He was referencing and prophetically speaking of the invasion and destruction of the temple by Titus in A.D. 70; and admittedly, that was a terribly horrific time for those Jews. It was a time in which many of those victims greatly desired the Kingdom of God to come, but it didn't. However, the context clearly goes beyond the more immediate future and on out into the last days and Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

With that said, again we find ourselves reminded by the words of Jesus Christ to be ready at all times and to be busy building our "ark of salvation" and not looking back, as Lot's wife did. We are being warned continually that many will be surprised by the *finality of events* bringing suffering and destruction of such magnitude, that we *too* will hope the Kingdom of God will come, *but it won't*—at least not just *yet*. Why? Because our Lord is on a mission! He is not purposely delaying His return. Remember, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, *but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9).

This is what underpins our Lord's timing. He wants to know how many of us are really committed to this way of life. How many of us are willing to lose our lives to gain eternal life? This is what He needs to know from us. That's why we are told, "Whoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whoever shall lose his life shall preserve it" (Luke 17:33).

The momentum of this world's trends is now unstoppable unless mankind would repent *wholesale*, which is highly unlikely! Instead, it appears we have begun to move up onto the threshold of the "times of the Gentiles." Those "buds" are fast becoming apparent by our economies, politics, militaries, coalitions, regime changes, and the relentless efforts for global unification. The United States and the British Commonwealth are in decline. Our government models, used for centuries, are currently being replaced by the more popular form of government called "State Capitalism" (socialism). The stranger is indeed rising up and becoming more of the head (the trend setters), while the birthright nations are fast becoming the tail, indebted beyond their GDP to those they have borrowed from. American "exceptionalism" is fast becoming a thing of the past!

We are beginning to see prophetic warnings playing out before our very eyes, defining the season we are in—and it appears *a prophetic seasonal change is approaching!* Notice what is said in the Torah about the nation of Israel if they wouldn't heed the instructions of God. "The stranger that is within you shall get up above you very high; and you shall come down very low. He shall lend to you, and you shall not lend to him: he shall be the head, and you shall be the tail" (Deuteronomy 28:43–44).

I don't need to belabor the point about China owning over \$1 trillion of U.S. debt. Presently, the United States borrows 40 cents on every dollar spent. Additionally, our total unfunded debt liabilities, which include pensions, mortgages (Freddie Mac and Fanny Mae), Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security are now in excess of approximately \$90 trillion; and we are accruing additional debt liabilities at the rate of \$1.5 to \$2 trillion per year. Pathetically, the present U.S. administration has spent more money in the first three years in office than what was spent over 220 years of American history! And regrettably, there doesn't seem to be any cooperative leadership from *any* of the political parties to date, with any answers to the

gridlock presently blanketing the political stage. As Pogo once said, "We have met the enemy, and the enemy is us."

It Is Time to Make a Real Commitment to God

This is a time of salvation. It is a time we should be working out our own salvation by building a strong relationship with God through Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:9–13). We are told in Hebrews, "God, who at various times and in different manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Has in these last days spoken unto us by a Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they" (Hebrews 1:1–4).

We have such an *awesome* destiny, and it's hard to believe it's ours if we will only believe in faith and obey our Lord's instructions about "so doing." Paul affirmed that the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory—eternal life as a *born-again spirit being*—which shall be revealed in us upon the resurrection (Romans 8:16–18).

Conditions are building that portend to become intensely difficult. There will be many reasons for attempting to justify pulling back, recoiling, and not expressing the kind of affection and care for one another that is mandated by Christ for proving we are His disciples (John 13:33–35). The prices of goods and services will underscore some of our perceived limitations, but we must

be careful not to allow the surrounding difficulties to hamper our service to God and our fellow man—*within* the church, or *outside* of the church. Remember, all human beings are potentially a son of God, and will have their opportunity sooner or later to be part of the God Family. Therefore, it's important we recognize our sense of obligation to the *unconverted also*, especially as the times become more disturbing, and others become more inquisitive about answers as to why things are happening the way they are. We need to be there for *them*, too, as lights in the surrounding darkness.

The answer Jesus provides over the course of Matthew 24:32 through chapter 25 speaks to the formula for successful achievement and entrance into the Kingdom of God! It is framed in the context of the last days for a very important reason, and it's critical we recognize it. The

warnings against complacency, selfishness, and hard-heartedness, and our vulnerabilities to these characteristics during times of trouble, is a point well taken. It's apparent that as difficulties become more personal, we become more withdrawn and attentive to our own personal needs rather than those of God's people or others. This can be dangerous for preserving our relationship with God and the assurance of entering into God's Kingdom as one who has maintained a "so doing" attitude and work ethic.

With all the accelerated conditions of rumors of war, extreme weather, and the dismal political and economic realities now being faced by so many nations around the world, at some point these circumstances will touch us, and affect our *personal lives*, if they haven't already. We must be ready to accept the stress that will be upon us in the coming years (i.e., loss of employment, retirement funds, pensions, health, homes, etc.) and not allow them to cause us to become "dysfunctional Christians." Regardless of the *negative forces* we may face, remember: All things are possible through Christ Jesus. Paul further reminds us, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" And Jesus says, "Come unto me, you who are heavy burdened, and I will give you relief."

With all that's been said throughout the course of this series, the solution to successfully coping with the world we find ourselves in is to simply *GET RIGHT WITH GOD*. Follow the instructions of Peter and do what he said when he was asked, "...what shall we do?" Peter stated very assuredly and plainly, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:37–39).

It is time all of us consider our relationship with God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Those of us who are *baptized* need to understand that God has certain *expectations* of us. It's incumbent upon all Christians to rise to the calling we've been given and achieve the profile described as one who has been found "so doing" in the work of serving charitably, both God and mankind in general—within the church and/or outside of it.

Those of us who are *not* baptized need to begin to seriously consider a relationship with God the Father, through Jesus Christ, because *They* are the keys to a life beyond the pains and worries of this world. They offer quality of life *presently* in the short term, if we will believe and obey—but more importantly, in the long term, *eternal* life with Them as sons of God in the God Family!



Are you building your "ark" of salvation?

Near-Death Experience?

*Some claim that a “near-death experience” proves life beyond the grave.
But how does this compare with the plain teachings of your Bible?*

by Mike James



Mike James

For those of us who believe that we are unconscious at death, the near-death experience (NDE) must be addressed. First of all, let's establish what the Bible has to say about the state of the dead, because near-death experience proponents say the opposite. Numerous scriptures state that the dead are unaware (Ecclesiastes 9:5–6; Psalm 146:4; Psalm 6:5). Other scriptures liken death to sleep (Daniel 12:2; John 11:1–12). The Bible also makes it clear that God *alone* is immortal (1 Timothy 6:15–16) and that immortality is something we have to gain (1 Corinthians 15:53–54).

Now keeping in mind what the Bible has to say about death, what is a near-death experience? An NDE is when a person is clinically dead. In other words, their heart has stopped beating and they have stopped breathing. The person is unconscious, and sometimes he/she is under the influence of anesthesia during the experience. During this time, these individuals have stated that they experience a very lucid memory of being aware and conscious of an amazing experience. This experience leads many of them to believe there is life immediately after death.

According to Jeffrey Long's research of NDE's, addressed in his book, *Evidence of the After-Life*, there are 12 elements that most of these individuals experience. One of the elements is an out-of-body experience. This consists of what they believe is their spirit leaving their body. They report that they can see their body being worked on by doctors and nurses if they are in an operating room. Others tell of leaving the operating room and seeing loved ones in the waiting room or down the hall of the hospital. The interesting thing about this is that some report accurately about what was happening in the waiting room or down the hall. Some relatives have been startled to learn that their conversation outside of the room their loved one was in was heard by their loved one while they were in an operating room.

Many of these people also experience heightened senses. They report that they are more conscious and alert than at any time in their life. This is interesting, because one of the arguments against the NDE is hypoxia, which is caused when there is a loss of oxygen to the blood. Those who remember things after suffering hypoxia say that the memories are fragmentary and not clear, which is the opposite of the lucid memory in the near-death experience. On the other hand, it could just be that some experience the loss of oxygen in their blood in different ways. It's also important to mention that despite the lack of blood flow, there is still some electrical activity in the brain stem.

Other elements that are experienced include intense positive emotions. According to Long, only a small percentage of these folks were frightened by the experience, but other research shows that some do experience negative emotions, especially those who report ending up in a hell-like environment. Many of those who have a negative “hell-like” experience were brought up in Christian homes that believed in a literal ever-burning hell.

A number say they passed into or through a tunnel of some sort. Children have mentioned going through a noodle of some sort. This would make sense due to the child's greater experience with noodles than tunnels. Some say they are drawn toward a mystical bright light as they pass through the tunnel.

Others report encountering other beings. Many times, these beings are dead relatives of those having the NDE. A few times, they have reported meeting relatives who are still alive. Seeing live relatives during this experience would lead me to believe this is something occurring in the person's mind rather than a true after-death experience. Other beings have been reported as being of a mystical nature. Angels, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and even God have been mentioned. Some have also encountered mystical beings of an unknown origin. This leads me to wonder a little bit about who these unknown beings might be. Could it be some form of Satan or demons? I will address that a little later in this article.

The alteration of time or space is another element. Some say they seemed to be in the experience for a very long time, when in actuality only five or 10 minutes had passed in real time. A number of others mentioned that everything seemed to be happening all at once.

Some have said they experienced a life review. They saw various memories of their life flashing before them.

In Long's research, 40 percent went to an enchanting, unworldly realm. They described the place as beautiful, and like no other place. Some thought this was a heavenly realm.

The attainment of special knowledge was another element. Some said this was a feeling of knowing how everything worked.

Finally, many stated they encountered some barrier or boundary from which they could not venture any further. And the last thing they experienced, the twelfth element, was a return to their body for those who said they had left their body.

Four of these elements seem to fly in the face of what the Bible has to say about death. First is the out-of-body experience. If this were true, it would go against scriptures that teach we do not have an immortal soul that is conscious at death. Remember, the Bible says immortality is something we have to seek (Romans 2:7). Daniel 12:2 tells us we will awake from death in a resurrection.



Does a “near-death experience” prove life beyond the grave?

A recent book, *The Spiritual Doorway in the Brain*, appears to cast doubt on some of the characteristics of an NDE being the experiences of an immortal soul. The book's author, Kevin Nelson, M.D., provides some scientific data that would lead one to believe that some of the NDE characteristics could be the result of natural occurrences in the brain. For example, Nelson provides data on a woman who had something similar to an out-of-body experience when her brain was manipulated by electrodes. Nelson also believes that the tunnel experience some have during an NDE could be explained by research that was conducted on fighter pilots who had a tunnel vision-type experience as they experienced test flights which brought them close to the state of unconsciousness.

Another element I take issue with are the positive emotions that many of these people experience. This would lead one to look at death as a positive thing to be sought after. That was the impression I got in reading the quotes from those who had that feeling in Long's book about near-death experiences. Many said they wanted to stay and not return to their body, because the experience of joy, peace, warmth,

and love was so intense. Once again, the Bible makes it clear that death is an adversary, not a state we should want to go to (1 Corinthians 15:16–18, 26, 51–55). The Bible makes it clear that death is our enemy, not our friend.

I'm also a little concerned by the other beings that these folks encountered during their experience. Many of these folks thought they were dead because they were seeing dead relatives. We need to remember that some of these folks (a smaller number) actually saw relatives who were still alive during their experience. A few people have claimed to have seen Mary, the mother of Jesus. Once again, this all goes against Scripture, which says we are all dead until a resurrection at Christ's Second Coming (1 Corinthians 15) or a resurrection at the end of the 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth (Revelation 20). Let's not forget that Satan blinds us to truth (2 Corinthians 4:4). We also need to remember that Satan is an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). He can make the bad look good.

The last element I would like to comment on is the special knowledge that many of these people talk about. Listen to some of the quotes from these individuals:

The being told me I would know the secrets of the universe.

I know everything there was to know. All the mysteries of the world were being revealed to me.

I know how everything works because I looked into his eyes for a moment—the secrets of the universe, all knowledge of all time, everything.

CONTINUED on next page

**“For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten”
(Ecclesiastes 9:5).**

**“His breath goeth forth [in death],
he returneth to his earth; in that
very day his thoughts perish”
(Psalms 146:4).**

Keeping these quotes in mind, turn back to Genesis 3:5–6 and notice what Satan said to Adam and Eve. He told them they would be like God in their knowledge base when they ate the forbidden fruit. They would know all. Could Satan and his demons be playing with the minds of those who experience near death? I believe this is a possibility.

I do not believe that these individuals are experiencing the next state that follows our death. I believe we are not aware until we are resurrected. But what could be going on with these folks? The first thing to keep in mind is that not everyone who suffers an NDE has an experience like this. Many don't have any memory of anything. Hypoxia is a possibility, but again, those who experience this have fragmentary memories that are not clear like the lucid NDE memories. Some scientists theorize that the brain may be able to pick up more information at a distance than we are aware of. Others say that another reality is being experienced by the right temporal lobe of the brain. Nelson's book, addressed above, finds natural examples of many of the characteristics of an NDE. Finally, I believe this could be a deception from Satan to lead people to believe in an afterlife that is not real.

What really concerned me, was near the end of Long's book, the author quoted a Colombian woman whom he said encompassed most of the experiences of the average near-death experience. This woman stated the following:

We live in a plural unity or oneness. Our reality is unity in plurality and plurality in unity.

I was everything and everything was me.

There is no God outside ourselves; God is in everything and everything is part of God.

The scary thing for me in these three statements is they could be said by many proponents of Eastern religions or New Age religion. As more and more people become aware of these experiences, we will need to defend what the Bible teaches and warn those who may be in the process of being hoodwinked by a force they are not even aware of. This force may be attempting to bring people from different belief systems together into a single false world system. Long appeared to be pushing the idea that we all live on after death regardless of what we believe. That is a lie Satan has been trying to push on mankind since the beginning. Ω

Questions & Answers

Q Why does God allow suffering? It seems that God could devise a system to draw us to Him without having to inflict pain on us, or our loved ones, or our pets, or our neighbors. Even as limited as our intelligence is, I think God could have devised a way for us to understand without pain. Angels do not suffer—they believe in God.

A This dilemma has haunted mankind from time immemorial. If God is all knowing, all powerful and all good, it is asked, why does He allow pain, suffering and evil to exist in the world? It is the tinderbox of atheists and agnostics. The question implies that allowing pain and suffering, war and evil is somehow incompatible with God's goodness, or that somehow God is really to blame. Be assured, however, this is not the case.

First of all, it is commonly assumed that this is God's world. Yet His Word, the Holy Bible, reveals that Satan is the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). There is no “contest” between God and the devil. If there were, it would appear that the evil one is wining hands down, and God would not be all powerful! Adam and Eve made a poor choice in the Garden of Eden when they went “independent” from God and chose the tree of the knowledge of good and evil over the tree of life (see Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–6). Their progeny has been going the way contrary to God's revealed laws and commandments ever since (1 John 1:8). At various times God announced, “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known” (Deuteronomy 11:26–28). Again, He said, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). It is man's ways, so

contrary to God's ways, that have brought the world to its present condition. God has always revealed His ways—His laws, His commandments, His statutes—to mankind. Yet He observed, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 55:8,9).

Secondly, suppose God had taken the only alternative, FORCING man, against his will, to live according to His laws? Can you imagine, for instance, the utter frustration of a person wanting to light up a cancer-causing cigarette and, lo! some invisible angelic force suddenly prevented him from moving his hand to his face? Or a person wanting to say an unkind word to another human being suddenly being struck dumb? Mankind, with his present nature, would rebel and tell God to go mind His own business and “Stop shoving Your religion down our throats!” Thus, God has given mankind free moral choice.

Thirdly, many skeptics have set up a humanistic syllogism in blaming God for man's suffering. It goes something like this: “Pain is bad. A loving God would eliminate all pain. He has not done so. So therefore there cannot be a God like the one you Christians worship.” Think for a moment! It is true that pain is not fun. It was not meant to be! But pain is there for very good and helpful reasons. Have you ever thought of the downside of insensitivity to pain? It warns. It protects. It teaches. We normally avoid painful situations; it is necessary for our growth and development. Far from being an argument against God's creative power and redemptive love, pain attests His goodness as a natural alarm to our physical bodies—a warning that something is amiss. It is also a great incentive for mutually caring about others, as in helping less fortunate persons in the community. And, most of all, pain and suffering are reasons to seek the One who alone can deal with our eternal needs. In Romans 8:22 we read, “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” In other words, all nature struggles under the burden of suffering and distress which sin has caused.

Fourthly, the Scriptures make it plain that God did not create the world in the state we find it now, but evil came as the result of the selfishly independent nature of man. Man has brought evil upon himself by egotistically choosing his own way apart from God's way. Remember, mankind has separated himself from God, not vice versa (Genesis 3:8). Jesus, through His selfless suffering and sacrifice, shows us the way back.

And lastly, God's plan for man is to ultimately reproduce His own kind—the God kind—through mankind (Genesis 1:26). This involves a change in human nature by developing godly character—the ability to think and act as God thinks—along with a metabolic change from physical to spirit by means of a resurrection. Godly character cannot be created automatically by fiat—it must be developed through sometimes painful experience! Mankind must turn from his own ways, thoughts, and habits to become God-minded. It is rightly said that experience is not always the best teacher—but it is the dearest! And righteous character cannot be instilled without free moral agency: the desire to choose right over wrong—every time.

You also noted, “Angels do not suffer—they believe in God.” True, good angels do not suffer. They are “locked in” to God's ways. But in Matthew 8:29, we read where certain demons cried out to Jesus, saying, “What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” These words show they recognized Jesus Christ and anticipated His final triumph and judgment. 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 show that a time of torment is coming for evil spirits. Although these wicked angels (demons) are not physical and do not have physical nerve endings as do human beings, there is a torment and suffering awaiting them. In Matthew 25:41, Jesus says to the wicked regarding the Day of Judgment, “Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

God has given mankind approximately 6,000 years to go his own way and learn through the lessons of “aversion therapy” and the school of hard knocks that “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23) apart from God.

The good news is, that although evil is here and it is real, it is also temporary! Jesus is coming again, this time to restore all things and to enforce His rule; and as a result, utopia will envelop the earth (see all of Zechariah 14; Isaiah 2:3; Jeremiah 50:4–5; Psalm 110:2). May God haste that day! Ω

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Real Reasons Why Christ Came to This Earth* [CCE]
- *What Is the Real Gospel Truth?* [RGT]
- *God's Hand in Healing* [CD# C613]
- *Can Good Come From Evil?* [CD# C665]
- *Why Christians Have Problems* [CD# C682]

God Is Not Working On ‘Plan B’

by Lonnie C. Hendrix



Lonnie C. Hendrix

For many years now, it has been accepted among many members within the Church of God culture that God’s plan to reproduce Himself was not His original plan.

Many of our brothers and sisters in Christ believe that God originally gave this earth to the angels and offered them the potential to take over the entire universe and finish His creation. According to this line of reasoning, when the angels rebelled, God decided to deprive them of their potential and create mankind. As a consequence of angelic sin, they believe that God determined that only God was incapable of sinning. Hence, God then decided to reproduce Himself through mankind and offer them the incredible potential that had formerly been offered to the angels. Likewise, because angels were immortal and could not die, God decided to make man mortal so that He would not have to exist in a state of sin for all eternity. In other words, God’s plans for mankind were entirely a reaction to the failure of His plans for the angels.

These beliefs, however, contradict what is CLEARLY revealed in Scripture concerning these matters! In the Holy Bible we read: “For unto which of the angels said he AT ANY TIME, thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God is for ever and ever: A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom” (Hebrews 1:5–8). Notice that God *never* addressed *any* angel as His begotten Son. Continuing in verse 13, we read: “But to which of the angels said he AT ANY TIME, sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? *are they not all ministering [serving] spirits*, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” (Hebrews 1:13–14)?

Hence, we can clearly see from these scriptures that angels were created to serve God and His begotten children. They *never* had the potential that was given to mankind—NEVER. “For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak” (Hebrews 2:5).

Laying aside the Scriptural evidence for just a moment, we also have to question the logic behind these beliefs. Does it make any sense to deprive the entire angelic host of their potential if only one third of them sinned? How is that fair? What about the two thirds of the angelic host who remained faithful and loyal to God? God’s *modus operandi* is to hold each individual responsible for his own behavior (Ezekiel 18:1–20). God is the epitome of fairness and justice, and He would *never* contemplate or condone anything that would compromise His reputation in that regard!

Likewise, it should also be apparent that God’s plan to reproduce Himself was not the product or result of angelic rebellion. God planned to reproduce Himself before the earth was created. Christ told His disciples, “Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD” (Matthew 25:34). Paul wrote the church at Ephesus: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him *before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will...” (Ephesians 1:3–5). Peter wrote that Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf had been “foreordained *before the foundation of the world*” (1 Peter 1:18–20).

Hence, the Scriptures clearly support the notion that God’s plans were centered on mankind from the very beginning. Angels were *never* offered what was eventually offered to mankind. They were created to assist God and His children in the fulfillment of His great purpose. In other words, angels were given a secondary or subordinate role within God’s overall plan to reproduce Himself, and that was the plan from the beginning. Man’s creation was not a reaction to the failure of “Plan A.” On the contrary, it was an integral component of that plan.

Moreover, those same scriptures clearly demonstrate that His plan was designed to be failsafe. God knew that it would be possible for man to sin. As a consequence, He provided the means to redeem mankind if that happened. In the book of Revelation, we read that the Lamb (Christ) was “slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). God’s plan was strong. It was not subject to happenstance or failure!

God created mankind in His own image and likeness and gave them dominion over this planet we call earth (Genesis 1:26–28). The author of the letter to the Hebrews expanded on this theme. Quoting David, the author

wrote: “But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now [currently] we see not yet all things put under him” (Hebrews 2:6–8). The author then goes on to explain that Christ had to take on the nature of humankind to triumph over death and make sure that they qualified to assume control over *all things* (Hebrews 2:9–15). The thought concludes, “For verily *he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham*” (Hebrews 2:16). Brethren, it should be abundantly clear to all of us by now that God gave this earth to humankind and offered US the potential to assume an even greater role throughout the universe!

Having set the record straight on that score, we are forced to reexamine the issue of precisely what caused the angels to sin, what that sin was, and the consequences that it evoked. From the Scriptural evidence available to us, we can agree with the opposing viewpoint on one item: angelic sin was intimately associated with their rejection of their God-ordained purpose.

In beginning to untangle this theological mess, we need to look more closely at the Scriptural evidence regarding the angelic host. If the angels were not given this earth or offered the physical universe to reign over, where was their original abode or home? In the 12th chapter of Revelation, we read that there was a war in heaven between Michael’s angels and the Dragon’s angels (Revelation 12:7). Moreover, we are told that the Dragon’s team was defeated and “NEITHER WAS THEIR PLACE FOUND ANY MORE IN HEAVEN” (Revelation 12:8). John continued: “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: HE WAS CAST OUT INTO THE EARTH, AND HIS ANGELS WERE CAST OUT WITH HIM” (Revelation 12:9). That seems pretty clear to me. The entire angelic host was originally headquartered in *heaven*, and they lost their place there, and ended up on the earth as a consequence of being defeated in an angelic war!

But why did they rebel against God and fight against the angels who remained loyal to Him? Speaking about Satan, the prophet Isaiah wrote: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars [angels] of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:12–14). The Hebrew word translated here as “like” is *damah*, and it means to be comparable to, or to resemble, or to be like someone. Satan wanted to be like God. He resented that he was not given the potential which was offered to man. He resented the subordinate role that God had designated for him to play in His grand plan to reproduce Himself.

However, the folks who adhere to the “Plan B” theory believe that Lucifer wanted to knock God off His throne and replace Him. Once again, this defies the very logic they employ to arrive at their conclusions. Think about it—if Satan really did represent the pinnacle of God’s ability to instantaneously create another being, if he really did represent “the sum, full of wisdom” as Ezekiel asserted in his writings (Ezekiel 28:12), then it is not very likely that Satan failed to understand that God could not be replaced. He wanted to be LIKE God. He wanted to be part of God’s family. He felt slighted by God. He did not want to be a servant. He wanted to rule with God. In short, he was jealous of man’s potential and was guilty of coveting it!

In those same Scriptures, we read: “Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God...Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth, and I HAVE SET THEE SO: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of thy merchandise [possessions] they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned...” (Ezekiel 28:13–16). Several things stand out to us from this scripture: 1) We know that this being is the same individual who appeared to Adam and Eve as the Serpent (compare to Revelation 12:9); 2) God *had appointed* this individual to serve as one of the two high ranking angels who was stationed as a sentinel at God’s throne in heaven (compare Exodus 25:18–22); and 3) All of his tremendous gifts went to his head and caused him to sin. Likewise, these revelations shed some important light on some of the other scriptures concerning Satan, his angels, their sins, and their ultimate punishment for those sins.

In the book of Genesis, we read: “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the LORD God *CONTINUED on next page*

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planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed" (Genesis 2:7–8). Notice that the Garden of Eden was created for MANKIND, *not* Lucifer. Yet, we find Lucifer, also known as the serpent, present in proximity to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:1–5). Moreover, we are told that "the serpent was more subtil [cunning, crafty, and prudent] than any beast [creature] of the field which the LORD God had made" (Genesis 3:1). Sounds like the description of Lucifer's intelligence found in Ezekiel, does it not? So why was Lucifer there? You know the story—he persuaded Eve to disobey God. Why? Because he was jealous of the human couple's potential—he wanted to be God's son!

Afterwards, when the deed was done, God told the serpent what his punishment would be. We read: "And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat *all the days of thy life*: And I will put enmity [hostility] between thee and the woman, and between thy seed [fallen angels] and her seed [Christ]; it [He] shall bruise [crush] thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:14–15). Notice that the serpent was tied to the soil of the earth thereafter, and that someday he would be permitted to inflict an injury on the Messiah's "heel." Nevertheless, the Messiah would deliver a blow to the serpent's "head," which signifies the ultimate defeat of Satan.

Brethren, there is no evidence that Lucifer or any of the angels were ever offered the salvation God foreordained for mankind. They are spirit beings, but it is not just any spirit that imparts eternal life and makes us members of the family of God—it is the Holy Spirit of God (Romans 8:10–17)! Lucifer and his angels were *never* offered God's Holy Spirit; but mankind was offered that Spirit, and it lives in God's people today! In fact, this very truth underscores the incredible human potential. We are to put on that immortality, to finally become part of the very family of God (1 Corinthians 15:49–57)!

Hence, the angelic rebellion *did not* cause God to change His plans for the universe. The creation of mankind was *not* "Plan B." Satan never has derailed God's plans or altered His purposes, and he never will.

Paul made this clear when he wrote to the saints at Rome: "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation *was subjected to frustration*, not by its own choice, *but by the will of the one who subjected it*, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Romans 8:19–21, N.I.V.). God allowed the creation to be subject to futility and frustration to further His own purpose and agenda.

"Plan A" is still on track, and it will remain on track until it is finished. There never has been a "Plan B," and God's purpose for mankind and the angels will stand forever! Ω

Ministering Spirits

The writer of the book of Hebrews, citing Psalm 104:4, states that the angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). The heirs of salvation are, of course, human beings. The angels, on the other hand, are powerful spirit beings who serve as God's agents assigned with the primary task of assisting the human heirs of salvation. The Scriptures show example after example of the angels of God doing just that—assisting the people of God—and there is not the slightest hint that God originally had a different plan or purpose for these powerful spirit agents.

When Elijah fled from the murderous Jezebel, an angel came to him and provided food and drink so he would have sufficient strength for the 40-day journey ahead of him (1 Kings 19:5–8).

The prophet Daniel, on the morning after a night locked in a den of lions, was able to announce to King Darius, "My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him" (Daniel 6:22).

Like the righteous servants of God before Him, Jesus received help from God's agents.

When He was a young child, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and warned him of Herod's plot to kill the child, instructing him to take the young Jesus and His mother to Egypt and stay there until further instructions (Matthew 2:13).

At the end of the intense ordeal of Jesus' "temptation" in the wilderness, "the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him" (Matthew 4:11). And then again, at the end of His earthly mission—in the night of His betrayal, when He prayed with great fervency that His Father might "remove this cup from Me"—"an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him" (Luke 22:43).

An angel announced the birth of Samson (Judges 13), John the Baptizer (Luke 1:11–20), and Jesus (Matthew 1:20–21).

In the various visions that make up the book of Revelation, angels are involved in revealing God's intentions and carrying out God's will on the earth.

In the book of Acts, we find angels assisting the human heirs of salvation in various ways. See, for instance, Acts 5:19–20; 10:3–6; 12:7–10; 27:21–24.

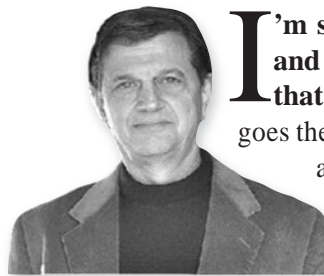
Throughout Scripture—both the Old Testament and the New—we find the angels of God busily engaged in carrying out their primary mission of assisting human beings, who were foreordained to be "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17).

Angels are not to be prayed to or worshiped, for, like the humans they assist, they are created beings. But we can express our thanks to God for the assurance He provides through setting these powerful agents about His people. Their purpose is summed up succinctly in Psalm 91:11:

"For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways." Ω

Are You a Disappointment to God?

by Evan J. Chase



Evan J. Chase

I'm sure we can all relate to our best intentions and wishes going wrong and the disappointment that followed. An example of this is when a child goes the wrong way in life and the deep disappointment and hurt it causes to the parents of that child.

In a Christian's life, he or she is called by God the Father (John 6:44,65), who knows His new child has the ability, with God's Holy Spirit dwelling in him, to grow, develop and be eventually born into God's own family (John 6:39).

When we as Christians turn off that "road," or by the fruits of our lives show we are not serious about God's way of life, imagine how that disappoints the Father and Jesus Christ!

This subject is well documented in the Bible. Turn to Genesis 6:5–6. This is the account of the state of the world just before the Flood, and how disappointed and grieved God was as a result. Notice the last part of verse 6: "...it repented the LORD that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart." Sadly, there were times that God's infinite patience was sorely tried due to man's sinning ways!

Another example of this is Isaiah 63:10, speaking of ancient Israel's bad habit of turning from God in spite of His miraculous deliverance over the years: "But they rebelled and vexed His Holy Spirit, therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them." Yes, even all-patient and all-longsuffering God Almighty has a point at which He takes major action against sinners.

How do our lives reflect God's calling? Are we careful to obey Him in the letter and spirit of His laws and ways? Do we immediately repent and get back to God's way of life if we sin?

The Apostle Paul had a lot to say about the Christian life and what God expects from us. The book of Ephesians is a "gold mine" of instruction and exhortation for us all. Read in chapter four as Paul describes our renewed life living as Christ did: "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption." Indeed, it is possible to grieve God the Father and Jesus Christ by our lack of commitment, diligence, and lack of consistency in living His way.

Our eternal future is on the horizon. Rather than grieving God's Spirit, we can stir it up within us (2 Timothy 1:6–7) to please Him and confirm His confidence in calling us! Ω



Church News

Over 400 Observe Thrilling Pentecost in Jamaica

The Feast of Pentecost was observed by 404 persons in the Jamaican CGI. The Sagcor Auditorium in Kingston was packed to capacity by 344 persons from the Kingston and Spanish Town congregations. Meanwhile, 50 and 10 persons observed the holy day in Maroon Town and Ocho Rios, respectively.

The Kingston assembly enjoyed an exhilarating praise and worship experience, as is usually the case when both congregations meet. The day was memorable for more than that, however. The ordination of two new deacons, the honouring of a veteran Church of God couple, along with Pastor Ian Boyne's scintillating sermon on the prophet Ezekiel, were the highlights of a truly wonderful Pentecost.

Deacon Chris Hendricks led the congregation in the singing of traditional Pentecost hymns, followed by several inspiring musical items by individuals, various ensembles, and the choir.

Pastor Boyne then made a special presentation to Juston and Marion Sutherland in honour of their more than 40 years of service in the Church of God. Pastor Boyne commended Deacon Sutherland and his wife for their unwavering and exemplary record of service, sacrifice, and perseverance in the faith. Amidst sustained applause, Mr. Boyne presented the Sutherlands with a special plaque on behalf of the church.

Pastor Boyne's choices of Solomon Bleary and Orion Brown for ordination to the deaconate were enthusiastically endorsed by the congregation, as indicated by their resounding applause. This was no surprise, knowing the two men. Mr. Bleary joined the CGI in the early '90s as a young man, and has been an indefatigable worker since. His ordination is merely an official recognition of his role as a leader and servant which he has already been fulfilling. He is married to Oddette, who is also very active in the congregation.

Mr. Brown grew up in the *Worldwide Church of God*, and has been with the CGI several years now. He and his wife Simone have been models of service to the congregation. Mr. Brown has been serving as Pastor Boyne's personal assistant, and has earned a reputation for diligence, resourcefulness, and reliability.

Following an energizing session of praise and worship led by Deacon Hendricks and his team, Pastor Boyne delivered a dynamic and profound exposition focused on the prophet Ezekiel. He explained the context of Ezekiel's ministry and elucidated several important lessons from the prophet's life relevant to our lives as contemporary believers. He especially highlighted how Ezekiel was called, not just to preach His message to the Israelite captives in Babylon, but to actually live it. Mr. Boyne explained that during Ezekiel's ministry, God told him to illustrate his messages with dramatic object lessons. These included such acts as lying on his side for 390 days during which he could eat only one meal a day cooked over manure, shaving his head and beard, and showing no sorrow when his beloved wife died. Through everything, Ezekiel demonstrated true obedience and faithfulness to God.

Though suggesting that God may not ask us to do anything quite as dramatic or difficult, Mr. Boyne challenged the audience to consider their willingness to do whatever God may require of them. He also showed that though Ezekiel's message was one of condemnation for Israel's sinful actions, yet ultimately it was also a message of hope of future restoration for God's people. Ezekiel gave a vivid picture of God's unchangeable holiness and inexpressible glory, which we need to capture as we face the struggles and challenges of our daily lives.

One member, who also communicated with me, was compelled to express to Pastor Boyne how great an impact his sermon had on her. She wrote him to say, "...your sermon was one of the best I have heard in 40 years. It was amazing on every count. Thank you." I think her sentiments were shared by many others. Ω

Submitted by Glenford Smith

Members Say Goodbye



Congregation in Cranberry Township, Pennsylvania

On May 21, 2011, the Cranberry Township congregation of the *Church of God International* gathered for this photo to mark the event of Charles "Chuck" Calahan's last Sabbath with us before moving to Texas to be near his family members. He will be dearly missed. Charles is pictured standing at the far right in the front row. (Not all members were present for this photo.) Ω

Submitted by Ronald C. Bachner

Beware of Terrorist Groups in Church!

Beware of terrorist groups in church! Reports are that five terrorist cell groups have been operating in many of our churches. They have been identified as: Bin Sleepin, Bin Gossipin, Bin Arguin, Bin Fightin, Bin Complainin, and Bin Missin. Their leader, Lucifer Bin Workin, trained these groups to utterly destroy the Body of Christ.

The plan is to come into the church disguised as Christians and to do the work within the church to discourage, disrupt, and destroy. However, there have been reports of a sixth group. A tiny cell known by the name of Bin Prayin is actually the only effective counter terrorism force in the church. Unlike other terrorist cells, the Bin Prayin team does not blend in with whoever and whatever comes along. Bin Prayin does whatever is needed to uplift and encourage the Body of Christ.

We have noticed that the Bin Prayin cell group has different characteristics than the others. They have Bin Watchin, Bin Waitin, Bin Fastin, and Bin Longin for their Master, Jesus Christ, to return. No church is exempt! However, you can spot them if you bin lookin and bin goin. Ω

Submitted by Christine Tonjes

A preview of our new booklet, *The Q&A Book, Volume 2*, can be seen on our website at <http://cgi.org/resources/booklets-brochures/85-the-qaa-book-volume-2>

MUSIC ANNOUNCEMENT—MIDLAND FEAST SITE

Our choir will be between 25–30 members this year. We are developing an orchestra to help back up the hymns. We will have the hymns for E-flat and B-flat instruments. If you play alto or tenor sax, or brass instruments, trumpet, trombone, tuba, or horn in F, please contact me quickly so that a small organized orchestra can be formed.

Frank Klett

5940 Burdette Street
Toledo, Ohio 43613
(419) 475-2554
(419) 787-5681



ANNOUNCEMENT FOR THE MIDLAND FEAST SITE

Mrs. Ramocan is organizing an "International Fashion Show" for the Midland, Ontario Feast site. Please bring your fashion ensembles and appropriate music if you would like to participate.

Church News

New Location for Auburndale!

The *Church of God International* of Auburndale, Florida has been meeting at the Auburndale Women's Club for over 17 years. We never really had a place to call our own, and holy days were especially difficult, because sometimes the Women's Club had already booked the building for another event, causing us to have to move. With guidance from God, a building came up for sale less than a mile away from the Women's Club.

With much help from the Auburndale congregation, hours and hours of working diligently to get the building ready for fellowship and worship, we were able to reach our goal of having our first service on June 11, with our first Pentecost on June 12. It was amazing to have this new beginning on Pentecost Weekend, as Pentecost pictures the renewal of life and the beginning of the church. It is truly an incredible thing to see men and women of God come together in bringing about such a wonderful place for fellowship and worship.

Our first service was with the *Miami Church of God*, for a total of 56 in attendance. The sermon was given by Bill Harkins of the CGI Auburndale. On Pentecost, we had both the *Church of the Sovereign God* and *Miami Church of God* gather with us for a total of 72 brethren. Offertory was given by Raymond Wendle, sermonette by Alex Fontao from the *Miami Church of God*, and the sermon by Ben Faulkner from the *Church of the Sovereign God*.

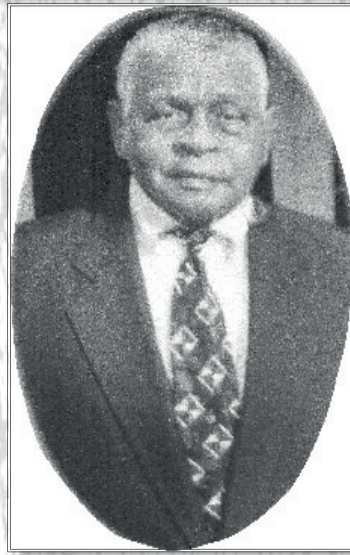
We cannot thank God enough for giving us such a wonderful place of worship. Ω

Submitted by Rachel Simpson



In loving memory...

Erman Jackson



February 18, 1926

May 6, 2010

I have fought a good fight. I have finished the race, I have kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:7).

The Memphis, Tennessee congregation was saddened when one of our dearest members died on May 6, 2010. Mr. Erman Jackson of Grenada, Mississippi had been in ill health for a while and passed away at Baptist Memorial Hospital. He was born on February 18, 1926 in Bryant, Mississippi, and accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior as a teenager.

He was married on July 16, 1948 to Bessie Ann Freelon, and they had five children.

His mother worked for Herbert Armstrong in the 1950s, and Erman started attending the *Radio Church of God* in 1956, where he became active in the Spokesman's Club. He moved from California to Grenada, Mississippi in 1982. He joined with the *Church of God International* and was an active and faithful member in the Memphis congregation from 1995 until his death.

Services were held on May 15, 2010, and he was buried in the Coffeerville Cemetery. He will be sorely missed by us all. Ω

Submitted by Sharon Richardson

The Feast of Tabernacles *Infuse* meetings will be in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina this year! We have a lot of events in the works!!

Volleyball Tournament and Cookout
Infuse Kickoff Luncheon
Parent's Night Out
Ice Cream Social
and More!

All volunteers are welcome.

Let Cody or Mike James know if you plan on volunteering.
(olympicweight@yahoo.com or mhjames6043@yahoo.com)

Attention Musicians: *Infuse* needs players and singers for the Myrtle Beach Praise Band this year. If you can play drums, keyboard, guitar, or bass, or if you can sing and would like to be part of the Praise Band, please contact Vivian Rust for details at vivianrust@aol.com

Website: The new website is up and running. Check it out! We have new features like Scriptures and Bible Studies. Let us know what you think (infusecgi.org).

Retreat: Anyone have ideas for next year? We are looking for locations and times for next year. Speak up now and have your voice heard! E-mail Cody at olympicweight@yahoo.com or Mike at mhjames6043@yahoo.com

Magazine: Contact Adam Boyd at wboyd56@yahoo.com if you have ideas or want to contribute articles to the *Infuse* magazine. Ω

Church News

Clyde Bost Honored

Electing to make it a private affair, the children of Clyde Bost gathered in Statesville, North Carolina recently to celebrate their dad's 90th birthday. Escorted by his four daughters, Karen, Frances, Helen, and Janet, Clyde Bost had no idea where he was going when he was pinned with a rose boutonniere before stepping into the 1941 black Chevy Deluxe sedan, picking him up at 5 PM on Friday, March 18, 2011. The car was provided by Archie and Kelly Johnson of Statesville.

Mr. Bost didn't have long to wait, as the event scheduled was a short distance away, an evening around Lake Norman, aboard the nostalgic Mississippi paddleboat, *The Catawba Queen*. One of the highlights of the evening was his being allowed to actually steer the old steamboat. As is always the case when the gang gathers, there was much to talk about, much to laugh about, and lots of good memories to share. A wonderful dinner of prime rib, grilled salmon, and herb roasted chicken was provided. The birthday cake, designed by Ingle's Bakery, was in the shape of a Bible with Clyde's favorite scriptures inscribed: John 3:16-17; Psalms 100; Galatians 3:29; Psalms 19:14; Psalms 24; and Revelation 4:6.

The father of eight children, Clyde is a native of Statesville and the son of the late Bertha Idella and James Oscar Bost. The house he was born in on March 21, 1921, still stands today in Statesville. The area back then was known as the Celeste Eufola Whistle Stop. His mother was a member of Front Street Baptist Church of Statesville. Clyde was married for almost 70 years to the love of his life, Effie Frances Fincannon Bost, who sadly passed away on June 3, 2010. Memories of their life together were very much a part of the evening.

During the evening, Clyde's sons shared some of their favorite memories of times with Dad. David said he remembers, as a child, the habit of telling his dad, "I can't." "He taught me a valuable lesson," David said. "I had to copy a poem by Ernest Albert Guest 50 times, and it went something like this." David then began to recite what he remembered of the poem so long ago:

Somebody said that it couldn't be done but he with a chuckle replied, that maybe it couldn't, but he would be one who wouldn't say so till he'd tried. So he buckled right in with the trace of a grin on his face. If he worried he hid it. He started to sing as he tackled the thing that couldn't be done, and he did it!!

David declared the poem has stuck with him throughout his life.

Bill, the eldest son, remembers fishing as a young boy with his dad. "Dad owned a little boat and we would go fishing out on the Chesapeake Bay and the James River in Virginia. One day, no kidding, we caught over 100 fish!"

Jeff smiled as he spoke of his many good memories with his father. "I remember Dad taking me out to fly a kite and I let the kite go. I proceeded to chase that kite all the way to school while Dad stood and watched and laughed at me, believing that I could catch that kite. I remember many hunting excursions and spying out the land, and our picnics." Jeff said he has a lot of good memories and that he could really go on forever.

When asked what they have taken away from Clyde's 90 years of wisdom, his daughters were delighted to respond. Karen said he gave her his strength and taught her never to give up. "Can't never did do nothing!" he would say. "He taught me to believe in faith."

Recalling a time she will never forget, Karen shared another story. "One



Clyde Bost

time, he caught me slouching, so he taught me good posture and how to walk like a lady by making me walk with a book balanced on my head for 30 minutes a day. This is a lesson I remember to this day—when I catch myself slouching, I remind myself to sit up straight." By including Sunday drives in their upbringing, Karen declares, Clyde taught all of the kids to appreciate their surroundings. With great admiration, Karen closed with, "I know there is not another man like him."

Frances strongly declared, "I think it took me well into my adult years and having children to realize how appreciative I am of Dad's hands-on parenting. He wasn't our friend, but our parent. I remember his help on at least two major projects I had in school (a bug display and a seashell display). He definitely prepared all of his children for the real world. I get my tenacity or persistence from him, my love of reading and music, my love of God, and my strong work ethic. He taught me to do my part in life, take a stand, and speak up if the need arises. For that I am most grateful."

Helen clearly knew the answer for herself. "My strong will! Who can doubt that? My love of history, of travel, my continued thirst for discovery, adventure, and knowledge—all I credit to my father. Books, many of them, are and always will be a part of my life because of his example. I remember our early days as partners in crime. I wrecked my sister's car and was so afraid Dad was going to kill me. Instead, he worked all night to fix that car, removing every dent, to a point you couldn't even tell that car had ever been wrecked! Proof positive of my belief Dad could really do anything he set his mind to."

Janet can definitely thank him for his old fashioned upbringing and how it's helped her in raising her own child, all of his help with school, especially those long nights of learning algebra, and how he taught her to never give up on anything. She has fond memories of how he taught her to build and color her own kites right down to making her own glue, going to the grocery store together and getting a box of animal crackers to eat while shopping, and how he taught all the guys that came to court what it meant to date a lady.

All the girls remember giving their dad a "good-night kiss" before bed, even in their teen years. They can still see his pleasing smile, a wonderful memory.

The children asked their father what he thought of the family sitting in front of him now. He replied with a sincere voice, "I want you all to know that even though I haven't always said it, I love you all dearly." Ω

Submitted by Diane Sain

Notice!

- It is the desire of the staff to publish *The International News* quarterly. We can do this only if you, the reader, help by submitting timely articles, reports, and pictures.
- With few exceptions, submissions should be from 800–1000 words in either .doc, rtf, or .txt format.
- Submissions may be sent either to vancestinson.org or lloyd Cary@gmail.com, or preferably, to *both*.
- DEADLINE for the next issue is November 15, 2011.

The Editor

"These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons" (Leviticus 23:4).

The dates for God's Fall Feasts in 2011 are:

- Feast of Trumpets: September 29, 2011
- Day of Atonement: October 8, 2011
- Feast of Tabernacles: October 13–19, 2011
- The Last Great Day: October 20, 2011

Detailed information on our various Feast of Tabernacles sites for 2011 is posted on our website at www.cgi.org and in the previous issue of *The International News*.

Request your back issue today!

Church News

London Fellowship Enjoys Garden Service

On Saturday, July 30, it was our distinct pleasure to host a “Garden Service” for the local London Fellowship Group here in Chatham, Ontario, Canada. We are a rather small, insignificant group, with services twice monthly, on the first and third Sabbaths of each month. Also, we usually host one holy day service during the year. I like to call us “the weak, the halt, and the lame,” as most of us are seniors, handicapped, and/or have medical issues, but manage to be at services faithfully.

The day started out with beautiful sunshine and a slight breeze, but promised to be a great day. The weather cooperated.

The first to arrive were Bill Watson and his wife, Margie. We had a few moments to get re-acquainted before the members began to arrive. Just as services were getting started, everyone was surprised to see Charles Groce nonchalantly strolling in—he had taken time from his busy schedule to attend services with us.

Mr. Watson went on to deliver a timely sermon for our group regarding God’s great plan of salvation, and how we will be changed to spirit beings to become members of God’s family—something the world does not understand. He emphasized that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God,” and that we do not leave our bodies at death to continue living in some other dimension until Christ’s return and the resurrection. He also commented, as he walked among us, on how he thought this garden setting might have been close to the atmosphere that Christ taught in during His Sermon on the Mount.

At the close of the sermon, a group of young people we’ll call the “Delacruz-Jasper Family Band,” treated us to Sabbath-appropriate background music while the BBQ and food tables were set up. During this time, Mr. Groce and Mr. Watson circulated among the 30-some guests and fellowshipped. This was the first time they had a chance to meet and talk with Mr. Groce and Mr. Watson.

The meal offered a variety of foods and desserts for all. It was rather entertaining to see people carrying their lawn chairs from one location to another in order to stay in the shade—I even saw a bench being relocated to a cooler spot. Mr. Groce thought it was much cooler than Texas, but a little warmer than he expected.

Finally it was time to leave, as everyone had at least an hour-and-a-half journey to return home. Last Sabbath at services, we noticed a definite boost in morale for our little group, and so are hoping to plan a similar event next year.

Ω

Submitted by Loretta and Leland Jasper



A prayer of thanks before the meal



Charles Groce, Loretta Jasper, Lee Jasper, Marge Watson, Bill Watson



Erica, Carlos, Zackary and Lorrie—
part of the “Delacruz-Jasper Family Band”



Bill Watson (center) with Lou-Ann and Dave Copeland



Leland Jasper with Bruce Delacruz and Rick Dubler

We Have An Open Church Policy

The *Church of God International* is an open church. We have many people attending who are new in the faith. Please be aware that some may not always keep each of God’s laws as they should, and some may not believe everything we teach. We pray that they may be strengthened through the services we render and the examples we set as they come to a closer walk with their God. We request that you be neither judgmental nor base your standard for obedience on what you see your brother do. Christ is our standard, not weak and sinful men or women. Always remember that you will be judged for what *you* do, not what others do. Your job is to pray for them, set the right example, and please God our Father and Jesus Christ in all that you think, say, and do.

Ω

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I'VE HEARD...



- Friendship is a plant that must be watered often.
- Forgiving those who hurt us is the key to personal peace.
- Nothing can bring you peace of mind but yourself.
- God forgives all repentant sinners; how unhappy is the one who cannot forgive himself.
- Happiness is not a station to arrive at, but a manner of traveling.
- Happy is he who learns to bear what he cannot change!
- To be wronged is nothing... unless you continue to remember it.
- Forgiveness means letting go of the past. Permanently.
- Those who can't forget are worse off than those who can't remember.
- Notice: when you sincerely pray for someone, you begin to modify your personal attitude toward him.
- Life may be hard, but it's also wonderful.
- There is no real wealth but life.
- Sorrow looks back, worry looks around, faith looks up.
- Being in agony, He prayed more earnestly.

- The opposite of having faith is having self-pity.
- Feeling sorry for ourselves is a luxury we can't afford.
- Every new adjustment is a crisis in self-esteem.
- Deception leads to more deception, error leads to more error, and truth leads to more truth.
- Is it any wonder why compromising Christians do not like *non*-compromising Christians?
- People do not reject the Bible because it contradicts itself, but because it contradicts *them*.
- Too many Christians expect the world to respect the Book they *themselves* neglect!
- Truth is "hate" to those who hate the truth.
- Tell me who you walk with, and I'll tell you who you are.
- As long as we continue to "justify" ourselves, we don't need to repent of what we've done.
- The most miserable creature in the world is a Christian who is not living right.
- Living on earth is expensive, but it does include a free trip around the sun.



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