



THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

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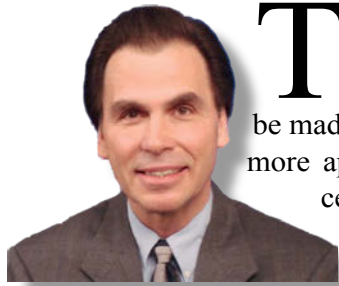
"Put on the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:13)

Winter 2011

The Real Meaning Behind the Nativity of Jesus Christ!

At this time of year, we are reminded throughout the holiday season about the nativity of Jesus Christ. This important event should, from time to time, be given its rightful recognition. However, did Jesus Christ require, command, or mandate it to be celebrated? Is there any biblical basis for observing a festive "birthday" observance for this King of kings and Lord of lords? And if not, how do we recognize it, if at all?

by Bill Watson



Bill Watson

There are many people today who are unaware December 25 is *not* Jesus Christ's birthday. Arguably, a compelling case could be made that establishes the autumn of the year to be more appropriate. Some have speculated, based on certain scriptural texts, that it may be more accurate to consider the Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah) or perhaps the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles. However, regardless of these speculations, we do know this: *He was not born on December 25.*

Historically, the record is clear. December 25 shares historical connections with ancient pagan Babylonian sun worshippers and their winter solstice celebrations. The attachment of these seasonal "trappings" observed by the heathen cultures of the past is a fascinating study. We highly encourage you to request our free booklet, *God's Seasonal Plan*, and our free edition of the *Armor of God* periodical on "Church History." The content of these publications will help you understand how, what, where, and who made the changes and substitutions replacing the original apostolic holydays as evidenced in our Bibles. However, suffice it to say, *Christmas is not a Christian holyday*, and Jesus Christ never expected the day of His physical birth to be observed in revelry fashion as it is today. Frankly, the Bible's *total silence* concerning the day of His physical birth is deafening!

So What Is Important About the Nativity?

Clearly, the narratives described in Luke, Chapters 1 and 2, are important from a few standpoints. First, it's very reassuring and encouraging to read of this event because it explains how the firstborn Son of God the Father, the Word of God, became flesh. Secondly, it proves, by virtue of the many prophecies mentioned in the Old Testament, that the Bible and the events surrounding Christ's life, death, and resurrection are indeed credible and true! And most assuredly, the method was illustrated by which mankind can now obtain immortality through this Being's incarnation: the unwarranted and innocent sacrifice of Himself out of love for His creation.

The story of a "God Being" becoming a man so that man can become a "God Being" is an incredible story. The nativity event explains the commencement of *how* God the Father would initiate this complex "birthing process." This miraculous phenomenon and the record of *how* it was done and *who* was involved is extremely important, because it is critical to the confirmation and connection we share with the "God Family." It substantiates our *future* "born again" experience—which is the ultimate conversion: the *transition* from mortal to immortal (1 Corinthians 15:52–56)—and clarifies how our *literal adoption* will occur, reconciling us to the God Family. It reveals how this foundational *miracle* of the "firstborn" of *many brethren* unfolded. That is a crucial piece of the Mystery of God. Understanding these circumstances and the record of this event serves to fortify, reaffirm, and establish that this *phenomenal miracle of begetting*, of God interacting with man, did indeed occur. These are just a few reasons

NATIVITY, continued on page 3

Between the Testaments

by Lonnie C. Hendrix



Lonnie C. Hendrix

"And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch" (John 10:22–23).

What was the Feast of the Dedication? Why was Christ observing it? Who were the Pharisees and the Sadducees? How did the Romans come to be in charge of Judea? Who was King Herod? Have you ever wondered what happened between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament? Have you ever wondered why the world into which Christ was born looked so different from the one that was extant in Nehemiah's day?

In the chronology of the Old Testament, we are left with the Persians in charge of Judea. Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther all take place under the reigns of the kings of Persia. Zerubbabel had rebuilt the temple with the permission of those kings. After all, Daniel had prophesied the Babylonians would be the first in a series of empires that would rule over Judea. He predicted that they would be followed by the Persians.

Even so, what happened next? We know that Daniel's prophecies did not end there. Was God silent and inactive after the Persians came to power? Did the story of God's people end until the time for Christ to enter the world? The answer to both of those questions is a resounding NO!

To begin to answer these questions about what happened next, we need to go back to Daniel's prophecies and refresh our memories about what he had to say about the future. As you may recall, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream; and Daniel was commanded to tell him about the dream and interpret its meaning for the king. He said: "Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay" (Daniel 2:31–33). He continued: "This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength and glory... And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee [the Persians], and

TESTAMENTS, continued on page 4

What's inside...

Witness

Alice E. Lauria
Page 2

What's Next—

After the Feast of Tabernacles?

Evan J. Chase
Page 2

In Loving Memory—Frank Marang

Page 5

Feeding From the Vine

Ferrell Vincent
Page 6

Does God Really Care About Exercise?

Lloyd W. Cary
Page 7

Q&A – Are We Out of Step About Christmas?

Page 8

Feast Reports

Pages 9–15

Glad to See You!

Bronson James
Page 16

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Witness

by Alice Edwards Lauria

My name is Alice Lauria, and I worship with the Morehead, Kentucky congregation. A funny thing happened to me on the way to the Feast this year.

There is an old story about a farmer and his mule. The good ole country boys and girls reading this are probably familiar with the story. As it goes, each day the farmer, let's call him Joe, prepared his mule for plowing, then he would pick up a two-by-four and whack his mule. Joe's neighbor and friend watched Joe whack the mule a number of times and could stand it no longer. So, one day he asked Joe why he whacked his mule each time. Joe responded, "First, I've got to get his attention."

When Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana and Mississippi, there was a story about a man and his faith. Now this fellow didn't have any transportation. When the waters began to rise, he was offered a ride by a neighbor, but he refused. God would save him. The waters kept rising and folks in a boat came by to rescue him. Again, he refused. God would save him. The waters kept rising. He went to his roof top. This time a helicopter flew over and offered a way out. Again, he refused. As the waters covered him, he was still waiting for God to save him.

One more nugget of information, and then I will tell you the point of this article. My father was an Edwards. Now the Edwardses are fiercely independent and self-reliant folks. My mother was a Shaull. I'm not sure there is a particular mold for them, but my Mom never, ever complained. No matter what happened, she stayed the same with never an unkind word. As a product of that marriage, I inherited a DNA of don't complain about any problem or be a burden to anyone, and always be self-reliant and independent.

I was whacked by a two-by-four on August 1, 2011. That is the day I received a call from my gynecologist to let me know that the follow-up mammogram and biopsies showed that I had ductal carcinoma in situ. I learned from my surgeon that it was Stage "0." I tried to put off the surgery until after the Feast and all the mowing was finished. My surgeon advised against it and scheduled my surgery for September 19. I also learned that I needed help, a lot of help. God has blessed me with really good neighbors who are always there to help in any way they can. Marilyn drove me to the hospital, picked me up, and drove me for a return visit to the surgeon's office. David mowed my lawn. It pained me to have to take their time to help me, but I didn't have a choice. My two-by-four and rescue, their joy. Although I have learned to be more open about myself with our Morehead congregation, giving up total independence and self-reliance has been more difficult. Not only did our congregation help me cope, but they prayed for me. Thank you!

I also believe with my very being that had I told our congregation and my family what was happening before the biopsies and asked for their prayers then, the biopsies would have been negative. But I didn't ask. I just let the "water" cover me.

The Sabbath before the Feast, I learned that my son in Belize was ill. I was beside myself. The next day as I again prayed for him, it came to me, "You're doing it again. Ask for help." I sent an email to a few I knew had not left for the Feast, asking for prayer. On Monday I received an email from my son. He had spent Sunday in the emergency room, had been treated, and was feeling much better. Again, my thanks to those who prayed for him.

We don't know from where God's help will come. It isn't our choice. Just don't be so stubborn, prideful, stupid, or whatever, to ask for and accept help. We haven't been taught that we are our brother's keeper for nothing.

Maybe this wasn't so funny after all, but it's certainly a lesson I'll remember. Ω

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What Next—After the Feast of Tabernacles?

by Evan J. Chase

We learned much at the Feast this year! The "Big Three" come to mind now that we have returned to our lives in this present society once again: 1) Preach the gospel, 2) Feed the flock, and 3) Help the poor.

Preaching the gospel isn't just for the ministry—it reflects in your life and conversations with people in the world! You never know what will become of a seed of information you give someone of the hope that lies within you. Our tithes and offerings also are our part to spread the gospel to the world (Mark 16:15).

Feeding the flock is also not just the ministry's job! When you attend Sabbath services and interact with your brothers and sisters in the faith, you are helping feed them spiritually—especially if you help and serve them in problems or needs (Psalm 55:13). This is a reason God made the Sabbath a commanded assembly for His people (Leviticus 23:3). Corresponding with your Feast acquaintances also feeds the flock.

The last point is much misunderstood in our walk with Jesus Christ. He helped the poor often during His ministry, and made it quite clear how important helping those in need is to our calling as Christians. We all know about the terrible financial crisis, job losses, and other forces that are making many formerly productive members in society now homeless or among the poor! If you have a home, a job, and a functioning lifestyle, you should thank God daily for it. We know that as a result of sin, America and other countries are suffering more and more. It is also a more common sight to see people begging on the street! Search out reputable organizations in your area that help the poor and homeless, and help them as you are able. Praying for their efforts is one thing, but helping is another. Remember, Jesus Christ made a very emphatic point that helping our fellow man is a *salvation issue* in Matthew 25:34–46. These were real acts of people who went out of their way to care about others!

When we love and help others, we are learning the very personality of God! As we pray for others and *actively help them*, we are glorifying God! God the Father and Jesus Christ experience joy when one of Their begotten family members reflects Their love to others! It also has an additional blessing: It stirs up the Holy Spirit within us, giving us peace, inner strength, and happiness—so it is a winning situation all around!

We are saved by God's grace, but rewarded according to our works; so these things are very important in our growth process. As we increase in love and caring for others, we also will find it easier to resist sin and have more real and living faith, which we are going to need as time goes on! Ω

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Editor-In-Chief: Vance A. Stinson

Editor: Lloyd W. Cary

Contributing Writers: Lloyd W. Cary, Evan J. Chase, Lonnie C. Hendrix, Bronson James, Mike James, Alice E. Lauria, Ferrell Vincent, Bill Watson, and to the many contributors who made this publication possible, *thank you*.

Production: Lloyd W. Cary

Chief Executive Officer: Charles E. Groce

Business Manager: Benny Sharp

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OVERSEAS OFFICES:

- **Australia:** Minister, Herb Haupt: The Church of God International, PO Box 171, Boonah, Queensland 4310, Australia
- **Canada:** Minister, John Coish: The Church of God International, 900 Oxford St., PO Box 33034, London, Ontario, Canada N5Y 5A1
- **Jamaica:** Minister, Ian Boyne: The Church of God International, 60 Cairncurran Ave., Western Dist. PO, St Andrew, Kingston, Jamaica
- **Philippines:** Minister, Rene Corpuz: The Church of God International, 7 Opal St., Severina Subdiv, KM 18 South Superhighway, Paranaque, Metro Manila, Philippines. Email: rene@cgiphils.org

CGI Website: www.cgi.org

CGI E-mail: info@cgi.org

Phone: 903-939-2929

Actually, combined with the consideration of the many fulfilled prophecies surrounding the coming of Christ as the “suffering servant,” it’s obviously clear, Nostradamus has nothing over the Bible. As a matter of fact, the many “Christological prophecies” (see “The Messiah in Bible Prophecy” below) comprise just one segment of many fulfilled prophecies of the Bible. Admittedly, there are *multiple prophecies* concerning a *variety* of circumstances, conditions, and events that all serve to prove and affirm the Bible is tailored to be “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:” (2 Timothy 3:16).

Clearly, the coming of Christ the Messiah, contained in the written record of God's Word, is *good news*! Understandably, the knowledge we have as Christians about God the Father giving "...His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should *not perish*, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16), is a *remarkable understanding* of a unique birthright. It is the greatest news the human race could be told—the method by which God is reconciling mankind to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:1–9; 16–21). That is at the heart of why the recorded event of the *nativity* of Christ is so important. By contrast, the traditional trappings of trees, mistletoe, yuletides, gifts, decorations, and so many other items that "the many" have come to call "Christ-mass" do nothing but serve to camouflage the deep, true, rich meaning that underlines the *real value* of the written and recorded story!

What so many don't realize is that the coming of Jesus Christ as a human being (Hebrews 2:16-18), taking on the role of the Lamb of God (John 1:29, Acts 8:32, 1 Peter 1:19, Revelation 5:5-8), designed to be sacrificed for the sins of all mankind (1 John 2:2), was only the first phase. Christ's mission involves a far greater and much broader scope of effect and influence in the grand scheme of things.

The record is certain from the pages of your Bible: Jesus Christ is alive, resurrected after being dead for three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40), and is now at the right hand of the Father

At this time, He will resurrect King David (Jeremiah 23:3–5; 30:8–9), the prophets, and many others who sacrificed their lives to reflect Jesus Christ’s values throughout history by repenting and accepting Him as their Messiah and Savior (Revelation 6:9–11). He and this spiritual “Gideon’s Army” will establish a utopian society, healing the world and rebuilding the waste cities. “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse... And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding... And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD:... But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth:... The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them... And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp [snake], and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain [nation]; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:1–9).

NATIVITY, continued on page 4

The law of compound probability shows the odds of a prophecy coming to pass. Each *detail* of a prophecy doubles the chances of the prediction *not* coming to pass. That is, a prophecy with *one* detail has one chance in *two* that it will either be fulfilled or not fulfilled. A prediction with *two* details has only one chance in *four* of coming to pass. The probability that the many lengthy prophecies in Scripture were fulfilled by random chance apart from divine power is astronomical. Peter Stoner in *Science Speaks* (Moody Press, 1963), writes that by using the modern science of probability in reference to *only EIGHT* prophecies, we find that the chance of any man who might have lived down to the present time and fulfilled all eight prophecies is one in 10¹⁷. That would be one in 100,000,000,000,000,000! Stoner considers 48 prophecies to be one in 10¹⁵⁷. But they *all* came true in Christ! We are forced to ask, *When does “coincidence” stop being “coincidence” and take on the characteristics of divine guidance?*

[illegible]

Prophecy	Event	Fulfillment
Gen. 12:1-3; Ps. 72:17	Line of Abraham	Mt. 1:1; Gal. 3:16
Gen. 49:10	Born of the tribe of Judah	Mt. 1:2-16; Lk. 4:23-33
Ps. 132:11; Is. 9:7	From the line of David	Mt. 1:1, 6-16; 9:27
Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1	Forerunner; John the Baptist	Mt. 3:3
Mic. 5:2	Born in Bethlehem	Lk. 2:5-11; Jn. 7:42
Isa. 7:14	Born of a virgin	Mt. 1:18-23; Lk 1:30-35
Hos. 11:1	Called out of Egypt	Mt. 2:15
Is. 61:1,2	Commissioned	Lk. 4:18-21
Isa. 53:4	Carried our sicknesses	Mt. 8:16-17
Ps. 69:6	Zealous for God's house	Mt. 21:12,13; Jn. 2:13-17
Isa. 53:1	Not believed	Jn. 12:37,38; Ro. 10:,11,16
Zech. 9:9	Hailed as King	Mt. 21:4-9; Mk. 11:7-10
Isa. 28:16	Rejected; Chief Corner Stone	Mt.21:42-46; Acts 3:14; 4:11
Psa. 41:9; 109:8	One apostle betrays Him	Mt. 26:47-50; Jn. 13:18, 26-30
Zech. 11:12	Betrayed for 30 pieces of silver	Mt. 26:15; 27:3-10; Mk.14:10-11
Isa. 53:8	Tried and condemned	Mt. 26:57-68; 27:1,2,11-25
Isa. 53:7	Silent before accusers	Mt. 27:12-14; Mk. 27:12-14
Ps. 69:4	Hated without cause	Lk. 23:13-15; Jn. 15:24,25
Isa. 50:6; Mic .5;6	Struck, spat upon	Mt. 26:67; 27:26,30; Jn. 19:3
Ps. 22;18	Soldiers cast lots for garments	Mt. 27:35;Jn. 19:23,24
Isa. 53:12	Numbered with sinners	Mt. 25:55,56; 27:38; Lk. 22:37
Ps. 69:21	Given vinegar and gall	Mt. 27:34,48; Mk. 15:23,36
Ps. 22;1	Forsaken by God	Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34
Isa. 52:14	Disfigurement	Jn. 19:1
Ps. 34:20; Ex. 12:46	No bones broken	Jn. 19:33-36
Isa. 53:5; Zech. 12:10	Hands and feet pierced	Mt. 27:49; Jn. 19:34,37; Rev. 1:7
Isa. 53:5,8, 11,12	Sacrificial death; carry away sins	Mt. 20:28; Jn. 1:29; Ro. 3:24; 4:25
Isa. 53:9	Buried with the rich	Mt. 27:57-60; Jn. 19:38-42
Jonah 1:17; 2:10	In grave 3 full days and 3 full nights, then resurrected	Mt. 12:39,40; 28:6; 16:21; 17:23; 27:64; 28:6; Acts 2:27-28
Ps. 68:18	Ascension	Lk. 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-11

close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name... Behold the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God" (Amos 9:11-15).

Then What?

This will commence the Kingdom of God *on earth!* Your Bible plainly says this first phase will last for one thousand years (Revelation 20:4). But again, this is just the beginning. Ultimately, when the thousand years are complete and every human being who ever lived will have their opportunity to accept Jesus Christ's atoning blood for their sins, (Revelation 20:5-6), *God the Father will come and tabernacle with man for all eternity* (Revelation 21 and 22)!

Now *that* is what underscores the nativity of Jesus Christ. It is the "why, what, how, and wherefore." It explains the details of *how* this story of our Creator (Colossians 1:13-20), Who came to this earth, broke through the "spiritual veil" into our "physical realm" and took on the seed of destructible flesh, and then innocently died for our sins. Unequivocally, it is the explanation and description of a love *so deep* and a risk *so high* that undoubtedly makes it the **greatest story ever told!**

As human beings, we should be encouraged and relieved beyond our wildest dreams that there is a way made possible to extend our lives beyond this fleshy existence, and live as an *immortal* with God in His kingdom for all eternity. Now *that's* where the nativity record leads us, *what it's really all about* and *why* it's such an important narrative to understand! It will serve you well to consider these facts from time to time and remember: Never forget how it was



TESTAMENTS, continued from page 1

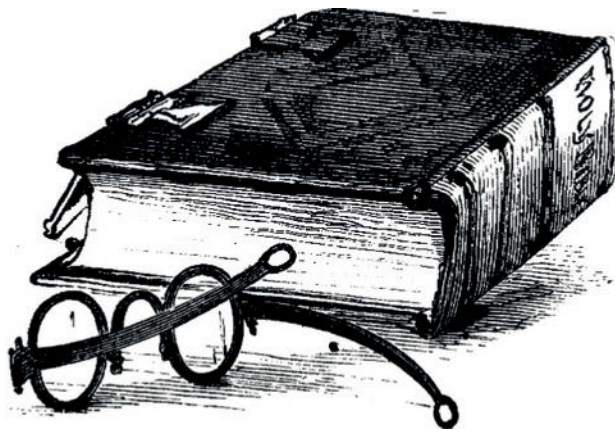
another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth [the Greeks]. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron [the Romans]: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise" (Daniel 2:36-40).

Moreover, this sequence of events was reiterated to Daniel through several visions from God. We read: "In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters. Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another. The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it [Babylon]. And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had

THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh [Persia]. After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it [Greece]. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns [Rome]" (Daniel 7:1-7).

Thereafter, Daniel's visions concentrated on the Persians and the Greeks. We read: "Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last [the Medes and the Persians]. I saw the ram pushing westward, and northward, and southward; so that no beasts might stand before him, neither was there any that could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will and became great. And as I was considering, behold, an he goat came from the west on the face of the whole earth, and touched not the ground: and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. And he



came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing before the river, and ran unto him in the fury of his power. And I saw him come close unto the ram, and he was moved with choler against him, and smote the ram, and brake his two horns: and there was no power in the ram to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground, and stamped upon him: and there was none that could deliver the ram out of his hand [this portrayed Alexander's defeat of the Persians at the Granikos River]. Therefore the he goat waxed very great: and when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven" (Daniel 8:3-8). The angel Gabriel goes on to explain these symbols to Daniel later in the same chapter (Daniel 8:15-26). Finally, during the reign of Darius the Mede, Daniel was given another vision dealing with these same events. We read: "And now will I shew thee the truth. Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the fourth shall be far richer than they all: and by his strength through his riches he shall stir up all against the realm of Grecia. And a mighty king shall stand up, that shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. And when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven; and not to his posterity, nor according to his dominion which he ruled: for his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others beside those" (Daniel 11:2-4).

History informs us that these predictions came to pass. Alexander of Macedonia, also known as Alexander the Great, defeated Darius III of Persia and assumed control of his empire. He reigned for twelve years, conquered most of the known world, and died. After his death, his

generals divided up his empire among themselves. Within a few years, the majority of the territory and power was concentrated in the hands of four men: Kassander, Antigonos, Seleukos, and Ptolemy.

Thereafter, Daniel's prophecies concentrated on two of the Greek kingdoms that had emerged from Alexander's old empire: Egypt, which was ruled over by Ptolemy and his descendants, whom Daniel referred to as the "king of the south" (Daniel 11:5-45); and Babylonia-Syria, which was ruled over by Seleukos and his descendants, whom Daniel referred to as the "king of the north" (Daniel 11:6-45). These Greek states, Egypt and Babylonia-Syria, fought for control of Judea in the years that followed.

Eventually, a descendant of Seleukos named Antiochus Epiphanes came to rule over Judea. We read in the First Book of the Maccabees: "Now when the kingdom was established before Antiochus, he thought to reign over Egypt, that he might have the dominion of two realms. Wherefore he entered into Egypt with a great multitude, with chariots, and elephants, and horsemen, and a great navy, and made war against Ptolemy king of Egypt... And after that Antiochus had smitten Egypt, he returned again... and went up against Israel and Jerusalem with a great multitude, and entered proudly into the sanctuary, and took away the golden altar, and the candlestick of light, and all the vessels thereof... And when he had taken all away, he went into his own land, having made a great massacre, and spoke very proudly" (1 Maccabees 1:16-24).

Later, in that same chapter, we read: "Moreover King Antiochus wrote to his whole kingdom, that all should be one people, and everyone should leave his laws: so all the heathen agreed according to the commandment of the king. Yea, many also of the Israelites consented to his religion and sacrificed unto idols, and profaned the Sabbath. For the king had sent letters by messengers unto Jerusalem and the cities of Judah that they should follow the strange laws of the land, and forbid burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and drink offerings, in the temple; and that they should profane the Sabbaths and festival days: and pollute the sanctuary and holy people... that they should also leave their children uncircumcised, and make their souls abominable with all manner of uncleanness and profanation: to the end they might forget the law, and change all the ordinances. And whosoever would not do according to the commandment of the king, he said, he should die... Now the fifteenth day of the month Chisleu... they set up the abomination of desolation upon the altar, and builded idol altars throughout the cities of Judah on every side..." (1 Maccabees 1:41-54).

After this, a man named Mattathias, along with his five sons, rose up to resist Antiochus and defy his decree. Eventually, one of those sons, Judas Maccabeus, defeated the king's forces and regained control over Jerusalem.

"Then said Judas and his brethren, Behold, our enemies are discomfited: let us go up to cleanse and dedicate the sanctuary. Upon this all the host assembled themselves together, and went up into Mount Zion... So he chose priests of blameless conversation, such as had pleasure in the law: who cleansed the sanctuary, and bare out the defiled stones into an unclean place... Then they took whole stones according to the law, and built a new altar according to the former; and made up the sanctuary, and the things that were within the temple, and hallowed the courts... Now on the five and twentieth day of the ninth month, which is called Chisleu... they rose up betimes in the morning, and offered sacrifice according to the law upon

In loving memory...

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Franklin Andrew Marang, Jr., of Coffeyville, Kansas, passed away on Monday, November 28, 2011 at Coffeyville Regional Medical Center.

Frank was born on February 18, 1925 in Blue Jacket, Oklahoma to Franklin Andrew Marang and Dora Luvenda Head. He attended school at Blue Jacket for a year, then attended two years of school at Snow Creek in Oklahoma near South Coffeyville. His family later moved to Coffeyville, where he completed his education, graduating from Field Kindley in 1943.

After graduation, Frank joined the Army on June 5, 1943 during World War II. After completion of basic training, he was put into the combat engineer team in Puerto Rico. After six months of training there, he came back to the States and sailed to the Philippines from California. Frank served in the Philippines until the war ended, then he was sent to Japan with the U.S. occupational troops until March 1946, when he was honorably discharged.

On June 12, 1946 he married Margie L. Fortner, the girl next door in Independence, Kansas, by the Justice of the Peace. Following their marriage, they made their home in Coffeyville, where they lived all of their married lives except four years when they lived in the Snow Creek area in Oklahoma. In 1996, they renewed their wedding vows on their golden anniversary.



Frank Marang

Frank worked at the Coffeyville Ice Plant; as a dish washer for Farrol's Grill; at Sweat Heart Flour; at the Corner Market Grocery store for two years; Lander Brothers Grocery Store from 1948 to 1960; hauled milk for Page Milk Company for three years; two years at Ford-Wulf-Bruns Funeral Service; Co-op Refinery for four years; and then to Funk Manufacturing Co., where he was employed until retiring in April, 1989.

In 1985 he became a minister of the *Church of God International*. He and his wife traveled extensively for the church. Frank was a member of the Fearsome Four Barber Shop Quartet, which included Bill Bowser, Al Clark, and Bob Esch, from 1958 to 2000.

He enjoyed hunting in his younger years, but enjoyed traveling for his church more than anything else.

Survivors include his wife, Margie, of the home; one son, Kent Marang and wife Linda of Coffeyville; two daughters, Kim Jones and husband Sherman of South Coffeyville; and Karla Thomsen of Coffeyville; nine grandchildren; and 17 great-grandchildren.

Services were at 2 PM on Saturday, December 3, 2011 at Grace Fellowship in Coffeyville. Burial followed in Restlawn Memorial Park with military honors conducted by the U.S. Army Honor Guard.

The family suggests memorials to the *Church of God International* or the American Red Cross. Contributions may be mailed to the David W. Barnes Funeral Home, 306 North Cline Road, Coffeyville, KS 67337. Ω

TESTAMENTS, continued from previous page

the new altar of burnt offerings, which they had made... Thus was there very great gladness among the people, for that the reproach of the heathen was put away. Moreover, Judas and his brethren with the whole congregation of Israel ordained, that the days of the dedication of the altar should be kept in their season from year to year by the space of eight days... with mirth and gladness" (1 Maccabees 4:36-59). That is why we find Christ observing the Feast of the Dedication in the Gospel of John. (John 10:22-23) Even so, what happened next?

After Judas Maccabeus died, he was succeeded by his brother Jonathan, who was in turn followed by their brother Simon. These men led the Jews in their battles against the heathen kings who had been dominating them since the time of the Babylonians. Moreover, they were eventually successful in throwing off the yoke of these kings and reasserting Jewish independence. When Simon died, he was followed by his son John.

Over time, this family came to serve as high priests and kings of the Jews. Historians call them the Hasmoneans, and they reigned as priest-kings over an independent Judea for many years. Nevertheless, it should be noted that these people were usurpers in the eyes of God. They were not patrilineal descendants of Aaron, and were consequently not entitled to the office of high priest. Also, unlike the promise God had made to David, the Lord had never made any promises to Mattathias, Judas, Jonathan, Simon, or any of the other Hasmoneans about establishing a dynasty for them on the throne of Judea.

Nevertheless, this period of independence allowed the Jews to have the space and time to collect and study the Scriptures and histories of their people. As a consequence, they developed three major philosophical schools of thought within the Jewish religion during this time. These eventually coalesced into three distinct sects of that faith. They were known as the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.

In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, the Jewish historian Josephus wrote: "At this time there were three sects among the Jews, who had different opinions concerning human actions; the one was called the sect of the Pharisees, another the sect of the Sadducees, and the other the sect of the Essenes. Now for the Pharisees, they say that some actions, but not all, are the work of fate, and some of them are in our own power, and that they are liable to fate, but are not caused by fate. But the sect of the Essenes affirm, that fate governs all things, and that nothing befalls men but what is according to its determination. And for the Sadducees, they take away fate, and say there is no such

thing, and that the events of human affairs are not at its disposal; but they suppose that all our actions are in our power, so that we are ourselves the causes of what is good, and what is evil from our own folly" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 13, Chapter 5, Section 9).

In effect, the Jews had too much time on their hands. They formed themselves into these different groups, and each group had different ideas about what the Scriptures had to say about things. They had different notions about what was or was not important, and about what it meant to be a good Jew. Moreover, they were arrogant enough to believe that God actually cared about their opinions of these matters.

During this period, the Hasmonean king, Alexander Jannaeus, and his wife, Queen Alexandra, had two sons: Hyrcanus, the elder of the two; and Aristobulus, the more ambitious of the two. Hence, when their parents died, the brothers fought over the throne of Judea. The struggle between them continued for many years, and both men eventually invited the Romans into the middle of their contest. They both attempted to win the support of the Roman General Pompey to their cause. This, however, provided an opportunity for the Romans to seize control of Judea and make it a province of their empire.

Once again, in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus wrote: "Now the occasions of this misery which came upon Jerusalem were Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, by raising a sedition one against the other; for now we lost our liberty, and became subject to the Romans, and were deprived of that country which we had gained by our arms from the Syrians, and were compelled to restore it to the Syrians. Moreover, the Romans exacted of us, in a little time, above ten thousand talents; and the royal authority, which was a dignity formerly bestowed on those that were high priests, by the right of their family, became the property of private men..." (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 14, Chapter 4, Section 5).

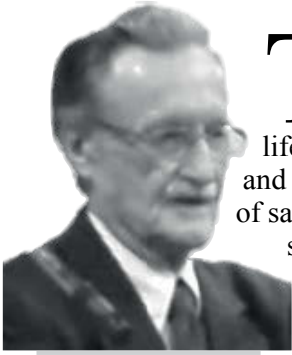
The Romans also appointed a man named Antipater to be procurator of Judea. After his death, they also appointed his son to be king of Judea. His name was Herod, and he married the Hasmonean princess Mariamme (the granddaughter of both Hyrcanus and Aristobulus) to shore up his support among the Jews. That is why we read in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke that Herod was king of Judea when Christ was born (Matthew 2:1-20 and Luke 1:5).

Hence, we can see that God was active in the period between the Old and New Testaments. There was a great deal going on relative to God's people during this time. This is the story of why the world looked the way it did when Jesus made His entrance into our world. Ω



Feeding From the Vine

by Ferrell Vincent



Ferrell Vincent

The Old Testament is filled with prophecies concerning the coming of our Savior, as we all know. The prophets described the kind of life He would live, the kind of death He would die, and the purpose of His coming and bringing a message of salvation. His opponents were many as He taught by signs and wonders in declaring and proving that He was, and is, the Messiah. It seems to me that John's Gospel is more vivid than the other three Gospels. John was the one preserved to especially record the history of the trials and disastrous conditions the world, and especially the church, would encounter all the way to the end. The purpose of this Gospel, written 20–40 years after the synoptic Gospels, is precisely the same as those written by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Toward the end of his Gospel, John says clearly, "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30–31, NKJ).

John focuses his writing on the fact that Jesus, although manifested as a flesh and blood human being, was in fact the eternal Son of God. His revelation of Jesus as the active, co-existent Being with the Father begins in the very first verse of the Gospel, establishing the firm foundation upon which all of Jesus' humanity is constructed. His Gospel, therefore, leans toward concepts and theological analysis rather than the actions and miracles that we see in the other Gospels. These concepts are found and explained in Jesus' conversations with individuals, rather than in Matthew's long discourses. Indeed, John's Gospel reveals the gradual development of the theology surrounding Jesus Christ—His life, His death, and His resurrection. As we read the Gospel of John, we must always keep in mind that he wrote his record about Jesus some 50 to 60 years after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

Matthew starts his Gospel with a discussion of the genealogy of Jesus' birth, creating the foundation for identifying Jesus as the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. He thereby declares Jesus to be the rightful heir to the throne of David. Mark's Gospel begins abruptly with the ministry of John the Baptist, anxiously moving toward that author's theme. He demonstrates the events of Jesus' miracles as the evidence of the Son of Man's unique place in human history. Luke, the historian, begins with Jesus' birth, His youth, and finally His ministry.

John, however, begins with a powerful theological statement that relates Jesus as the eternal Word, which is co-existent with God the Father Himself. John is telling his readers that it is impossible to understand who Jesus is if they do not understand His eternalness. Before Jesus manifested Himself as a historical human being, He existed as the eternal Word, the agent of all creation. This Word became flesh and entered into His creation. This eternal Word is Jesus, the Son of God. By introducing his Gospel with the overall concept of the eternal Word, John relates the revelation of Jesus Christ to Greek thought structures where the eternal mystery of God becomes physical reality in the person of Jesus. In so doing, the author relates the Creator to His creation in flesh and blood, and thus, mankind can never deny the reality of God the Father. Furthermore, mankind can never deny the reality of God's love. The vibrant, glowing descriptions of Jesus' life and ministry among the human race have endeared this Gospel to the hearts of Christians for centuries. This is the Gospel that is often recommended as the new convert's first reading assignment. Within its pages are the unparalleled revelations of an eternal God Who enters human history in the person of Jesus Christ to reconcile the world of lost humanity to fellowship with Him. Nowhere else in the New Testament is the good news made so simple and so clear. Here, our searching hearts can find release from the bondage of sin and receive abundant life when we finally become connected to the True Vine, Jesus Christ the Lord. Therefore when we repent of our sins and receive God's Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), we begin to draw upon the spiritual nutrients of the law which Jesus Christ consists of. The law of God is a perfect law (Psalm 19:7). David said God's law was a light to his feet (Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 6:23) that showed him how to walk, how to live. Therefore, as we draw upon the law, we become more like Christ. Psalms 19:7–11 states: "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever." John was inextricably linking the Jewish scriptures of Genesis with the Greek thought of his time that there



Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me (John 15:4).

was absolutely no difference between the two. The God of Genesis, Who created the universe in seven days, is the one and same Word.

Jesus said He was the light of the world (John 6:12), and instructed all who follow Him to also become a light to the world (Matthew 5:14). John is the only New Testament writer to use such terminology in describing the Word. The Old Testament Scriptures often speak about the "word of the Lord." In this context, the writers identified a message that came to God's people through His prophets. In these prophecies, there are many Old Testament allusions to the "word" being a Person.

For example, Deuteronomy 26:17 says, "Today you have declared that the LORD is your God and that you will follow his directions, obey his laws, commands, and rules, and listen to him." As we follow the directions to obey the laws and the commands and listen to our Lord's set of rules He devised for us before the foundation of the world, we receive the spiritual nourishment to sustain us through whatever the obstacles may be. Praise be to God, He is willing to feed us as we ask for our needs, to strengthen us and ready us to become kings and priest in the Kingdom of God.

In Matthew 7:8–12, Christ said, "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

In Exodus 34:27–28, Moses drew upon the "spiritual bank" of God's Word in preparing for 40 days and nights without food or water. Also, Jesus, in preparing for His final greatest trials, drew upon that great spiritual source given by His and our Father. Jesus and His disciples were likely winding their way through the streets of Jerusalem toward the East Gate, moving toward their intended retreat across the Kidron Valley at the Mount of Olives. Jesus continued speaking to them about the new way in which He would relate to them. He would soon come to them when the Father sent the Spirit to them at the petition of the Son. He stressed the intimacy and the love that would characterize the relationship between the Spirit and the believer.

Jesus couched this portrayal in agricultural terms the disciples clearly understood. This was the seventh and final discourse in which Jesus used the phrase *I am* with a word picture to help them understand His true identity. In this case, the audience was not a large crowd or members of the Sanhedrin. There were only Jesus' closest earthly companions. Jesus likened Himself as "the true vine" from which all branches receive their nourishment. This vine is cultivated by the Father Who carefully tends its growth and health. John 15:1–5 states: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

As our Savior was preparing to leave and go back to His Father, He made special provisions for everyone to feed from that same spiritual vine that would produce branches. Now *we* are the branches, and we must receive enough food through prayer and study and sometimes fasting to show evidence of feeding from the Vine. Ω

[Portions of this article were taken from the *Jamieson, Faussett & Brown Commentary* and *The Easy-To-Read Commentary*, Classical Christianity Foundation.]

Infuse Information From Mike James

We have a new Infuse Leadership Council that will be coordinating Infuse for 2011–2012. The members are: Herb Hanson, Devin Nolen-Jernigan, Jeremy Brown, Kelsey Dowell, Cody Wilkes, Jenna Crawford, Adam Boyd, Pat Williams, and Rob Randolph. If you are interested in helping *Infuse*, please email Mike James (mhjames6043@yahoo.com).

Winter Family Weekend (December 23–27): We will have a booth at the Winter Family Weekend in Lexington, Kentucky (<http://cogcincinnati.org/pages/tournament.html>). We hope to see you there!

Infuse Magazine: Do you want to receive the *Infuse* magazine? Visit this link to sign-up: <http://infusecgi.org/subscribe/>. Are you interested in submitting artwork or an article for the next issue of the magazine? Email Adam Boyd for more information at wboyd56@yahoo.com. Ω

I'm Old (or Young): Does God *Really* Care About (Ugh!) Exercise?

Here's a different way of looking at it.

by Lloyd W. Cary

Perhaps this article should be titled *The Joy Of Perspiration*. Exercise (the “ugh!” word) is one of those subjects that seem to divide people into three primary groups. First, there are the health fanatics, whose idea of a good time is strapping on a backpack full of bricks and doing wind sprints up steep hills against the wind. Then there are the couch potatoes, whose idea of a good time is a hefty bag of Fritos, an industrial-sized cheese ball with crackers, and a king-sized Slurpee (sigh)! Then there are the rest of us, who know we should exercise, and may even own several pieces of exercise equipment, but never quite find the time to do it.



Everywhere we look, there are body-builders, health gurus, and cardiac specialists telling us we should exercise—or else! Granted. But does *God* care about exercise? Does it really matter to God if I step onto my treadmill, entangle myself in exercise bands like an overgrown marionette, or pop a hernia attempting to lift impossible weights? Really now.

Too many people confine their exercise to jumping to conclusions, stretching the truth, sidestepping responsibility, bending over backward, lying down on the job, hunting for bargains, running up bills, pulling down others, and pushing their luck. About the only part of the body that is over-exercised is the lower jaw.

I've searched and searched, and nowhere in the Bible can you find a scripture that says, “Thou shalt exercise three times a week [and make sure one of those days is a good cardio workout].” But we do read in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” Does that include even the word (ugh!) *exercise*? Well, technically, “all” includes the dreaded “e” word, doesn't it? To paraphrase, *Every minute of our lives is to be lived to the glory of God, and exercise is no exception*. How? By extending our years of service to God, and by making us more effective in serving the Lord. *Sela*.

Exercise Extends Our Years of Serving God

The inspired psalmist wrote, “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and *if by reason of strength* [underline that!] they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” [we die] (Psalms 90:10). To the young, this may not mean much, but to those “living on borrowed time”—those over 70 or 80—or more—this is telling us something: Get out there and move. Exercise!



Have you ever considered that exercise could be the difference between serving God for 60 years or serving God for 75, 80, or 90 years? Think about this for a moment. Maintaining a healthy body and mind could result in God giving you many additional years to care for your spouse, your children, your grandchildren, your congregation. Staying in good shape could result in God allowing you to share the Gospel with *hundreds* of additional people. Those endless miles of huffing and puffing on the treadmill or tugging on those marionette-like strength bands could result in many additional years of faithfully serving your family or your church. Yes, we understand that God has numbered our days. In His sovereignty, God knows exactly how many days we will live upon this earth. But God uses *means*, and exercise is a means of adding years of fruitful labor to our lives.

Exercise Can Make Us More Effective

In Serving God, Our Family and Our Church



Not only does exercise extend our years of serving God, it also makes us *more effective* in serving Him. The truth is, an unhealthy body can limit our capacity to serve the Lord. Being unhealthy leads to less energy, less stamina, and foggy thinking, along with the probability of sickness and disability, which ultimately places burdens on others and limits our service for the Lord. “For the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy

truth” (Isaiah 38:18). Those who exercise regularly and are in good health are able to serve the Lord and others consistently and for longer periods of time. Healthy Christians are a better witness.

Paul told Timothy, “For bodily exercise profiteth little [for a little while]: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8).

These thoughts of getting into shape in order *to serve* can dramatically affect our attitude and approach to exercise! We don't *ultimately* exercise for the purpose of losing weight or to look good (although that is certainly a blessed side benefit). We exercise for the glory of God. We are created in God's image (Genesis 1:26; 5:1). We should strive to look like Him! We lace up our running shoes and pound the pavement so that we can serve God effectively for many years to come. We lift weights so that at age 65 we can share the Gospel with our grandchildren. We go to the gym so that we can lovingly care for our spouse for many years. We stretch those resistance bands so our grandchildren can boast, “My grandpa's got muscle!” and hopefully follow our good example.

Let's change our attitude toward exercise. Not only because it's a good thing to do—not only because sensible exercise can help ward off a whole host of degenerative diseases—but because God's glory is at stake. Think of the future as glory in the joy of sweat today!

Thank you, Lord, for my health. When millions of people cannot even walk, good health is a gift. Sweat is a mercy. Thank you for the opportunity to improve my mind and body. Teach me to be more grateful. Ω



Church News

Welcome Feast Baby!

Dr. Wayne (Neal) Leeves and his wife, Barbara, of Tyler, Texas, were blessed with a brand new granddaughter during the Feast! Kaelynn Rylee Russell, weighing in at 6 lbs., 9 oz., was born on October 15, 2011 at 1:15 PM.



Here's our special Feast blessing!



Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways
(Proverbs 8:32)

Questions & Answers

by Lloyd W. Cary

Q— You appear to be quite out of step regarding Christmas. Doesn't Christmas celebrate the birth of Christ? Christmas traditions have been around for a long time. It feels so right. Shopping for our loved ones can't be wrong, can it? Why do you shun Christmas? ~Anonymous.

A— Thank you for your recent inquiry. Jesus Christ said: "The truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Free from *what*? Is Christmas based on truth? If so, we can benefit from its celebration. But if not, it will become a burden to us. We need to *prove* what we *think* we know! Does the Christmas season bring a feeling of freedom, or is there a feeling of relief when it is over? Most often, the Christmas customs rule over us, predetermining our behavior. Indeed, the Christmas syndrome enslaves millions with nerve-jangling hustle, bustle, and deadlines—not to mention the burden of credit card debt!

Regarding Christmas shopping, you've undoubtedly been there, done that. You've been jostled by the crowds that pack nearly every department store. For the 500th time in recent weeks you've heard over the loudspeakers the lilting tune of "Jingle Bells." It goes well with the cash registers ringing up sales. Multiple Santa Clauses donning red suits and white beards, bellowing jolly "Ho, Ho's," are hired to draw children to sit on their laps while parents with dwindling wallets and purses look on gleefully.

"Christmas," wrote George Bernard Shaw in 1897, "is forced on a reluctant and disgusted nation by the shopkeepers and the press." If that was true back then, how much more is it applicable today!

Clearly, much ungodly conduct accompanies the holiday season. More than any other time of year, the Christmas season is laden with drunken, rowdy behavior, increased crime, suicides, and family breakup. One wonders, "How and why does Christmas produce such excesses of bad conduct?" Fundamentally, because it is unchristian and pagan. Can you imagine Christ being pleased with these things?

The word "Christmas" does not appear in your Bible because there was no such celebration among Jesus' early disciples.

Indeed, the long tentacles of Christmas have spread around the world. It is celebrated in many, many countries, even those that don't profess Christianity. Not only has it spread around the world, it also reaches far back into antiquity.

We've frequently heard the hue and cry, *Put Christ back in Christmas!* parroted by many who sincerely wish to honor Christ Jesus on the anniversary of His birth. They fail to realize that Christ was never *in* Christmas to begin with! The Puritan Church of England not only ignored Christmas; they also *persecuted* any unregenerate souls who dared to keep it in secret! In early New England, Christmas celebrations were forbidden by law because the Puritans were offended by the shocking non-Christian origins of its customs and traditions.

It is a historic fact that both ancient Romans and Greeks celebrated the birth of the unconquerable sun on December 25. The practice traces back to ancient Babylon. Nimrod was deified as the "sun-god." When cut down by his enemies, he was represented by a log, and when supposedly reborn, he was symbolized by an evergreen tree. After documenting this, Dr. Alexander Hislop's *The Two Babylons*, page 98, states: "Now the Yule Log is the dead stock of Nimrod, deified as the sun-god, but cut down by his enemies; the Christmas-tree is Nimrod redivivus [revived]—the slain god come to life again."

The log was burned on the eve of December 24; by the next morning it had been replaced by an evergreen tree. Dr. Hislop documents the pagan origins of the other customs surrounding Christmas—the candles, the feasting, the wassail bowl, the mistletoe, the giving of gifts, and others (See *The Two Babylons*, pp. 91–103).

Do Origins Really Matter?

The reason for Christmas is assumed to be Jesus' birthday. However, Jesus was *not* born on December 25. He was born in the fall when shepherds were with their flocks out in the open fields. The apostolic Christians did not celebrate His birth, but were commanded to memorialize His death by the Passover, which He instituted on the night of His betrayal. "This do," He commanded, "in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19,20).

Actually, the Bible specifies no date for Jesus' birth, and there is no record that Jesus Himself spoke of it, much less directed that it be celebrated. Every major encyclopedia tells us that December 25 is not Christian but pagan, that it was the birthday of Mithras, a false messiah, long before Christ. They tell

A Shocking Admission!

"The use of temples, and these dedicated to particular saints, and ornamented on occasions with branches of trees; incense, lamps, and candles; votive offerings on recovery from illness; holy water; asylums; holy days and seasons, use of calendars, processions, blessings on the fields, sacerdotal vestments, the tonsure... turning to the East, images at a later date, perhaps the ecclesiastical chant, and the Kyrie Eleison, **are all of pagan origin, and sanctified by their adoption into the Church.**" (*Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, p. 359). The author, John Henry Newman, was appointed a cardinal by Pope Leo III in 1879.

us, as does *The Encyclopedia Americana*, "most of the customs now associated with Christmas were not originally Christmas customs but rather were pre-Christian and non-Christian customs taken up by the Christian church."

Protestants get their Christmas customs from the Catholics. The Catholics got them from ancient Rome. British Cardinal Newman admitted that the Catholic Church did "transmute the very instruments and appendages of demon-worship to an evangelical use" and that much of his church's customs "are all of pagan origin, and sanctified by their adoption into the Church" (Cardinal John Henry Newman, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, p.351–353).

From the Romans, the Christmas practices reach back through Greece, Persia, Egypt, Assyria, and finally to ancient Babylon and Nimrod, their so-called "sun-god."

Christmas has nothing to do with Christ. It is saturated with paganism and demonism. Christmas survives and spreads because of hand-me-down custom and commercialism. More and more, Santa Claus and Saint Nicholas might more accurately be labeled as "Saint Gimme." Basically, the spirit of Christmas promotes the spirit not of love, but of selfishness.

The Clergy Do Not Care

The clergy are well aware of the pagan origins of Christmas, yet strangely—even though they *know* that Christmas is simply a pagan festival dressed up with some Christian names—they heartily encourage the celebration.

To "buck the system" would result in loss of influence, position, power, and income. This should not really surprise us, seeing that most have drifted *far* from the Bible.

No matter how well meaning the intentions, men cannot make a pagan holiday and pagan customs "Christian" by whitewashing them with Christ's name. Festivals honoring the sun, moon, or other heavenly bodies deny the true God. The scriptural principle is clear: "Be ye *not* unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel" (2 Corinthians 6:14–15)?

If you have not already done so, be sure to request our free publications, *Facts You Should Know About Christmas* and *Is Christmas Christian?* If you have access to a computer, please visit our web site at www.cgi.org where you can download many more booklets and brochures. Also, be sure to tune in to *The Armor Of God* television program. Ω

Incidentally, What About New Year's? Roots of the New Year's Celebration

"The New Year's holiday originates with a number of pagan holidays from ancient Rome. The first of January was a holiday dedicated to the pagan god Janus, and the name of the month comes from his name. Images of Janus had two faces on opposite sides, which meant that he saw both the past and the present. There was a saying that whoever greeted January 1 with fun, laughter, and plenty would pass the entire year in happiness and well-being. The very same superstition accompanies the celebrating of the new year for many of our compatriots... During certain pagan holidays, people would directly bring sacrifices to an idol. Some were notorious for immoral orgies, adultery, and fornication. On other occasions, for example during the Janus holiday, there were excesses in eating and drinking, drunkenness, and every sort of uncleanness that accompanies them. If we remember how we ourselves in times past have celebrated New Year's, then we must admit that all of us have participated in this pagan celebration."—*Georgian* newspaper, authors Gopal Sengupta and Keya Mukherjee.

Feast Reports, 2011

Midland, Ontario

Once again, we were off to the Feast! It was still dark, as we had a six hour journey ahead of us. As dawn broke, the day remained cloudy, but that did not dim our spirits. We were looking forward, with anticipation to the week ahead of us.

We arrived at the Best Western Highland Inn in Midland, Ontario, and after the usual booking-in process, we were able to take possession of our room. Much to our surprise and delight, we were assisted by a small group of youngsters who happily helped carry our belongings in with us. Later we learned they helped many others move in, too—a special thanks to these willing little labourers in God's church.

The Feast began with a short Bible Study Wednesday evening. Thursday was jam-packed with an opening message delivered by Mr. George Ramocan encouraging us to make the Kingdom of God our priority and to serve and obey God.

Then everyone (all 130 of us) enjoyed an excellent meal in the dining room prepared by the Best Western. The staff was most courteous and helpful to those needing assistance.

The afternoon service featured Mr. Charles Groce, who carried on with the theme of learning to work together. It seems we know how to divide, but have not yet shown that we can reunite.

He injected a bit of humour, noting that modern technologies were being used by many of our Canadian speakers, calling these devices “product placement,” a theme that carried on throughout the week with various “placement products” ranging from laptops to a bona-fide “apple,” not to be outdone by the most reliable product of all, viz., the good old-fashioned Bible. The very last “placement product” was a box of Kleenex!

The messages continued with lessons on how to better prepare ourselves to enter God's Kingdom by learning to be soldiers; peacemakers; staying under the “canopy of love” vs. the “canopy of calamity;” how all nations will keep the Feast of Tabernacles; how the “good fruit” will be separated from the “bad fruit;” the Bible as a leadership document; overcoming; being enthusiastic and zealous; and how God had a plan (and back-up plan) from the foundation of the world.

The choir was expertly coordinated and trained with hours of practice, resulting in a most professional rendition of songs such as: *Blessed Be the Name*, *I'll Walk With God*, *The Twenty-Third Psalm*, *Every Valley That Will Be*, and *With the Sound of Trumpets*. Our pianists enjoyed accompanying the songs on a grand piano that had been provided for the occasion.

Youth Day was very well done with participation by all our children (they even included the “product placement” theme). They did a rousing rendition of *Our God Is an Awesome God*, complete with sign language—something they have been taught at the Feast for the last few years.

On Thursday evening the social activities began with a Karaoke and Games Night. The young people were surprised by a most generous benefactor who made available 19 laptop computers programmed with versions of the Bible, games, and a planetarium program, etc., to help them enhance their knowledge of the Bible and the universe. (He received orders for 23 more and is busy filling those requests.) We are blessed to have such a knowledgeable and generous man in God's church. Many hidden talents were discovered as the Karaoke fun progressed throughout the evening.

The UCG generously extended an invitation for us to join them on a boating excursion that was enthusiastically supported. Those who went enjoyed a great meal, fellowship, and renewing of friendships from the past, in spite of the adverse weather conditions.

Our Feast was filled with showers of blessing as it rained every day, forcing us to hold Family Day in the meeting room. This had an unexpected benefit of drawing people closer together as a family. The Family Dance and youth outings were well supported, as was our International Fashion Show and Talent Night.

During a rousing sermon being delivered by Mr. Ramocan, the floodgates of heaven opened and the rain came pouring in. First a water pitcher was placed under the rapidly growing leak. It was followed with a large yellow bucket, which was then replaced with a very large gray garbage container. Our cup ran over!

The crowning achievement was the welcoming of six new baptized members into God's family. Everyone attended the event, and we were able to stand around the pool at an elevated level, giving everyone a clear view of the ceremony.

Our newest members are: Courtney Scarlett, Toronto; Michelle Waite, London; Cheryl Walch, Toronto; Samar Smith, Toronto (baptized by her father); Lori Delacruz, Kitchener; and Rosalie Difranco, Rochester. It was heart-warming to see the joy in their families' expressions as their loved ones were baptized!

Our average attendance was 147, with 130 present the first day. On the last day, we counted 136, while the remaining days ranged from 123 to 126.

As quickly as it began, the Feast was over. Murray Palmatier, our Feast Coordinator, delivered the final message, reminding us that the Feast should be a life-altering experience. Many thanks to him and his wife for all the hard work they did to make this Feast possible. Many thanks to all the unseen hands that also worked hard to make each day a success.

If you wish to experience a bit of Canadian hospitality, come join us in Midland, Ontario next year.

Ω

Submitted by Leland and Loretta Jasper



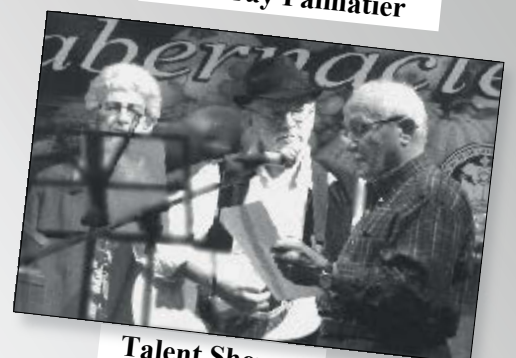
Baptisms



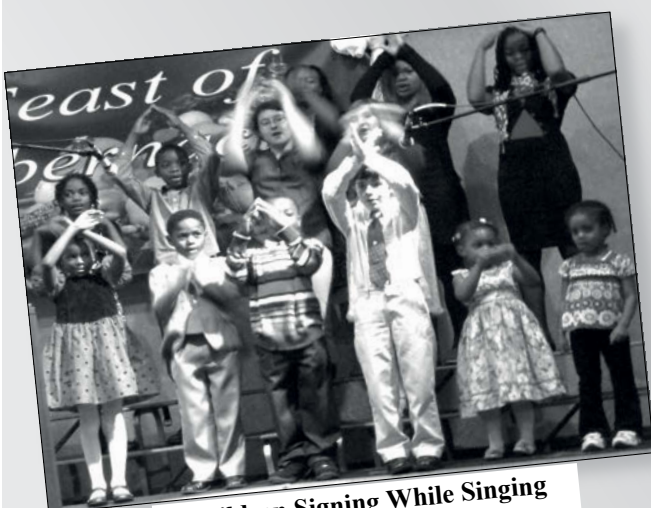
Choir

Feast Coordinator
Murray Palmatier

Samar Smith Baptized



Talent Show



Children Signing While Singing



More Baptisms



International Fashion Show

Feast Reports, 2011

Record 410 Attendance, 8 Baptisms At Jamaican Feast Site

A record 410 exuberant Feast keepers filled out the scenic Ruins Auditorium in Ocho Rios to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. It was the first time that the Jamaican CGI had over 400 persons at one Feast site, which comprised all four local congregations: Kingston, Maroon Town, Ocho Rios, and Spanish Town.

The Feast ended on a high with the baptism of eight souls. Amid the excited singing of traditional hymns and choruses by more than 145 members and curious onlookers, eight persons were baptized in the calm tropical waters of the Caribbean Sea by Pastor Ian Boyne and Deacon Paul O'Connor.

Worship leader Deacon Chris Hendricks kept the tempo of the first day worship very high, interspersing traditional Feast hymns with well-selected praise and worship choruses and relevant Scripture readings. The special music offerings featured solos and assorted ensembles, which served as precursors for Pastor Boyne's well-chosen and poignantly delivered sermon, "From Lo-debar to Jerusalem."

Recounting the story of Saul's crippled son Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 9, Mr. Boyne empowered the audience with the truth that, despite their financial and other problems, they are not forgotten or forsaken by God. From a wider perspective he also showed that despite the environmental, social, and political problems faced by mankind globally, God still has a plan to restore earth and to reward and vindicate His people during the Millennium.

He showed that just as the crippled Mephibosheth—whose name meant "son of shame; despised one"—a former prince, ended up in a decrepit Samaritan slum called Lo-debar, so too can God's people find themselves in painful, desperate circumstances. Like Mephibosheth, we might feel abandoned, helpless, and hopeless. But just as David remembered his covenant to Jonathan and restored Mephibosheth to royal prominence at the king's table, so too will God remember His covenant to His people. This message resonated powerfully with the vast majority of persons who were keeping the Feast despite their worst year financially, and many who were having severe unemployment and other challenges.

Mr. Boyne's two subsequent sermons were theological defenses of the Church of God's positions on the "Godhead" and the "Hope of Israel."

The most clichéd Feast phrase of all time must be "the best Feast ever," I think. And yet it is hard to improve upon it for accuracy in describing the true feelings of the Jamaican brethren at this Feast. The constant refrain was that the Feast messages were the best they had ever heard. In his post-Feast assessment, Pastor Boyne also commended the speakers, all of whom he said did an excellent job this year, the best ever in his view.

In addition to Pastor Boyne and I, the other speakers included Mr. Ricardo Hall, Deacon Paul O'Connor, Mr. Shannon Henry, Mr. Stephen Scale, Deacon Gilbert Bell, Deacon Fenton Tracy, Deacon Derrick Alwood, and the CGI overseer for the Caribbean, Pastor Bill Watson. Here are a few of the highlights:

Mr. Ricardo Hall's sermon titled *Reaching the Kingdom: Living Out the Period of the Ten Virgins* focused on how to keep alert while waiting for Christ's return. Using Jesus' parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25), he showed how the cares of life could take a spiritual toll after a while. He gave practical steps on how to stay watchful amid the unpredictable exigencies and inevitable problems that we will encounter.

Deacon Derrick Alwood's sermonette bolstered the faith of many with the lessons he drew out from the story of *Elisha and the Widow's Oil* (2 Kings 4:1-7). His main thesis was that when we are at the end of our rope, figuratively speaking, we should always turn to God; He will be there for us.

Pastor Bill Watson delivered the sermon on Days Three and Four of the Feast. He reiterated some of the themes of Deacon Alwood's sermonette, emphasizing the need to depend upon God, since the problems of mankind were too complex to be resolved by human beings. The fall holydays, he stated, represent how God is going to bring closure to mankind's problems. They encapsulated four important themes, namely, empowerment, restraint, restoration, and reconciliation. He then proceeded to explicate each of these aspects. His second sermon focused on *How to Be a Better Watchman*.

Kachinland

Since June 9, 2011, the terrible fighting between Kachin battalions and the Burma military government was started in the eastern parts of Kachinland. Because of this terrible war, over 30,000 Kachin civilians were fleeing to China's borderlines as refugees. I was very worried about our church members who live in the eastern parts.

Our mission office is located in the western part of Kachinland. Lake Indawgyi Region is surrounded by many high mountains—sea level above 3,000 feet. This year, we all decided to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles in our hometown, because it is located in a secluded area, and there is no fighting here.

One of our church members from the eastern parts, an elderly widow, came to our home before the Feast time. My family members accepted her very warmly, and she stays with us very happily.

On the evening of October 12, all the church members were happily gathered at our home. The next morning (October 13) at 10:00 AM, we started the service, and I preached the sermon for that day. There were only 15 of us, but every day we sang many songs from the hymnal, prayed together, studied Bible lessons, and happily witnessed the miraculous work of God.

On October 20, we gathered for the Last Great Day. We sang many hymns, collected donations, prayed, and studied Bible lessons, especially about the deliverance of Israel. I preached the sermon. My family provided lunch for our guests.

Even though we were a small group this year, we gained much knowledge and spiritual strength. We praised God so much for His protection during the Feast while the terrible war was going on. From October 13 to October 20, we all gathered at my home daily to honor God at His Feast.

We all are very happy that we could gather here without any troubles. During this Feast time, the terrible fighting between Kachin battalions and the Burma military government moved more and more into the eastern parts of Kachinland. Many, many Kachin civilians were running to and fro because the Burmese armies shot with great weapons into the villages. Many Kachin Christian women and girls were raped and killed by the Burmese Buddhist soldiers. The Burma military government purchases the latest weapons from North Korea and Russia, and then the Burmese armies shoot into the Kachin battalions every day.

We finished our Feast here without any obstacles; and we praise God so much for His protection from the terrible war in Kachinland. Please remember us always in your prayers.

May God bless you and your ministries around the world very abundantly!

Ω

Submitted by Lazum Brang

Deacon Paul O'Connor's sermon focused on *Persevering Faith*. Referencing scriptural texts such as James 1:3 and 1 John 5:1, he exhorted brethren on the importance of overcoming difficulties, giving several practical steps.

Mr. Stephen Scale's well-researched and dynamically delivered sermonette titled *Surviving the Spiritual War* made a huge impact. He laid bare the elements of Satan's master plan to defeat the elect, using every resource at his command, including his demons, Babylon, and human nature. Mr. Scale then gave strategies for overcoming the wiles of Satan the enemy.

Deacon Gilbert Bell delivered an important sermonette about *The Helmet of Salvation*, emphasizing the importance of one's mind set. Referencing Ephesians 6, he impressed members to give primacy to the "helmet of salvation," which, he pointed out, meant guarding and protecting the mind.

Another Feast highlight was the exciting Herbert W. Armstrong Memorial Speaking Competition. This year, in a keenly contested theological battle, Mrs. Stacy-Ann Hall recaptured her trophy which was won last year by Mr. Kimani Young. The topic debated was the doctrine of *The Perseverance of the Saints*, popularly called *Once Saved, Always Saved*.

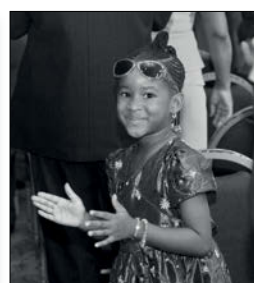
Feast 2011 set the highest attendance ever. Eight new souls joined God's church. It provided the best sermons ever. So, forgive the cliché—which happens to be true for the Feast-keeping islanders in Jamaica—but, Feast 2011 was the best Feast ever!

Ω

Submitted by Glenford Smith



Feast Scenes from Jamaica



Feast Reports, 2011

Tagaytay City, Philippines

The Feast of Tabernacles this year was a glorious time for me as I and the members of our Luzon-based churches gathered together in obedience to God's command (Deuteronomy 16:13–15). On average, 150 adults and 25 children attended this year's Feast of Tabernacles.

We held Feast services at the Tagaytay International Convention Centre (TICC) as we did last year. It is quite a spacious place which adequately contained all of our Luzon-based churches. Most of the attendees stayed at 5R Lodging, which is a very homey place to stay and the place where we held some of our functions, such as the "Bayanihan Night." The Bayanihan Night is a time where all the attendees of the Feast congregate at 5R, bring their own home-cooked food, and shared with everyone and have a great bonding time with the brethren whom we only see at Tabernacles!

Throughout the whole Feast, right up to the Last Great Day, we were blessed by wonderful music from our joint choir, individual church choirs, and soloists. This year, each category of people attending had its own choir, such as the Golden Age Choir (the seniors) and the Children's Choir. All of this was really fine music, directed and sung well to the glory of God.

On the first day we had a whole-day service with a buffet lunch. The food at TICC was so sumptuous, especially the beef dishes! Our ministers, Mel Arcinas and Winston Co, gave very encouraging messages. During the morning service, Mr. Mel Arcinas pronounced the blessing upon the people according to the Scripture. This was a very moving moment!

In every service throughout the Festival were lesson-filled sermonettes given by our deacons and other members of our churches. All these messages were related to the Feast of Tabernacles.

The second day, Mr. William Co gave a very enlightening message on *How Do We Overcome*. His main scripture for this was Ephesians 6:12–18 about putting on the whole armor of God so we can stand. He also commented that this is where our logo came from.

The third day, the Sabbath, was also a whole-day service. Again we received wonderful messages. Mr. William Co, in his message *God of Creation*, took us around the galaxy, pointing out how such a great big God created things far more majestic than little earth, and chose us over all His creation, sending His son to die for us that we might live. He completed his very graphic and moving message on the seventh day of the Feast.

On the fourth day, Mr. Rene Corpuz discussed *How We Can Enter the Kingdom*, explaining why we need to be born again. After the service, we had our Family Lunch together. This was a meal to end all meals—we ate a whole roast calf! The food and fellowship were awesome!

On the fifth day, we had a morning service, with the main message by Mr. Ely Mellomida. He spoke about the fact that God is able to deliver us. That evening was the "Bayanihan Night."

Going back to one of the highlights of the Feast, eating! On two occasions, the church went to two of the best eating places in Tagaytay. One was Josephine's Restaurant, and the other was Leslie's Restaurant. These were two sponsored meals, and we all dined like kings and queens!

Days six, seven, and the Last Great Day followed with more feasting in God's Word! The seventh day brought the continuation of Mr. William Co's message. How wonderful it is to be taken through the galaxies, God's creation, through video! We all felt we were actually there!

The Last Great Day came too soon, it seemed. We all had to pack up and go home! Cry, cry, I wish this Festival could go on all year round. That is how much of a blessing it was to me!

Being an annual Sabbath, we had a whole-day service. Both of the main messages really fired us up for the coming year! In the morning, Mr. Mel Arcinas spoke about *The Work of the Father*. The final message of the Festival was given by our Manila Pastor, Mr. Winston Co. He gave a wonderfully inspiring message about how it will be after the saints have been resurrected, and as kings and priests we serve with Jesus Christ for a thousand years, teaching those who were left behind. At the end of the millennium, everyone who finally accepts Jesus will live forever with God, Jesus, and us.

And so another memorable Festival is over, and as I said, I wish it could go on for the whole year! But at least we can carry the memories of this Feast to help and encourage us right through till next year! Ω

Submitted by Stephen H. Powell



Last Great Day



Omission: We are sorry that as of press time, we had not obtained a Festival report for Harrison, Arkansas.

Q. What is the Feast of Tabernacles—what does it picture?

A. the Feast of Tabernacles pictures the Millennium when Christ will tabernacle—or dwell with—mankind upon the earth for a thousand years (compare Isaiah 2:2–4; Daniel 7:14,18,22,27; Zechariah 14:9–21; Revelation 20:4–6).

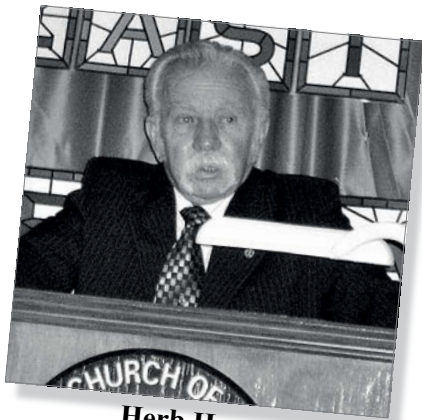
"And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles" (Zechariah 14:16).

Feast Reports, 2011

Australia



Australian Brethren in Ballina, New South Wales



Herb Haupt



Marvin Wyke

Feast of Tabernacles 2011 in Australia—what a great Feast! Of course, I, and hopefully all that participate in God’s festivals, have made similar statements year after year.

This was quite different for me, being my 20th year anniversary, so to speak, going to the Feast, but traveling about 9,000 miles to Australia. It was my first time flying on a plane, first time traveling out of the country, and I rode on a train in Sydney for the first time. Thanks to God for a safe trip. I joked to church members about learning so much about air travel, because I virtually knew *nothing* about air travel. One thing that gave me a chuckle was my first time to pick up my luggage for the plane transfer, and realizing I had been standing at the wrong carousel for what seemed like 30 minutes. I later found out the luggage pickup location is usually announced on the plane before landing. After that, I got my luggage at each point.

Touching down in Ballina, I realized I didn’t know or remember from the CGI newspaper Herb’s face, but Herb’s wife Tui recognized me. I was met with big smiles and warm handshakes and hugs. Though we never met before, it didn’t take long to see that these are God’s people. It makes no difference the location, God’s people are easy to get to know. Of course, I came to know Herb by phone conversations before the Feast. We had a great time talking and sharing experiences, especially how we traced our history that led us to meet in the Church of God. We had such good times talking. The brethren and I probably contributed to altering Herb’s 9 PM bedtime by keeping him up past 11 PM.

Time flies when you’re having fun. Church services were well organized, and Herb and the congregation are to be commended before God. Herb Haupt, who serves as pastor, Bob Schofield, a M.A.P. participant originally from New York, and I shared in giving sermons and Bible studies, which we hope were acceptable to God and inspiring for all. The congregation made me feel right at home. The fellowship was great, sharing stories of the good times and hard times of our lives. Herb and Bob did a good job expounding God’s word, and Zoltan Tuskes did a fine job leading the songs.

The culture of the USA and Australia are similar, but we do and say some things differently. On one of my first visits at a restaurant for a meal, I gave many who heard a laugh when I asked the waitress for an extra napkin, which in Australia means a diaper. The term they use is “serviette.” Now I see why they laughed. Talking with Mrs. Lisa DeGraaf, who is Dutch, we may share Dutch heritage, as she recognized my surname as Dutch. Just think about all the people of God that we have met and had fun with and all those we have yet to meet in other places of the world and those of God to be resurrected and those yet to be taught of God, how great it will be in God’s kingdom. Ω

Submitted by Marvin Wyke

Victoria, BC

Leading up to the Feast of 2011 in Victoria, BC, the weatherman was predicting typical cloudy, rainy weather for October, but he couldn’t have been more wrong. Some of us drove through rain to get there, but upon arrival we experienced the most beautiful sunny blue skies for the whole week. Whether we strolled along the waterfront, through the streets visiting the shops downtown or Oak Bay, climbed trees at Wild Play, scootered, go-carted, mini-golfed, or just soaked up the rays, all who attended here were glad that God blessed us with such magnificent weather.

We enjoyed three catered meals as a group. One day while the young and athletic enjoyed romping at Wild Play, the rest of us gathered for a 45-plus luncheon. There was a bit of a hiccup because the previously arranged establishment had an internal problem and cancelled on us. Another alternative was found at a local English pub, although communication broke down there and they weren’t prepared for us when we arrived. After a bit of delay, we were able to have our private room, and they made up for the misunderstanding by supplying all drinks on the house. That brought smiles to all! We enjoyed the museum and Imax on another occasion.

When there were no activities scheduled, the kids (and young at heart) often enjoyed the swimming pool at the hotel. There were even rumours that a few of the men had a “tidal wave” competition. Hmm—did I mention young at heart?

Our group was a little smaller this year, but even so, we had visitors from Alberta, BC; Seattle, WA; Saskatchewan; and Ontario. Once again, we were happy to be able to provide webcasting (thank you, Rob!) and had viewers watching each day.

Of course, I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the main reason we attend the Feast, and that is for spiritual inspiration and teaching about God’s plan. This year we heard from John Coish, Doug Coish, Eric Jantzen, Rick Dubler, and during the second half of the Feast, we were pleased to have Wayne Hendrix with us, who gave two sermons and a Bible study.

In his Bible study, John Coish helped us with how to approach Bible study. He showed us how to differentiate between biblical proof and theory. He mentioned how theories can be interesting, but we must be careful not to base doctrine on them.

Rick Dubler spoke on the subject of unity, with illustrations from the book of Corinthians. He also took us through the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

Doug Coish reminded us of the value of a single sheep to the Shepherd, and how dedicated He is to each one of us.

Eric Jantzen talked about peace, and then he compared Proverbs 31 with the fruits of the Spirit for his second sermon.

In his first sermon, Wayne Hendrix addressed grace—how we are saved now because Christ has died for us, and when Satan accuses us before God, Christ is there advocating on our behalf. Grace is already extended to us—we do not have to wait for this at a future time.

We also watched a very enlightening film called *180*, a pro-life documentary comparing the horrors of the Holocaust with abortion. People on the street were interviewed and asked questions on their views about abortion that made them think seriously about where they stood on the issue. It can be viewed at 180movie.com.

After services on the Last Great Day, those who did not leave right away had the opportunity to extend their fellowship with lunch at Red Robin and later at Luca’s Italian Restaurant for dinner.

Everyone is looking forward to next year when we will gather at a new location in Osoyoos at a five-star resort in the heart of British Columbia’s wine country. Ω

Submitted by Kim Hasanen

List of Names in Group Photo On Opposite Page (no particular order):

Robert F. Woodland	Clenard Costley	Shirley Williams	Gail Best
Louis Williams	Tekleab Abraham	Rosa Sanchez	Nicole Ellis
James Pope	Allan Hoo	Marilyn Gomez	Aubrey Ellis
Clifton Buchanan	Winnifred Hoo	Amon Gomez	Vivian Hall
Fred Redd	Sharon Woodland	Vadim Sealy	Celia Thompson
Thyon Woodland	Beverlie Ramocan-	Djimon Sealy	Heather Hanson
Ray Hall	Woodland	Harry Buck	Salma Suleman
Mark Ellis	Kimberly Ramocan	Arlette Gepp	Amina Suleman
John Carnegie	Demetra Buchanan	Daphne Costley	Sarina Suleman
Eliud G. Ramocan	Mykala Buchanan	Carmen Francis	
Byron McCoy	Marjorie Pope	Ngozi N. Best	

Not everyone is in the group picture, including our photographer, Jemal Countess. Special thanks to our videographer, Thyon Woodland, who worked very hard to see that all the services and fun events were dutifully recorded.

Feast Reports, 2011

Baltimore, Maryland

The Destiny of Hope Ministries, in partnership with the *Church of God International*, is pleased to report another wonderful Feast of Tabernacles in Baltimore, Maryland. Brethren from New Hampshire, Texas, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, Washington DC, Canada, Trinidad, Jamaica, and the surrounding areas of Maryland attended the Feast. A total of 64 persons attended on the high holydays and the weekly Sabbath, while a steady 57 gathered on the days in between.

The testimonies that came forth expressed the enrichment of the Word of God as presented by the various speakers, such as George Ramocan, Eliud George Ramocan, Robert F. Woodland, Elder Louis Williams, James Pope, Minister Clifton Buchanan, and Mark Ellis.

Mr. Woodland and Deacon Ray Hall were excellent moderators of the Feast. Special music renditions from Beverlie Ramocan-Woodland, Kimberly Ramocan, Demetra Buchanan, Vivian Hall, and sister Vadim Sealy were voices of inspiration as they ministered in song. Renditions from the Melody of Praise choir and the Men's Choral Group, under the direction of Byron McKoy, were indeed a tremendous blessing at the Feast this year. The children gave two renditions of choreographic praise dance, and Mykala Buchanan, the Buchanan's amazing four-year old daughter, read the entire book of Jonah like an adult. Everyone was in astonishment to see the mighty power and presence of God being manifested in the life of little Mykala.

Early in the Feast, Pastor Woodland announced that on the Last Great Day there would be a prayer session for those who were sick in body, going through economic crises, and/or family challenges. Many came forward on the Last Great Day for prayer as the elders and deacons anointed with oil and prayed for the sick, meeting the needs of the brethren. It was a moving experience for everyone.

The Nutrition Seminar with Dr. Ingrid Espinet gave everyone an opportunity to "Ask the Doctor." These sessions were life changing for many, as well as educational. Brethren left inspired to change their diets and to take better care of themselves physically, knowing that our bodies are the temple of God. The Senior Luncheon was also a delight. The food was superb and the music was great. Beverlie recited a poem entitled *Not Growing Old*. The Fun Show and Reggae Social were indeed a lot of fun for everyone in attendance. The participation was superb. The Feast photographer, Jemal Countess of New York, generously gave of his services in service unto God. Such immeasurable charity for the people of God! The brethren exemplified exuberance, warmth, and the love of God that permeated throughout the Feast. Deaconess Sharon Woodland, volunteer facilitator, provided excellent assistance and exit strategies with her team of helpers. Deacon Ray Hall of the New York assembly, through "Ray's Copy Service," provided hymn books, chorus booklets, Feast activity books for the youth, and Feast calendars for everyone. The New York brethren were the focal strength of volunteers for the Feast.

There was one baptism at the Feast this year, as well as ordination of deacons and deaconesses from the New York assembly. The Feast also attracted a couple of the hotel personnel, as well as people who were staying at the hotel, who asked the right questions and made it possible for Pastor Woodland and his wife to witness to them in a substantive way. They received the message of the Gospel and went away with enough to ponder on what they heard.

Pastor Woodland, Beverlie, and the brethren of the Baltimore Assembly look forward to hosting the Feast of Tabernacles for 2012. Arrangements have already been made to block off 70 one-bedroom suites at \$55.00 per night and 2-bed suites for \$75.00 per night. These have full-size refrigerator, 2-burner gas stove, pots and pans, cable TV, and wireless Internet (connection fee of \$5.00 for the entire Feast period). It will be a home away from home.

People are still talking about the substantive Word of God that came forth at the Feast. They are still giving testimonies of their experience of the love and warmth portrayed among the brethren as they interacted and fellowshiped together. Many have expressed their desire to attend in 2012. Ω



(List of Names on Page 12)

Myrtle Beach, SC

This had to have been the best Feast of Tabernacles in many a year. Not that others weren't great, too, but the love of many seems to have shined brighter this year. Hard times have befallen so many, and the appreciation of God's help and love made us all the more grateful for His Feast this year.

The days were nice and the ocean a bit choppy, but still wonderful to behold. It can't get any better than that. If one wanted to put a theme to this year's Feast, it would be "A Family Affair," with children being the center of that affair. Our greatest gift is our children, as Charles Groce pointed out in his message. We can learn from our precious children just by their innocence and honesty. The blessing of the children on Youth Day is truly an event that is precious to God, as well as to us. The reflection of that shows up on Youth Day. It all comes down to family, being a part of God's family.

Several sermons and sermonettes touched on the importance of remembering that Satan wants our families to fail, but with a personal relationship with God and His Son, we can prevail. It was pointed out that there are changes in this world and we have to change by transforming ourselves—our attitude, our actions—but only with that spiritual help God is willing to give us so freely. We all know anything worth having is worth fighting for—and, we have help. It was also pointed out that we need to let our light shine. What better way than through the actions of our children and our families?

It was also brought out how we need to remember we were young once and we need not judge our youth too harshly. We may just learn from them if we take the time to listen. They need to be encouraged so they can grow in strength and wisdom.

Our little ones sang a wonderful song I fell in love with, *Our God Is An Awesome God*. And He is!

Many activities were offered and enjoyed by all. *Infuse* kicked off their activities with a luncheon on the first day. Other activities hosted by *Infuse* included a Parents' Night Out, which was very popular and appreciated. Parents were able to drop their children off for an evening of fun and pizza while Mom and Dad had a few hours together. The annual Beach Volleyball and Cookout was a lot of fun for the entire family. Our *Infuse* team also treated everyone to a wonderful Ice Cream Social just before the Family Fun Show.

Our children's classes were taught by a group of very dedicated ladies who tirelessly give of themselves each year, and the children thoroughly love and enjoy their time with them.

The Family Dance with our Feast Band, the Family Fun Show, and Senior Luncheon were all wonderful opportunities for fellowship and a great time. The ladies had a lovely time at the Women's Luncheon, building on the friendships and support they share with one another.

Spiritual food was fed daily through sermons, sermonettes, Bible studies, and special music from so many people sharing their God-given talents, along with fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ, happy children, and young people serving the brethren. And of course, many enjoyed getting out and shopping and going to lunch and dinner in and around the Myrtle Beach area. What a fantastic time!

In all, over 200 had a wonderful Feast, and the love for each other was apparent, and we're not finished yet! 2012 is just around the corner! Ω

Submitted by Jo Morris



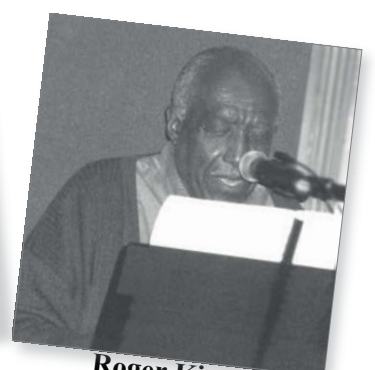
Clyde Bost



Youth Choir Signing While Singing



Charles Groce Speaking to Youths



Roger King

Feast Reports, 2011

St. Petersburg (Pinellas Park), Florida



Bill Watson



Dave Rusinko



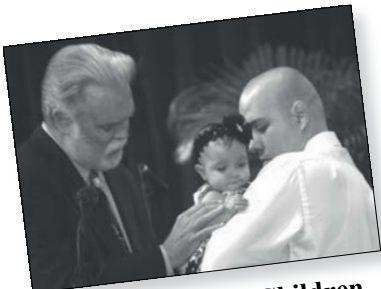
Mike Roy



Dwight Harrison



Larry Sharp



Blessing of Little Children



Children's Bible Class Teachers



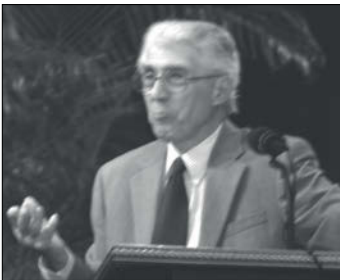
Vance Stinson



Alex Fontao



Clint Mahoney



Bill Harkins



Ben Faulkner

What a delight it was to see the gathering of 198 like minded brethren coming together to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles at Pinellas Park/St. Petersburg this year. The Feast is a time to rejoice and fellowship for the people of God, while listening to uplifting messages and inspired music.

Each sermon and sermonette built one upon the other to give us a taste of the coming Kingdom of God and what our goal ultimately is. We were encouraged to focus on what God expects from us.

Great sermons were delivered by Bill Watson, Ben Faulkner, Vance Stinson, Clint Mahoney, Jeff Reed, Dwight Harrison, Mike Roy, Morgan Pinkerman and Dave Rusinko; sermonettes were given by Larry Sharp, Tony Morelli, Bill Harkins, Bob Dagenais, and Alex Fontao.

A very well attended Bible Study was conducted by Bill Watson, in which he reminded us of our final purpose of being kings and priests to reign here on earth.

This year we had three very good seminars by Ben Faulkner, given in the mornings before services. The first was on Bible based communication skills, and the second and third was a two-part series on the Old Testament Timeline.

The Festival choir, together with the abundant special music, provided the background and prepared the mood for the worship service every day.

The children's Bible Sabbath School was well attended, culminating with a song program performed during Youth Day services, and an ice cream treat after the performance provided by the teachers, Pam Barnes and Patty Fontao, with the assistance of Mary Flores.

The teen Bible classes were coordinated by Jeff Reed, with several other men giving presentations every day.

There was lots of time for fellowship during the many social activities, including a miniature golf outing, a family bowling night, a cookout at the park with a softball tournament, a luncheon/ BBQ at the volleyball tournament, a Fun Show where a lot of talent was displayed to entertain everyone from the young to the elderly, and as always, the main highlight of the social activities was the dinner dance, with over 100 in attendance, featuring lots of music, fellowship, good food, and of course lots of dancing.

It was a great spiritual Feast filled with love, fellowship and the opportunity of being together with old friends and getting to know new ones.

Thanks to everyone in attendance and to all who contributed and helped make this Feast a success. Looking forward to see you all again in 2012.

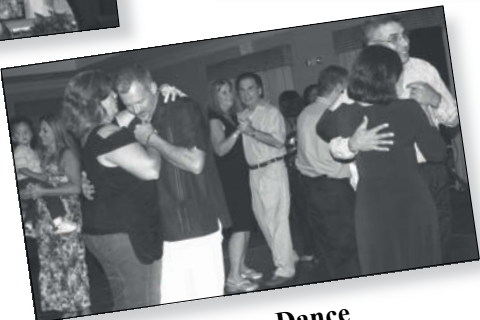
Ω

Submitted by Aleida Fontao



Festival Choir

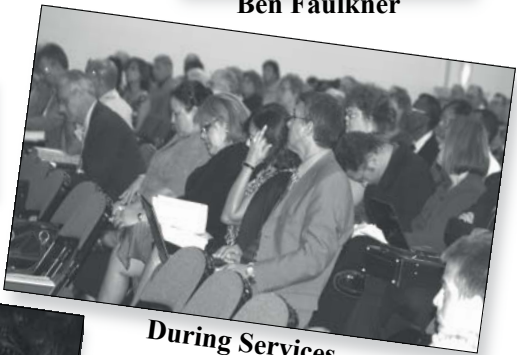
Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
for brethren to dwell together in unity!
Psalm 133:1



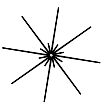
Dinner Dance



Youth Chorale



During Services



Feast Reports, 2011

Kentucky Dam Village

As we traveled from eastern Kentucky to Kentucky Dam Village State Resort Park, we were surrounded with beautiful foliage. The various shades of crimson, gold, yellow, and brown leaves were sprinkled with evergreens. The beauty was a reminder of some of the gems of jasper, emerald, sardonyx, and topaz found in the foundation of God's Holy City. The scenery added to the excitement and anticipation of what was to come. There was no let-down or disappointment. The first day we had a sermonette and two sermons. That evening we were treated to a Crosby/Hope movie, *On the Road to Bali*. The 50s movie also included a Superman cartoon and a preview.

Our other activities included a Church Luncheon, Senior Luncheon, Youth Picnic, Church Picnic, and a Ministerial Luncheon. The youth who participated in Sabbath School presented an excellent program under the direction of Angie Buchert. The Talent Show was just that. We were treated to singing, instrumentals, and readings. The "Shoemaker & Company Playhouse" put on a skit of the Ray Stevens' classic, *Along Came Jones*. You had to see it to believe it. (Ask for a DVD.) Following the show was a Family Dance. And, you guessed it—more food.

The two Bible Studies were thought provoking. Tony Buchert taught "Exploring the Doctrines." He pointed out that even though there are numerous translations and no one translation is perfect, nonetheless, unless you can prove any assertion made, by the Bible, don't believe it. Ferrell Vincent chose the subject of "Preexistence of Jesus Christ." He discussed many of the occurrences in which Christ took part long before He was born in the flesh in Bethlehem.

Those who worked behind the scenes helped all of us enjoy a memorable Feast of Tabernacles. So many contributed, there are too many to mention by name, but we would like to point out some of those contributions. Those who registered attendees, those who drove the golf cart, played piano, led the choir, led the singing, those who filmed and provided DVDs and CDs of all the services, those who participated in the Talent Show, those who organized all the social events, the Lodge chef who prepared excellent food, and last but not least, James and Carol Pollitte. We appreciate their dedication to organizing all the events and providing all of us an enjoyable time at the Kentucky site. Thank you!

There were two ladies who became members of God's family, Jeane O'Barr and Michelle Emrick. Congratulations and welcome! When you embrace one who is newly baptized, what is the first thing they say? (and we all say it): *I'm wet!* Are not all newborns wet?

In one of his sermons, Bronson James encouraged us to sow the "seed" when the opportunity presented itself. Without going into details, a couple of seeds were sown within our congregation. They matured and were harvested within a matter of hours. Is that not to be expected when the seed falls on fertile soil?

You will notice that little mention has been made of any of the ministers or sermons. There is a reason for that. We saved the best for last. Those who presented either a sermon or sermonette were Ferrell Vincent, Allan Graham, Bill Russ, Lloyd Cary, Nathan Kelley, Archie Reynolds, Bronson James, Bobby Whitt, Fred Weed, Mark Schwarzkopf, Frank Baker, Jack Stephenson, Eugene Lucka, Wes White, and Tony Buchert. Thank you for every word. We understand and appreciate all that you did to prepare those messages of knowledge and inspiration. There were sermons on *Establishing a Kingdom*; *The Elder Brother's Syndrome*; *Church Errors*; *How to Pray*; *Homeless*; *Wheat, Tares, and Maturity*; *A Day of Remembrance*; *In His Image*; *God's Holydays and Forgetting*; *Flim-Flam Man*; *The Love of the Truth*; *The Spirit In Men*; *The Great Intruder*; and *A Modern Parable*. Although each presented a different approach, the sermons, when summed up, seemed to have one theme—a renewed spirit, invigorated commitment, remembering and rehearsing, and forgetting past grudges. We were left with a feeling of family, love, hope, and faith in a better future. To prove my point of saving the best for last, at the Feast 250 DVDs and 125 CDs were given to those who asked. The requests are still coming in.

We were blessed with almost perfect weather through the Church Picnic Monday afternoon. Then some rain and cooler weather descended upon us. We shivered, complained a little, and some even purchased winter coats. It was Wes White who pointed out that in some areas of the country, that kind of weather would be welcome; you see, Wes is from Texas, where they have had a long drought and hot temperatures.

We had a wonderful Feast and hope you did as well. Until we meet again in 2012, may God bless you in every way. If you would like a different venue next year, we invite one and all to Kentucky Dam Village. You all come, you hear? Ω

Submitted by Alice Edwards Lauria



**Festival Coordinator
James Pollitte**



Bronson James

BAPTISMS



Jeanie O'Barr Baptized



Michelle Emrick Baptized

YOUTH DAY



**Sabbath School
Conducted by Angie Buchert**



Ferrell Vincent

SPEAKERS



Bobby Whitt



Wes White



Tony Buchert



Bill Russ



Mark Schwarzkopf



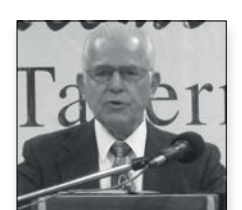
Jack Stephenson



Archie Reynolds



Frank Baker



Fred Weed



Lloyd Cary



Nathan Kelly



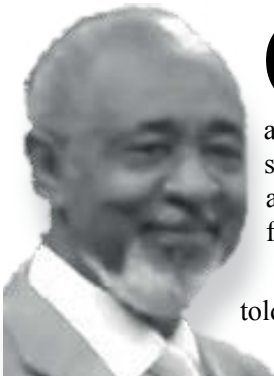
Alan Graham



Kentucky Festival Choir

GLAD TO SEE YOU!

by Bronson James



One of the hardest things to do (among many others) is to be consistent. Maintaining a continuity in anything gets harder every day. Being constant in health and in relative wealth are examples of cares in which the bar is changing frequently.

Take health, for instance. One day we are told to avoid certain kinds of food because they are killers. Then, a relatively short time later, we are admonished to eat the taboo food because it is now good for you. What is a body to do? With such paralyzing information coming at us, is it any wonder we are often frozen in place with indecision or apathy?

In the area of wealth, the winner's line is being moved at such a pace that the middle class is all but evaporating. Those smitten by this rapid change are frightened and disgruntled. Symptoms of withdrawal and disconnection pervade our way of life. When this point is applied to the church and our local congregations, it raises serious concern about our consistent, continuous, and constant attendance in our collective worship. Let me explain.

One of the most "to the heart of the matter" points made in God's Word is found in Hebrews 10. The writer makes a powerful case for the overwhelming efficacy of Jesus Christ's sacrifice (verse 10). As a result of this substantial offering, all sinners can enter into the holy place before God Almighty and commune with Him (verses 19, 20).

The writer then makes a focused point we should all consider. "And *since* we have a great priest over the house of God, let us

draw near with a sincere [true] heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:21–22, NASB throughout).

The writer of the book of Hebrews wants the reader to assuredly know that after our hearts are cleansed by the sprinkling of Jesus' blood, our bodies having been submerged into the watery grave of baptism and the washing of water by the Word (Ephesians 5:26), there remains a responsibility for such a cleansed person. It is one that is easy to shirk in the time in which we live. Notice: "Let us hold fast [grasp tightly] the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23).

Do you see the writer's point? He says God is faithful to us. We also have a duty of faithfulness; however, it is not only toward our Creator that this faith is shown, but also toward our fellow-laborer in the faith. "And let us consider how to *stimulate* one another to love and good deeds" (verse 24). Do you know how this is accomplished? Verse 25 is the key: "Not forsaking our own *assembling* together, as is the habit of some, but *encouraging* one another, and ALL THE MORE, as you see the day drawing near."

There you have it, right between the eyes! We are urged to meet (assemble) with each other in a consistent, continuous, and constant manner. Our health or finances may preclude steady meeting for worship and fellowship, but will our Father accept any other reasons for our forsaking Sabbath worship with other believers?

If any of us are frozen in time—frightened, apathetic, or even negligent—it is not too late to change and break some bad habits. After all, God wants us to. And it will do a lot for all of us to be able to say, "Glad to see you!" Ω



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