

December 2009

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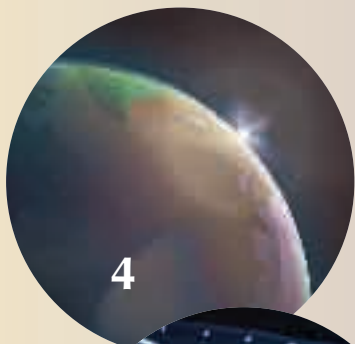
The background of the entire page is a photograph showing the silhouettes of three people from the waist up, standing against a bright sunset sky. They are holding their arms high, each holding a trumpet. The sun is a large, glowing orb on the left side, creating a lens flare effect. The sky transitions from a bright yellow near the sun to a darker orange and purple at the top.

God's Final Call

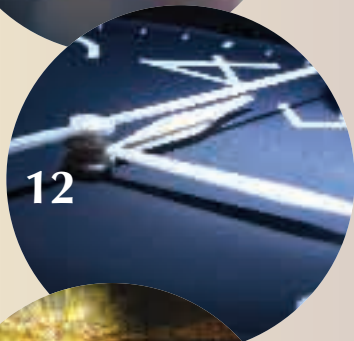
Time on our hands (p. 4)

Dangerous days (p. 7)

Reading the signs (p. 18)



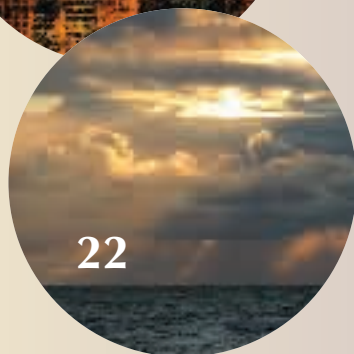
4



12



18



22

ARTICLES

- 4 **Living With Delay** — by Calvin Burrell
- 7 **The Persecution of Christianity** — by Robert Coulter
- 12 **Faith-Plus Forum on Christ's Return** — David M. Kauer, James McBride, Donald L. Gouldbourne, Gordon Feil
- 18 **Are These the Last Days?** — by Richard A. Wiedenheft
- 22 **Who Are You, God?** — by Dawn Yrene

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 **First Word** — I Think . . .
- 10 **Q & A**
- 16 **HeartSpeak**
- 30 **International Tour** — A Therapeutic Community
- 31 **Last Word** — Benefits of Prophecy

25 **COG7 IN ACTION**

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I Think . . .

I'm in a confessing mood today, ready to admit my heresy. Here it is: I'm not sure that the whole world is becoming only worse and worse, as many Christians claim and a few Bible texts seem to say.

More progress than regress has come to the human condition during recorded history, it seems to me — much of it since Christ's first advent. In compassionate treatment of infants, elders, and women; in the abolition of slavery; in public sanitation, nutrition, and healthcare; in the rise of benevolent democracies around the world; in modern conveniences that convert drudgery to leisure, providing opportunity for personal enrichment; and in many other arenas, we enjoy a higher quality of existence than did those in Bible times, those in the Middle Ages, or even those who lived a hundred years ago.

The last decade appears to challenge my theory. The recent spate of bad news about economy (not half as bad as the 1930's), about government (mostly from one political perspective), and about church (Christianity is on the ebb in Europe and North America, where only 5-25 percent of people attend church) has convinced many folks that Armageddon is near. See what Richard Wiedenheft said about this, on p. 18.

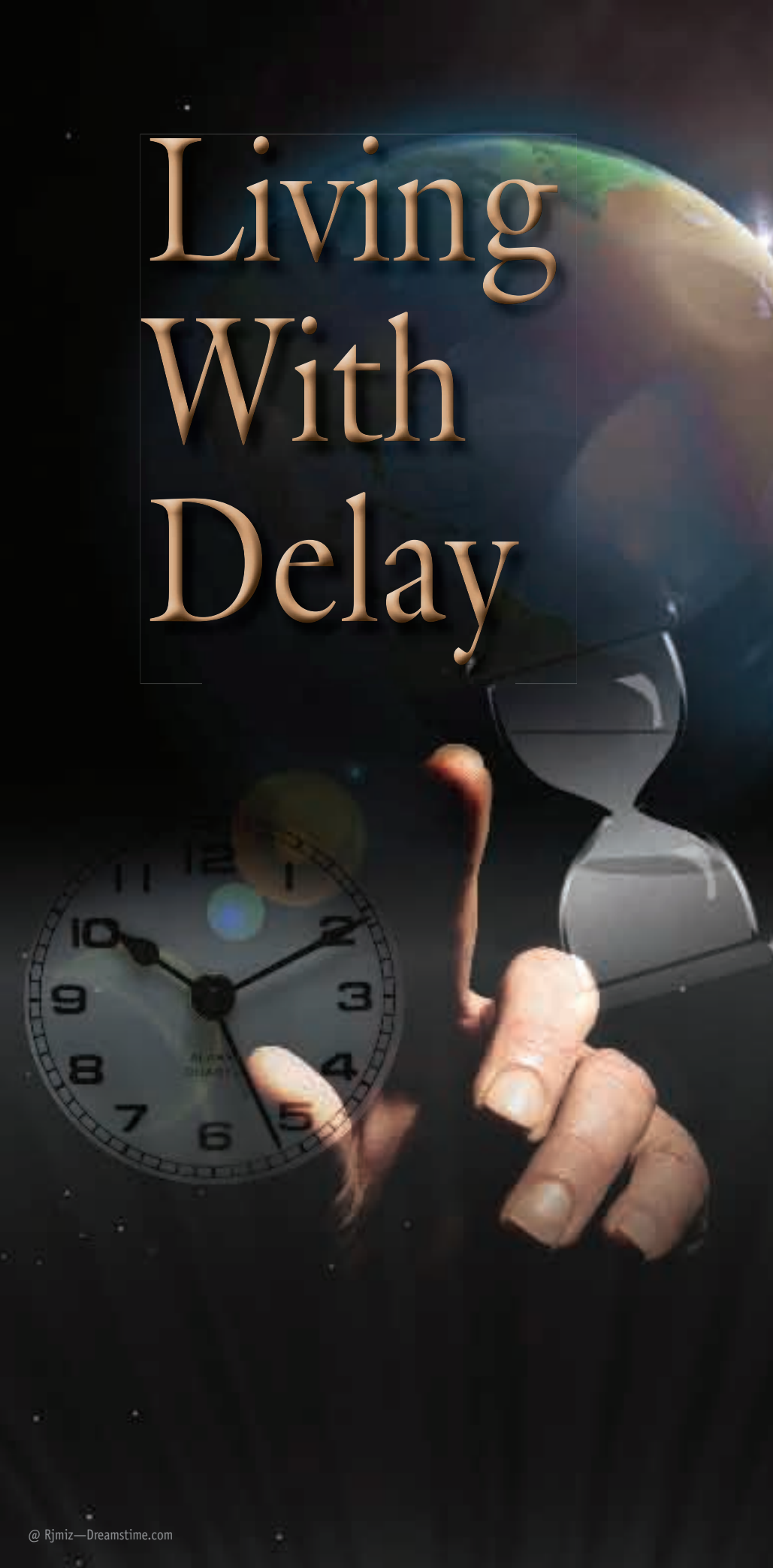
It may be slow or no growth for Bible-loving, Christ-sharing folks in America, but believers still have it good around here. I think we should stop quoting a few prophetic clichés to support our negativism and let the Bible paint its own multi-hued version of our present and future. Jesus' story of wheat and tares (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43) suggests this more realistic, balanced view. He planted good seed, and the Devil planted bad. Both grew together until the harvest.

I think this explains why we live in a world that's getting better and worse at the same time. I agree with Whaid Rose who observed that a lot more happens in the world — both good and bad — than most people know about. I think there's enough evil happening, thanks to the tares, to keep us praying, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus. How long?" The solution to this chronic condition requires the Second Advent, the theme of this BA.

On the other hand, I think there's enough good going on around the planet, thanks to Jesus' seed, to keep us thanking God, sowing more good seed, and trusting that tomorrow will, in many respects, be better than today. What do you think?

— Calvin Burrell

Living With Delay

A hand is shown holding a round analog clock and an hourglass. The background features a view of the Earth from space, with the planet's curvature and atmosphere visible against a dark sky. The clock face is white with black numbers and hands, and the hourglass is clear glass with white sand. The overall composition is centered and evokes a sense of time and waiting.

When Christ returns, will He find faith on the earth? by Calvin Burrell

How do we respond when Christ seems to have delayed His return, when our blessed hope is postponed and injustice prevails in the land?

The facts are these:

- Scores of Bible texts foretell a last great day in which the Lord will intervene in history to judge the wicked and reward the righteous (for an Old Testament example, see Daniel 7:13, 14). Some New Testament texts (1 Corinthians 7:29, for example) imply that the writers expected His return in their lifetime. The most compelling promises are from Jesus Christ himself: "I will come again . . . quickly . . . to give to every one according to his work" (John 14:3; Revelation 22:12).
- Fifty generations later, Christ has not returned and the promises are not fulfilled. In the face of this, many have given up hope in a heavenly kingdom to come, yielding

rather to doubt and earthly temptation as Jesus predicted (Matthew 24:48, 49). This backsliding has increased the violence, corruption, and spiritual darkness that envelope our earth.

- In a passage focused on His return (Luke 17:20–18:8), Jesus anticipates that many will falter under the delay, so He asks, “When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (18:8b). The question is poignant and penetrating, with a potential for powerful impact on those who hear and reflect on it. Each of us should answer individually: *When Christ returns, will He find faith in me?*

Parable

The answer may be uncovered in the story Jesus tells in Luke 18:1-8a, just before He asks our key question (v. 8b). It’s the story of a judge, he of considerable power and position. A judge can change things and bring justice at the drop of a gavel.

It’s also the story of a widow, she of little or no power. Most widows in Jesus’ day were poor and weak, working twice as hard for bare existence. Living with chronic injustice, the widow petitions this judge to take vengeance upon her adversary.

This adversary, the third person in the story, is the widow’s enemy — her antagonist. She hears his insult at every turn; she feels his oppression. He adds to her daily burdens and won’t let up!

Now the judge can do justice for the widow anytime he wants. But he doesn’t want. Instead, he delays. He delays because he

is basically a selfish guy, having great care for his own personal convenience and very little for any poor widow. “No,” he tells her over and over again, until he can take no more of her troublesome pleas.

Finally, in exasperation, the judge agrees to rid the widow of the adversary, not because he is just but because then he’ll be rid of her too.

Parallels

Who is this judge, this widow, this adversary in the bigger story of life?

The widow reminds us of the church. Its members are like this poor, weak woman in many ways. Most of Jesus’ followers are not among the world’s powerful, rich, and famous (1 Corinthians 1:26). Culture’s movers and shakers do not often value godly faith and moral conduct as highly as do Christians. More often, they enjoy poking fingers in the eye of God and His people.

Like the widow, the church of God has constant cause to cry out for justice. Believers see oppression as did a number of psalmists. In fact, the early verses

in Psalm 94 sound like the widow in Jesus’ parable:

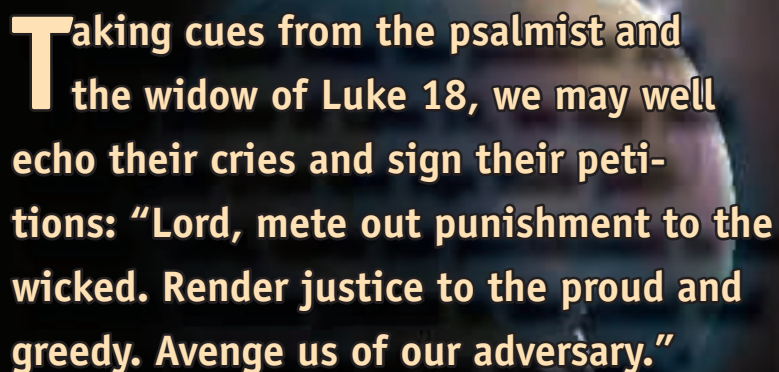
Rise up, O Judge of the earth; render punishment to the proud . . . Lord . . . how long will the wicked triumph? They . . . speak insolent things; all the workers of iniquity boast in themselves. They break in pieces Your people, O LORD, and afflict Your heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger . . . (vv. 2-6a).

In verses 16 and 23, the writer asks who will stand up for him against the evil workers who gather against the righteous and condemn the innocent.

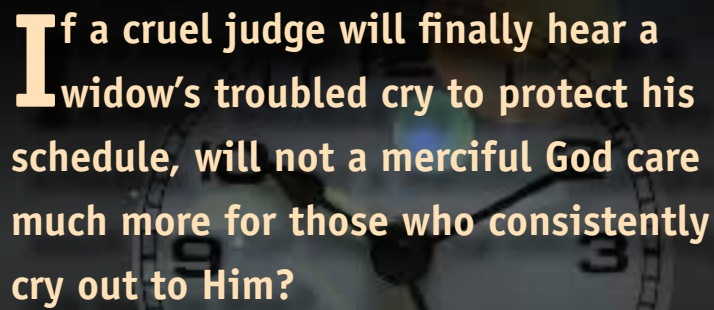
What this psalm asks is no different than what Jesus taught His disciples to pray: “Deliver us from the evil one” (Luke 11:4b). Rescue from evil and relief from worldlings who “lord it” over the righteous are as needful in this perverse generation as they ever were. Consider a list of injustices that oppress people of faith and obedience today, using Psalm 94:3’s “How long?” as our preamble:

How long shall . . .

- evil be exalted as good and good be regarded as evil?
- dishonest people prosper at the expense of the just?



Taking cues from the psalmist and the widow of Luke 18, we may well echo their cries and sign their petitions: “Lord, mete out punishment to the wicked. Render justice to the proud and greedy. Avenge us of our adversary.”



If a cruel judge will finally hear a widow's troubled cry to protect his schedule, will not a merciful God care much more for those who consistently cry out to Him?

- criminals terrorize our streets and neighborhoods?
- drug dealers and alcohol manufacturers entice our youth to destruction?
- rap artists fill our ears with vile language and moral garbage?
- rich men use deception and dishonesty to heap up their treasures?
- arrogant athletes and movie stars, flaunting sin, be heroes for our children?
- greedy preachers fill their purses through false teaching and promised wealth?
- politicians make public policy when they can't keep their own private lives intact?
- popular media present sex as a right of all, with no regard to moral responsibilities or natural consequences taught by hard experience?
- we be a nation that approves killing our children before they are even born?

Taking cues from the psalmist and the widow of Luke 18, we may well echo their cries and sign their petitions: "Lord, mete out punishment to the wicked. Render justice to the proud and greedy. Avenge us of our adversary."

And who is our major adver-

sary, this third person of Jesus' parable? Is he the drug dealer, the criminal, the rap artist, the rich and dishonest person, the arrogant athlete, the godless movie star, the false religionist, or the proud politician? Though all these appear on our "How long?" list, we should not regard them as our absolute enemies.

The absolute adversary of God's people is identified in another place: "Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Without ceasing, we do well to pray "Lord, deliver us from this Evil One — the Devil."

What about the judge of Jesus' story? Whom does he represent in the drama of life? The easy answer is to say that he is God or Christ, judge of all the earth.

It is true that God is like this judge in some ways. God has power and position like the judge. Like him, God can do justice and punish the enemies of right anytime He wishes. And like the judge, God delays doing so.

The reasons for heaven's delay, however, are opposite the judge's reasons. Because this unmerciful and unjust judge neither

feared God nor respected man, the righteous Judge of Scripture is more to be contrasted with him than compared. If a cruel judge will finally hear a widow's troubled cry to protect his schedule, will not a merciful God care much more for those who consistently cry out to Him?

Though He long delays (v. 7b), God is not uncaring, not unjust, not slack in His promises. If we understood His reasons for delay and His plans for vengeance, we would do exactly as He does and call it perfect justice.

Finding faith

Though this parable doesn't directly address the issue of Christ's return, Jesus' question at the parable's close returns us to that theme: "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (v. 8b). The answer to this question is suggested in the parable itself:

- Divine delay is a reality: "though He bears long with them" (v. 7b).
- Human persistence is a necessity: "Men always ought to pray and not lose heart" (v. 1).
- Delay will not forever last: "He will avenge them speedily" (v. 8a).

Those who respond to Jesus' righteous delay with continued hope and persistence — they will be found faithful when He returns.

Yes, the Son of Man will find faith on Earth. He will find it in those who, like the widow, pray for justice, trust for mercy, leave vengeance to God, and don't lose heart unto the end. They will be delivered speedily when Jesus comes quickly. **BA**

The Persecution of Christianity



A bully of the saints, seen first in Daniel 7, becomes the religious beast of Revelation 13.

by Robert Coulter

John the Revelator introduced the subject of the persecution of the Christian church in Revelation 12. He identified God's church as a woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars on her head (v. 1).

Her adversary was an enormous red dragon with seven

crowned heads and ten horns (v. 3). The Lord permitted the dragon to war against the church for a period of 1,260 years (v. 6). We arrive at this conclusion by considering each day of the 1,260 days as one year. (The expressions "time, times and half a time" in verse 14 and "forty-two months" in 13:5 are equivalent to 1,260 days.) When the dragon realized that destruction of the church was beyond its reach (12:13-16), it was enraged and made war against her offspring "who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (v. 17).

The dragon is identified as the ancient serpent called the Devil and Satan (v. 9), who led the whole world into apostasy through rebellion against God. It represents the totality of the four pagan kingdoms pictured by Nebuchadnezzar's metallic statue (Daniel 2) and the four beasts of Daniel's vision (ch. 7). This is the reason the dragon has seven heads: Babylon had one, Persia had one, Greece had four, and Rome had one head with ten horns (Daniel 7:2-7). As these

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John calls for the saints to patiently endure and remain faithful to God in spite of the impending atrocities. God had not forgotten them and would vindicate them.

godless entities were conquered in turn, their idolatrous ideologies were incorporated into each succeeding society. This permitted the satanic ideologies of the four kingdoms of Daniel 2 and 7 to act in unison as a dragon. Satan used Babylon, Persia, and Greece to make war against Israel for hundreds of years. In John's day, he used Rome to wage war against the church of Christ.

The beast

In Revelation 13 the scene changes, but the persecution continues. John wrote, "And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea" (v. 1a). Like the beasts of Daniel 7, it sprang from the sea and was a composite of those four — lion, bear, leopard, and nondescript beast. The dragon (Revelation 12:3) gave this beast its power and authority. The fact that crowns, on the heads of the dragon, are now worn on the horns of the beast (13:1) indicates that the dragon's authority has been transferred to the kingdoms that developed in western Europe upon the fall of the Roman Empire.

One of the beast's heads is fatally wounded, but to the astonishment of the world, the wound was healed (v. 3). This wound was to the head representative of Rome. It was initiated by Emperor Constantine, who divided the capital of Imperial Rome between the cities of Rome in the west and Constantinople in the east. After a brief period of unity, the empire was permanently divided in 395. This division weakened Rome, contributing to its fall to the heathen hoards of the north in 457. The fatal wound to the beast's heads was the collapse of the western half of the empire.

The wound was healed (v. 3) by the Frankish king, Charlemagne, a pretender of Christianity and supporter of the papacy. When requested by the pope to defend Italy against the Lombards, he rushed to the pope's aid, defeating them and taking control of Italy (v. 4). The union of Charlemagne's heathen kingdom with the papacy fulfilled this prophecy. On December 25, 800, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne as Caesar Augustus in the old St. Peter's church in Rome. Those in attendance pro-

claimed him emperor of the Romans, believing they had realized their hope of resurrecting the Roman Empire. Charlemagne's coronation was the healing of the deadly wound. It laid the foundation for the establishment of the ruthless Holy Roman Empire, uniting the authority of the Roman church with that of the states of western Europe.

John's description of the work of the beast in vv. 5-8 has many parallels to that of the little horn kingdom of Daniel 7: 20, 21, 25. It had a mouth that spoke boastfully (Revelation 13:5a), meaning that it was vainglorious, blasphemed God (v. 6), made war against the saints, and prevailed against them (v. 7) for 1,260 years (v. 5b). John's message was a sobering indication of the temporary withdrawal of God's divine protection of the saints (vv. 9, 10). John calls for the saints to patiently endure and remain faithful to God in spite of the impending atrocities. God had not forgotten them and would vindicate them (6:9-11).

Beast with two horns

The second beast of John's prophecy arose out of the earth (13:11), a succession from within the kingdoms described in Daniel 2 and 7. It had two lamb-like horns and spoke like a dragon, indicating the dual nature of a church (lamb-like) united with civil authority (a dragon). This beast represents the Holy Roman Empire, the union of the Romish church with the political kingdoms of Europe.

The diabolical work of this second beast was described as

1. Exercising the authority of the first beast (v. 12). After the

fall of Rome in 457, its citizens came to depend upon the papacy for many of the services previously provided by Rome's civil authorities. The phrase "on his [the beast's] behalf" means "in his presence," indicating that John's three beasts of chapters 12 and 13 were contemporaries, operating successively and in the same arena. The two-horn beast performed great and miraculous signs, called down fire from heaven, and deceived all men by its empowerment from the first beast (v. 14a). This aptly describes the Roman church's ability to bring unwilling kings into subjection and to enlist civil authorities to enforce its decrees.

2. Erecting an image in honor of the first beast because of the power it was given (v. 14b). This addressed the fact that the Roman church's hierarchy was organized and operated much like Imperial Rome, even to emperor worship in the worship of its popes as "Holy Father."

3. Gave breath (life) to the image of the first beast so that it could spew its blasphemies and require the saints to adopt its heresies, or be killed (v. 15). It did this through the use of its clergy, puppet kings, and magistrates. It conducted intrusive surveillance on its subjects, excommunicated and boycotted those who differed, and even put to death those it considered heretics.

This beast forced people to receive a mark in their right hands or their foreheads as a prerequisite to pursuing the ordinary activities of life (vv. 16, 17). Comparing this with the display of the Father's name on the forehead of His saints (22:4), we believe that the mark of the beast was not to be a visible sign. Rather, it indi-

cates consent and participation in the ideology of this antichristian church.

John calls for wisdom and insight in calculating the number of the beast (13:18a).

Comparing passages, we conclude that the beast's number is synonymous with his name (v. 17b; 14:11), to the "number of his name" (15:2), and to "a man's number" (13:18b). Many attempts are made to identify this mysterious figure, but speculation about his identity is unimportant because enforcement of his mark is now history. Although the manifold blasphemies, heresies, and antichristian ideologies of the beast still exist in this apostate church, it no longer exercises the authority to enforce its edicts either through papal decree or through the agency of the state. Still, those who are unenlightened in God's Word and take the church's heresies as truth may voluntarily participate in her heresies.

Many teach that the mark of the beast is yet to be enforced by a latter-day antichrist. That is impossible if John's time allocations are taken literally. The time God allowed the saints to be perse-

cuted and overcome was 1,260 days, or three-and-one-half years (12:6, 14; 13:5), equaling 1,260 years. This period indicated by John is identical with the time given to Daniel's little horn to oppress the saints (Daniel 7:25). The principal executors of these prophecies were the same entities — those who waged war on the saints, prevailed against them, spoke against God, and thought to change God's times and laws. They were allocated identical periods to perform their heinous schemes. That time is now past.

For all practical purposes, the beasts of Revelation 13 have been rendered impotent, even if the dregs of their heresies and idolatries linger on in the world.

BA

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



Many teach that the mark of the beast is yet to be enforced by a latter-day antichrist. That is impossible if John's time allocations are taken literally.



Questions & Answers

Q What does your church believe and teach about heaven?

A The closest thing the Bible offers to a glimpse inside heaven may be chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation, where God's throne is described. Beyond that, we don't know much for sure about heaven. After all, that's God's place — His throne — not ours. When Jesus came from there to reveal the Father, He said that no one else had ever gone there and that we might not believe it if He told us more (John 3:13).

Scripture says a lot more about the earth — its beginning (good), its purpose (human habitation), and its destiny (restoration) — than about heaven. Essentially the Bible's message is not much about our going to where God lives. Rather it's about God coming here, once in the person of His Son and again at the end, bringing all the glories of heaven with Him.

As God promised a land and seed to ancient Israel, so Jesus told His disciples they would inherit the earth — His land for His seed (Matt. 5:5). To be sure, the natural creation has been defiled and requires cleansing (2 Peter 3:7-13), but God will not finally destroy at the end what He created and called good at the start. God and heaven will come to us in a restored and renewed universe — the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21:1-3).

Q I've heard preachers use 1 Thessalonians 3:13 ("at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints") to prove that souls of the redeemed are now in heaven. Is there a better interpretation?

A This is one of two verses in Paul's letter that speak of God bringing the saints "with" Jesus. The other is 4:14, which says those God will bring are those who now sleep in Jesus, awaiting resurrection. We believe these two verses affirm

that, as Jesus descends, dead saints will be raised from their graves and joined by the living righteous to meet the Lord in the air (4:15-17). What a grand and heavenly time that will be!

After this airy reunion, as the saints descend with Christ toward the earth, it will appear to the watching world that they're all coming from heaven, as 3:13 can imply. But not all of them are, for only Jesus was ever there (John 3:13). The saints soar somewhere into the vast expanse to meet Him coming this way, but none of them come "all the way" from heaven. From this perspective, it makes perfect sense that Jesus brings all His saints (from their graves and from the meeting in the air) with Him when He returns from heaven.

The next question addresses texts that could imply deceased Christians are in heaven prior to Jesus' return.

Q Some Christians quote 2 Corinthians 5:1-9 as proof that we are immediately in the presence of the Lord when we die. How is the phrase "be absent from the body and . . . be present with the Lord" properly understood?

A This passage is one of two places where Paul expresses his hope of being with Christ when he departs in death; the other is Philippians 1:23b. If these texts were his only statements on the topic, we might indeed think that Paul anticipated "heaven" immediately upon death, in accord with the theory that souls never die.

In other texts, however, Paul states his belief that the heavenly reward will not be experienced by believers until Christ returns (1 Thess. 4:14ff), until the dead are raised immortal (1 Cor. 15:52ff), and until final judgment is passed (2 Tim. 4:1ff). These three texts are more definitive teachings of Paul than the previous two.

Second Corinthians 5:1-9 and Philippians 1:21-26 are primarily devotional passages, not doctrinal

statements. Being “absent from the body” and “present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8) expresses Paul’s confident hope that even the death of this mortal body will not break the believer’s fellowship with his loving Lord. Indeed it will not, as Romans 8:38, 39 affirms, for the New Testament describes death much like a sleep in which we are not aware of time’s passage, but from which we shall be wakened by the trumpet of Christ’s return and the glory of resurrection — with a new body.

Rather than the common view of natural immortality, Paul’s teaching later in Philippians (3:10, 11, 20, 21) affirms the view presented here. Note also that Paul’s statement in 2 Cor. 5:3 (“if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked”) expresses aversion to the thought of being in God’s presence without a resurrected, immortal body.

Q Did Enoch and Elijah go to God’s heaven without experiencing physical death?

A The question is not an easy one; only God knows the answer for sure. Our studied opinion is that Enoch and Elijah did not ascend into heaven where God dwells in His infinite glory and majesty. Until now, it seems that only Christ, who came from there, has done that (John 3:13).

Other verses that support this conclusion are Hebrews 11:13, 39, 40. Here we learn that all the heroes of faith, like Enoch (v. 5) and the prophets (v. 32) like Elijah, have died without receiving their final reward. They will receive it at the resurrection, when Christ returns, just like the rest of God’s people (1 Cor. 15:22, 23).

Q What does the Bible say about immortality of the soul? If we don’t go to heaven when we die, where are the dead?

A The term *immortal soul(s)* is not found in the Bible. The idea that humans are naturally

born with an immortal component that survives death and continues to exist in another realm owes more to Greek philosophy than to Hebrew religion. The Israelites did not think of one aspect of human personality continuing to exist without the whole. No detachable parts.

In Scripture the word *soul* has several connotations. One of the most common of these is “whole person”; a person is a soul (Gen. 2:7; Ex. 1:5; Ezek. 18:4; Acts 2:41, all KJV). All human persons (souls) are mortal and subject to death.

While the influence of Greek dualism (body and soul) begins to be felt in the New Testament, our future hope as Christians is always couched in terms of Christ’s return and a resurrected body. This — not an immortal soul that departs the body at death — is the blessed hope of all God’s people (Titus 2:13, 14).

Rather than what every human has at birth, immortality is the gift of God in Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23; 2 Tim. 1:10). Though eternal life is a spiritual reality now, by faith, the ultimate reality of immortal life in the new heavens and earth awaits the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, when “this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:52-54).

Where are the dead? Asleep in their graves, the Bible offers, waiting the great getting-up morning. You may request the Church’s free tract on this topic.

— Answers by Elder Calvin Burrell

We Ask: Since God isn’t physical, do you suppose that physical space is required for heaven, His home? Where is the promise of “going to heaven”? In the March ‘10 BA, we will print the best Bible verses our readers provide to support the popular view of heaven as the future home of all Christians.



Faith-Plus Forum

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on Christ's Return

Is Jesus Coming Soon?

by **David M. Kauer**
Citrus Heights, California

Is Jesus coming soon? How soon? The question has been asked since the first century. Just before the Ascension, Jesus' disciples asked a similar question. Jesus replied that it was not for them to know the times and seasons. He added, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and

you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Then as they watched in amazement, Jesus began to ascend into the heavens with a cloud obscuring Him from their sight. Two men in white clothing stood by them and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (vv. 9-11).

In like manner! It is now nearly two thousand years since Christ

took His rightful place at His Father's right hand, and the question remains: When will Jesus come in like manner? Are we now in the time that Jesus told His disciples would come and that believers should look for?

The Second Coming has been explored with many viewpoints since Jesus spoke directly to it in His Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21). False predictions along the way have caused many believers to lose faith. Our imperfect understanding of Jesus' words does not negate the fact that Jesus will return and set up His kingdom.

On the contrary, the knowledge of Scripture is what strengthens our faith. As believing people take ownership of Bible truth on this topic, the powerful working of the Holy Spirit will carry them through the tests and tribulations yet to come.

Comparing Jesus' words to events since He spoke tells us that most of those events have come to pass. Counterfeit christs, wars and threats of war, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places have occurred often and may be on the increase. False teachers within the church have deceived many, and the "spirit of lawlessness" abounds while the love of many grows cold. Even churches encourage compromise with false teachings and celebrations, instead of worshipping God in the way He directs.

The prophetic words of Jesus are that before the Son of Man comes in a cloud with power and great glory, we should expect "distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth . . ." (Luke 21:25, 26). This describes our present world conditions as we enter a new decade on January 1, 2010.

Is Jesus coming soon? Yes, we believe He is. But how soon? Will it be within the next eight to fifteen years? The time is truly growing short; the signs are all around us and shouting louder every day! Addressing Christ's second coming, Peter concludes: "You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the

wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:17, 18).

In this last-day time we need to strengthen one another in both grace and truth so that we may hear the words of Jesus: "Well done good and faithful servant . . . Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matthew 25:21).

Prepare to Meet Your Doom?

by James McBride
Lincolnshire, U.K.

Anyone writing on signs of the times must acknowledge a centuries-long history of failed prophetic interpretations. The only certainty, though disputed by some, is that Jesus will come again at a time preserved in heaven's counsel.

That doesn't mean we may live as if it won't happen in our lifetimes; it could. Jesus warns us, "Be ready." Readiness isn't mea-

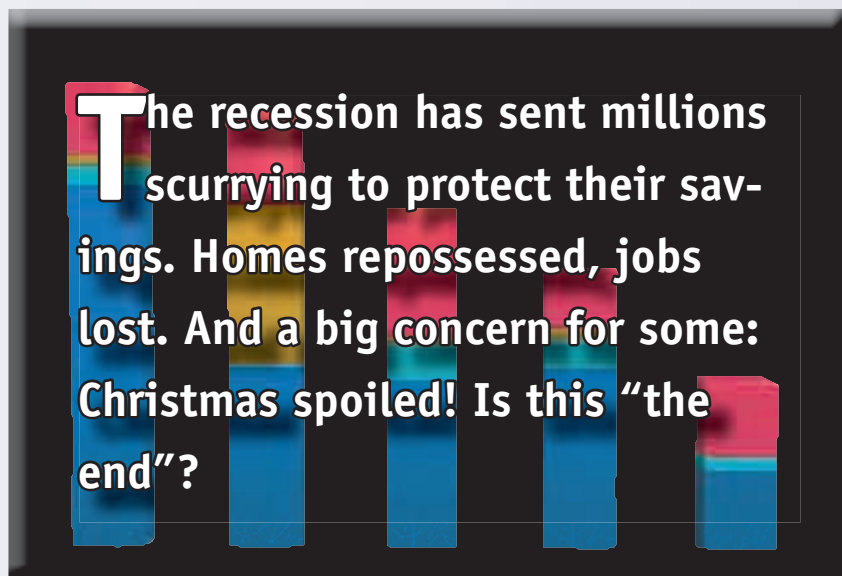
sured by our understanding of prophecy. Rather, those who are faithful and diligent are ready.

Any number of end-time scenarios have afflicted our planet, sending believers scurrying to the hills or to their knees. These scenarios have come from preachers of all faiths — some sincere, some for personal gain.

Earth's scarred face bears witness to past calamity. Catastrophes have re-shaped the planet. Millions have died from plagues. Nations have torn one another apart. There are ever-present reports of impending war. But, said Jesus, "See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet" (Matthew 24:6).

Much of the Olivet prophecy (Matthew 24) came to pass in Palestine by AD 70. The Jews suffered horrendously, as recorded by Josephus, at the hands of the occupying Romans. But not all that prophecy was fulfilled. There's more to come.

The generation that will experience the return of Jesus will also witness the resurrection of the saints (v. 31 and 1 Thessa-



Ionians 4:16). At that time Jesus will “stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east” (Zechariah 14:4) at the beginning of His reign as Earth’s supreme ruler (v. 9). None of this has yet happened.

What, then, of our global credit crunch, our worldwide recession? It has sent millions scurrying to protect their savings. Homes reposessed, jobs lost. And a big concern for some: Christmas spoiled! Is this “the end”?

It would be foolhardy to answer that question with a certain yes or no. Time and again the signs have suggested that the end could be near, even at the door. And we are still waiting. The signs are indeed there today, but they may pass, and life as we’ve known it may recover. Or it may not.

At God’s perfect moment, He will intervene to stop the madness. Of all people, Christians should not be fearful. Jesus’ counsel is to be watchful and faithful (Matthew 24:45-51). “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (28:20).

Waiting for Christ’s Return

by **Donald L. Gouldbourne**
Dorchester, Massachusetts

Some people believe Christ has already come. Others say such an event will never occur. Despite such pessimism, believers trust in the imminent return of Christ. Early Christians waited for Him, even until death. Still today, Jesus’ followers look forward to meeting Him in the air as He descends from heaven.

Just prior to Jesus’ ascension to the Father’s right hand, two angels said He would return (Acts 1:11). Of the many references to Christ’s second coming, the most reassuring may be this one: “Let not your heart be troubled . . . I will come again” (John 14:1, 3). All believers can rest their minds and hearts on this!

For those of us who share spiritual fellowship with Jesus by faith, Christ now reigns in our hearts as Lord of our lives. Though we should avoid sensationalism, Christians have peace that they will not face the judgment prepared for the ungodly.

Waiting on Christ’s return means that we are prepared to meet Him.

What are the preparations needed for the Lord’s return? The Christian life should be one of devotion, commitment, purity, faith, and moral convictions. Our minds should be set on heavenly things, where Christ sits now at the Father’s side.

With all the sickness, suffering, warfare, and distress of this age, humanity wonders how much further can we go. Generation after generation has come and gone, and some ask, “Where is the promise of His coming?” (2 Peter 3:4). When we sense such doubt or impatience, we should look to God’s Word. Passages like Hebrews 10:37; Revelation 3:11; 22:7, 20; Psalm 50:3; Isaiah 35:4 can be helpful.

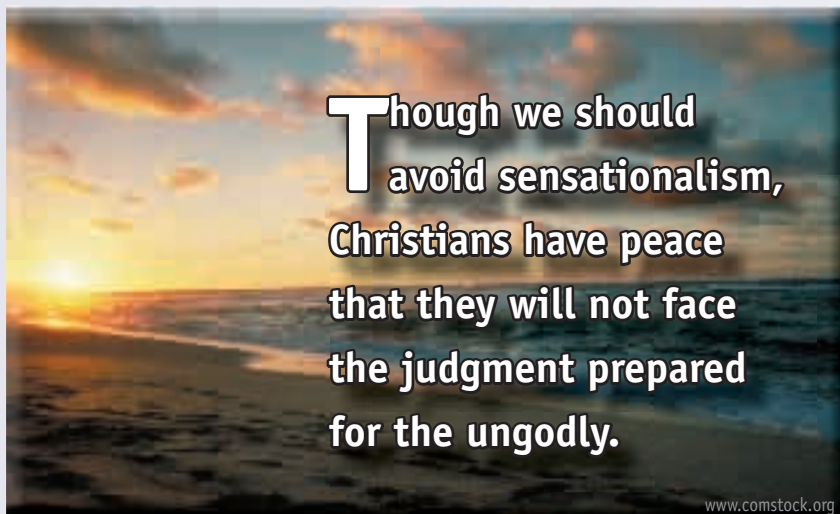
Sometimes it seems to us that God forgets or delays His coming. But no one knows the day or hour when our Lord shall come. Armageddon is near because of the financial, economic, and social upheavals faced around the world in our time. Let’s keep looking up!

Reign Dance

by **Gordon Feil**
Victoria, British Columbia

What role do Christians play in bringing in the day of our Lord’s return? Some say we can do nothing to change the set time of that great day.

Outspoken Peter writes things not designed to settle this dust. His remark that we should be “looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God”



(2 Peter 3:12) is perplexing and provocative. Maybe we can hurry that day after all.

First, our Lord told us to pray God's kingdom to come (Matthew 6:10). This suggests that prayer can make a difference.

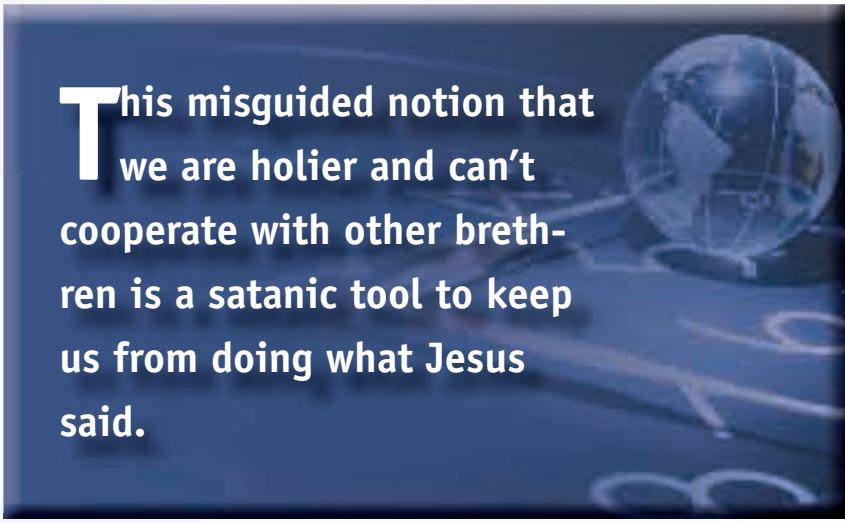
Second, in the near context of Peter's remark we read that God is not slow concerning His coming but is patient toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). When we don't repent, it may slow things down a bit.

Third, Jesus says that the end (tandem to Peter's "day of God") will not come until "this gospel of the kingdom" is "preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations" (Matthew 24:14). From these words, it seems we must conclude one of two things: Either "this gospel" has not been preached in all the world, or Jesus was wrong.

Ignore the second option. So let's consider what gospel Jesus had in mind to be preached before the end comes. For me, it's obvious that the vanilla-flavored gospel that pop Christianity generally proclaims does not qualify. That one has gone into all nations, yet the end has not come.

What Jesus wants preached is "this gospel of the kingdom." Which gospel that is may be found in the context. Since Jesus' comment is in answer to questions posed by His disciples (v. 3), the gospel of the kingdom must be the good news of His return when He shall be King of kings and Lord of lords over the whole earth. It is a concept introduced in Daniel 2:44 and carried right through the New Testament.

Jesus preached the gospel of



This misguided notion that we are holier and can't cooperate with other brethren is a satanic tool to keep us from doing what Jesus said.

the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14, 15; Luke 4:43). The apostles preached the gospel of the kingdom of God (Acts 8:12; 19:8). What gospel do we preach? The good news that Jesus is coming again to change this world for the better and that you can rule with Him (Revelation 2:26, 27; 3:21).

This is not to denigrate the wonderful truths that Jesus lived sinlessly, was killed for us because we do not, and was raised to glory after three days. That is the first word of gospel truth without which we won't be reigning with Him. But we can't stop there.

Knowing Jesus as Savior ought to be part of a faith that convinces us to repent and follow Him. His Spirit is the promised result (Acts 2:38). With that mind of God in us, we can proclaim the good news that He is coming again and that people should prepare by learning to observe whatever He commanded us (Matthew 28:19, 20).

If we don't proclaim this message, who will?

The pressing need to preach this good news of the kingdom is why I grieve over the lack of

unity among churches. This misguided notion that we are holier and can't cooperate with other brethren is a satanic tool to keep us from doing what Jesus said. We need ecumenism among the churches of God in order to pool our resources and do the work of preaching and teaching God's prescription for human happiness and His soon return. All this is the gospel of the kingdom of God. It is to be preached as a witness to the nations if we want the end to come!

Some North American aboriginals have practiced a "rain dance" designed to induce the onset of rain, presumably the bailiwick of God. When the day of God comes is also His purview (Matthew 24:36), yet apparently we can have some influence upon it. When Jesus comes again to reign may be influenced, if not precipitated, by something we do — sort of a reign dance!

"Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing" (Matthew 24:46). Blessed is he who does the reign dance! **BA**

INSIDE PRISON WALLS

Locked away in a cold, dark prison cell, John the Baptist starts to realize he may never again see the light of day.

by Michael Mancha

HAVE YOU EVER WANTED TO QUESTION GOD?

I mean really. Have you ever just cried out to Him, asking Him exactly what He's doing or why He's taking so long?

Prayer can be like that sometimes. Most of the time our prayers are "regular prayers" — you know, where we thank Him for everything, ask Him for what we need, and pray for those dear to us. I don't mean to cheapen prayer, but in a nutshell that's what it's all about. But sometimes prayer can be an earnest outpouring of frustration. Sometimes it can be a flurry of anger and pain. Sometimes it can just be tears.

I used to think that these kinds of prayers—the ones where I was angry or frustrated with God — were sinful. I felt like less of a Christian and more of a doubter. I felt that asking God why would result in the same answer I'd get from my earthly father: "Because I said so."

Then I found something in Matthew's Gospel that changed my thinking forever. In chapter 11, John the Baptist is in prison, awaiting his fate. Probably deep down John knows his future isn't bright, because he does something very unlike his character: He gathers his disciples and sends them to Jesus with this message: "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" (v. 3).

That line beaks my heart. It comes from a man whose birth was announced by an angel to his father Zechariah, a man directly affected by the presence of Jesus while both men were still in their mothers' wombs (Luke 1:41), a man who baptized Jesus and whose ultimate calling was to announce the coming of the Christ.

Yet now, in his darkest hour, John asks Jesus himself if He is who He says He is. That's heart-breaking.

How can a man so close to Jesus suddenly need confirmation that Jesus is really the Messiah? Can you imagine? John knew his life was ending, and all he wanted to know is whether he had done the right thing or wasted his life.

John was human; he wrestled with fear and doubt just like the rest of us. And when things got scary, he questioned just like the rest of us.

Asking God questions isn't sinful. If nothing in your life has compelled you to question God, then maybe you're not doing anything in your life at all. Even Jesus asked questions.

Just before His arrest in the garden, Jesus' heart was so overwhelmed that He was sweating blood. On His knees, Jesus asked God if there was another way out. Plan B. He asked if there was a way out of a plan He knew had to happen.

Asking questions allows God to speak to you. It gives God an opportunity to give you what you need: answers. That's exactly what He gave John the Baptist.

When John's disciples brought John's question, Jesus replied like this:

"Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me" (Matthew 11:4-6).

JOHN WAS HUMAN; HE WRESTLED WITH FEAR AND DOUBT JUST LIKE THE REST OF US.

The Bible doesn't say more about this story, but I imagine it went something like this. . . .

John's disciples make the journey back and tell him all they'd witnessed. With miracle after miracle, people praise the name of God and rejoice. Some are filled with tears after finally being freed from the bondage of disease and lifelong disabilities. The men tell John story after story with such passion that John is moved to tears. And with that, his heart is restored. Soon, John is dead.

Sometimes things work out well, and our prayers are filled with praise and gratitude. And sometimes things blindsides us, and our prayers are painful. It's in these moments that we may fear and worry. It's in these moments that we want to cry to God for answers, and it's in these moments that God wants us to seek no one but Him. In their darkest moments Jesus and John the Baptist turned their eyes to God.

Is it OK to question God? Yes. He wants us to be honest with Him. And when we're honest, we will see and seek Him as never before.

NFYC CALENDAR

SW DISTRICT WINTER YOUTH RETREAT

December 31, 2009 - January 3, 2010

Salvation Army Camp Hoblitzelle, Midlothian, TX. Contact Jason and Rose Rodriguez, jandrrodriguez@att.net.

WESTERN CANADIAN DISTRICT WINTER YOUTH RETREAT

December 31, 2009 - January 3, 2010

Long Island Conference Centre, Crownsnest, Alberta. Contact Cisco and Debbie Chavez, fm.chavez@shaw.ca.

NFYC REGISTRATION

National FYC registration for 2010 will begin January 1! Get your group information ready now. The first youth group to register will receive a special gift from the NFYC. Just go to <http://nfyccog7.org/register> or e-mail nfyccog7.org for more details.

Are These the Last Days?

Before hoisting your sails into the latest prophetic breezes, please read this. by **Richard A. Wiedenheft**

Editor's note: Many people like to theorize on prophecy, and most Bible students have an opinion about it. When it comes to making prophetic sense in print, however, few do it as clearly and compellingly as did BA writer Richard Wiedenheft (1946-2007). This article first appeared here in 1998. While some current data has changed, the article's clear-headed wisdom is needed now as much as it was then.

Our world has serious problems. Environmental pollution has reached global proportions. We're being poisoned: acid rain, dying oceans, destruction of the ozone layer, and the "greenhouse effect." We have a one-world economy based on the precarious foundation of fractional-reserve banking, high interest rates, and inflation. Then there are serious moral and social problems: abortion, pornography, immorality, divorce, diseases, drugs, malnutrition, terrorism, and the possibility of nuclear destruction. What a depressing picture!

But do all these problems prove that we live in the last days just before the return of Jesus Christ? Many Christians believe they do. Daily, preachers and writers cite the latest disaster or environmental problem as a prelude to the end. Many have accepted a scenario of specific events that supposedly lead to a rapture and then the Second Coming. Some use biblical numerics to set a timetable.

To be sure, the end may be near, but there is great danger in so much preoccupation with eschatology. Let's consider more evidence — from the Bible and from history.

Last days?

Most students of the New Testament recognize that Paul and other apostles thought that the Messiah would return in their generation. Frequently New Testament writers referred to their time as the "last days" or as the "last hour" (Acts 2:16, 17; Romans 13:11; James 5:3; 1 John 2:18). These references, with Hebrews 1:2, might be taken to

mean that all time since the coming of the Son of Man can be considered the "end time." For all the New Testament writers, it was the end. They all died, but the world went on.

Warnings

Paul warned Timothy that in the latter times some would abandon the faith and terrible times would come (1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1). Peter and Jude said there would be scoffers in the last days (2 Peter 3:3-14; Jude 18). While these passages are frequently cited as prophecies for our day, the problems described have existed in every age.

A close look at the context indicates the verses were in fact intended as warnings for first century Christians. For example, after warning Timothy about the kind of people there would be in the latter days, Paul wrote, "Have nothing to do with them" (2 Timothy 3:5; cf. v. 6). He considered his day as the prophesied latter days and warned believers accordingly.

Down through the centuries Christians have typically believed

that they lived at the end of the age, that they would live to see the second coming of Christ, that the turmoil and problems of their day were sure signs of the end. Many Christians, including well-respected scholars, have even set dates based on various "Bible" chronologies. Periods of 2300, 2520, 1260, 1290, 1335, and 1000 years have been manipulated in various ways to predict the end in the years 1000, 1033, 1356, 1572, 1365, 1533, 1648, 1847, 1844, 1914, 1975, 1988, and others. All these dates have two things in common: They made good sense to people at the time, and they were all wrong.

Why is there such a preoccupation with dates and chronology, with figuring out when Jesus will return and seeing every evil as a sure sign of the end? One reason is that Christians long to be united with their Savior at the resurrection — a blessed hope indeed. So they look for evidence of the nearness of the event they hope for. In the process, however, they may be inclined to see only the evidence that supports their hope.



Down through the centuries Christians have typically believed that the turmoil and problems of their day were sure signs of the end.

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Another reason is not so godly. It is the same reason people consult fortunetellers and astrologers: They are curious about the future. Unable to rest securely in the loving arms of their Creator, they want to know what lies ahead. And for every such individual, there is some Bible teacher ready with new proofs of how near the end is or of exactly when and how it will occur.

Pitfalls of prognostications

Someday someone might hit the right date. But in the meantime, millions of Christians are falling into pitfalls associated with a preoccupation with the nearness of the Second Coming.

Physical vs. spiritual protection. Christians have their priorities wrong by being more concerned with physical protection (from a great tribulation) than with spiritual protection from eternal death. The fear of suffering, not the fear of God and His ultimate eternal judgment, motivates them to be active in religion. Having a stockpile of staples, alternate sources of energy, land for growing food, etc. may prolong one's comfort for a

few months or years in this life, but it is useless in eternity.

"Signs" vs. the gospel. Preaching the "signs" of the end can replace the preaching of the gospel of eternal salvation. For many, gloom and doom have become their gospel. The whole focus of their conversations and periodicals is what is wrong with our country and our world. These people are so preoccupied with the problems that they have little time or energy to preach the ultimate solution: salvation through Jesus Christ and the eradication of sin from our lives through the power of God's Spirit.

Biased perception. Preoccupation with the end of the world can lead to a biased perception of the real world. People so oriented see in history and in contemporary life only what fits their idea of what the end times will be. They see evidence of things getting increasingly worse, ignoring evidence of advancements in various areas of life. Those who see only one side of what's going on in the world become a laughingstock to those who see another side to the story.

Nationalized gospel and

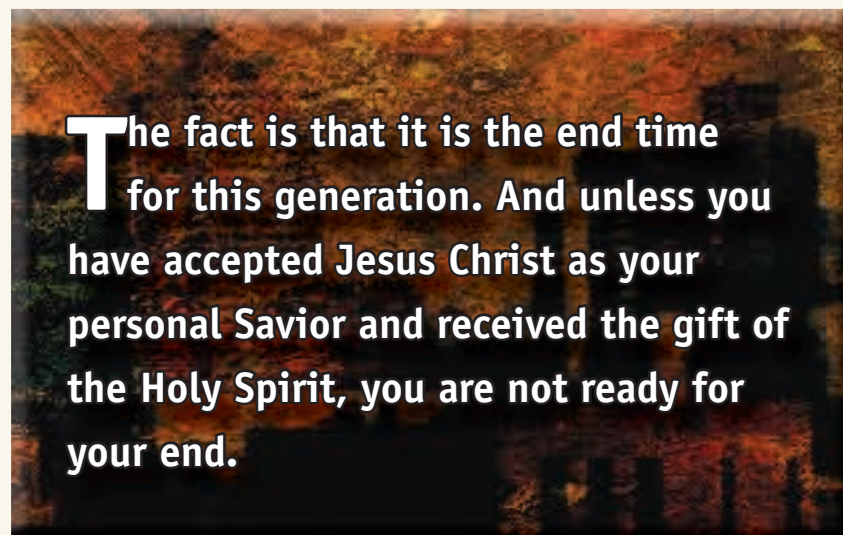
prophecy. Some Americans in particular tend to nationalize the gospel and prophecy, to see the fate of America as the fate of the world. In reality, the end of the U.S. or Canada could come without the end of the world. History reveals that nation after nation, civilization after civilization, have decayed and crumbled. Given enough time, ours will undoubtedly do the same. But to equate the demise of America with the end of the world is a presumptuous leap of logic.

Disasters and judgment.

Some who proclaim gloom and doom tend to equate all disasters with the judgment of God. For sure, America deserves judgment. But to equate natural calamity anywhere with God's punishment belies the important part such happenings have always played in balancing creation. For example, powerful hurricanes wreak destruction in some areas, but they also suck tons of moisture and drop it as life-giving rain in other areas.

Fatalistic attitude. Those who believe the Second Coming is immediate often adopt a fatalistic attitude and fall prey to a siege mentality: "There's nothing to be done about the world's problems. Don't prepare for any future; just hole up and wait." Instead of working to solve problems, they say, "This is prophecy being fulfilled. The end is almost here; there's no need to do anything." By sitting on their hands when they should be actively involved, they fulfill their own prophecies and assure a worse world for their children.

Lifetime decisions. People make lifetime decisions based on the belief that the world will soon end. I have talked to people



facing old age without children or mates or resources because in their youth they believed the end was imminent then. Others have rushed into ill-advised marriages because they thought time was short.

Calculations. Preoccupation with the end inevitably leads to date-setting and other foolish end-time scenarios. All these have failed in the past. Those who espouse them are an embarrassment to God's church.

Can we know?

Some Bible passages are commonly believed to indicate that Christians, by observing signs of the times, can know when the end is near. However, some of these indicate that by that time, it will be too late, that the end will surprise all except those who are ready at all times!

Luke 21:27, 28 and Matthew 24:29, 30 picture cataclysmic events: "The sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory."

But by the time this sign appears, it may be too late for spiritual or physical preparations. As in the parable of the ten virgins, when the cry of the approaching bridegroom is heard, it is too late to buy oil for the lamp.

Other passages indicate that Christ will return without special sign, so that men will not be anticipating it:

"So you also be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Matthew 24:44).

"That day will close on

The frequent message of the Bible is "Always be ready, always be doing the work of the Master, because you don't know when He will return!"

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you unexpectedly like a trap" (Luke 21:34).

"No one knows about that day or hour . . ." (Mark 13:32).

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come" (Matthew 24:42).

If the prophetic scenarios commonly accepted by Christians are true (rebuilt temple, invasion of Israel by Russia, rapture of saints, Great Tribulation, etc.), there would be nothing unexpected about Jesus' return. But the frequent message of the Bible is "Always be ready, always be doing the work of the Master, because you don't know when He will return!"


Real message

Very possibly we do live in the last days. But how sad that all the gloom and doom, all the end-time prognostication, all the date-setting obscure the real message of Christianity. The fact is that it is the end time for this generation. All of us will die. You will die. And unless you have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and received the gift of the Holy Spirit, you are not

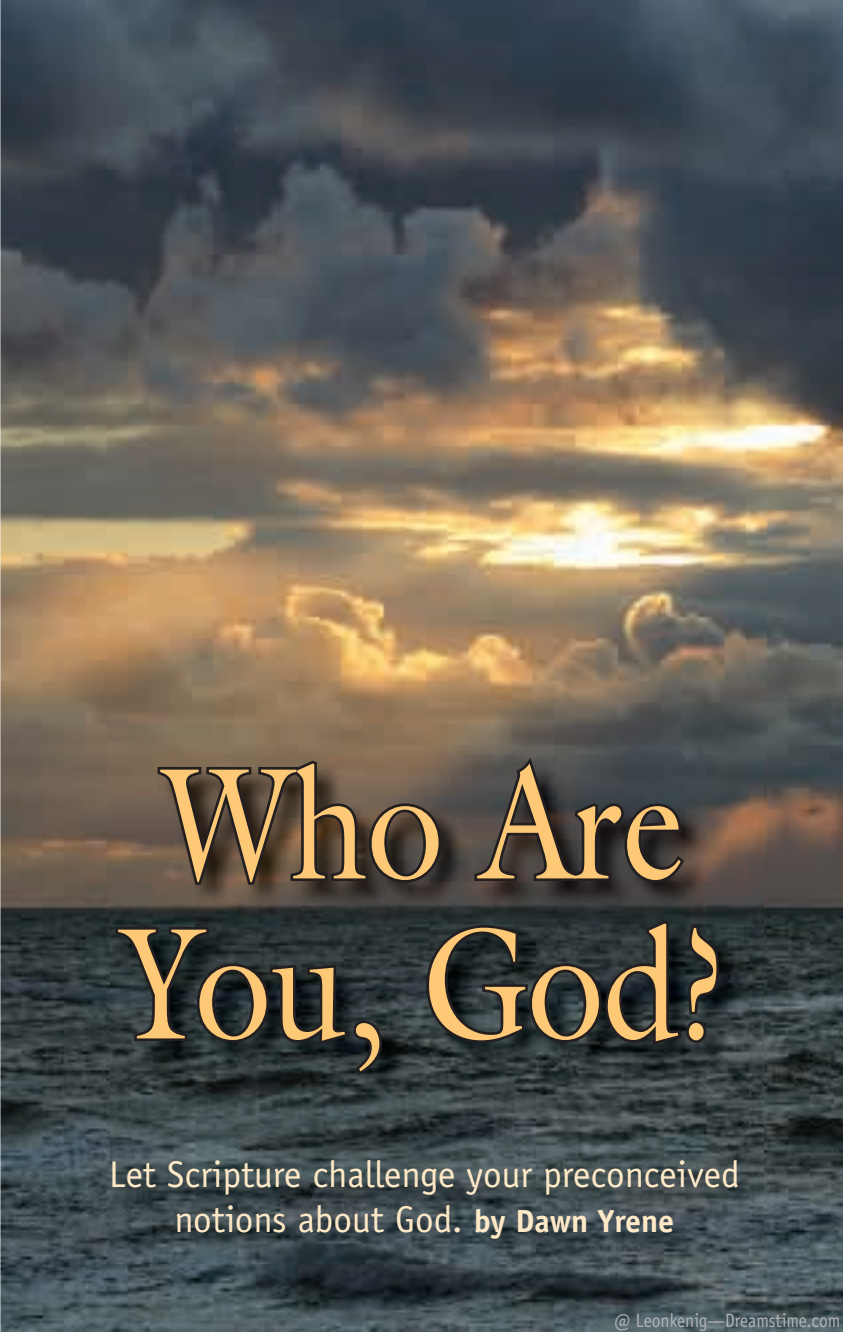
ready for your end.

On the other hand, if you have become a child of God through Jesus Christ, then you are already sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Whatever happens in the kingdoms of this earth, as long as you continue in Christ Jesus, your eternal future is secure.

Of course, what happens on this earth is of great consequence to us and our children in the physical realm. Whether or not freedoms and blessings continue in our homelands should be of great concern to Christians. But whatever the freedoms, whatever the blessings in this life, they will ultimately end. The only ultimate freedom, the only ultimate blessing, the only ultimate security, is in the eternal, spiritual realm: the kingdom of God. **BA**

Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*. Read the full-length version of this article at www.cog7.org/BA. 





Who Are You, God?

Let Scripture challenge your preconceived notions about God. by Dawn Yrene

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“Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them. . . . Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger” (Joshua 7:25, 26). Now there’s a verse I’ve never written on a three-by-five card.

What about you? Have you ever read the Bible and overlooked information that didn’t fit neatly into your personal theology? Is it possible you do it without even noticing?

We all enjoy meditating on life-giving scripture verses like

Philippians 4:6, 7 or Psalm 23. But we may nervously skim past the instructions God gave to the Israelites in Joshua or Judges to kill this or that group of people.

Even when I have not totally ignored uncomfortable verses, I have been tempted to de-emphasize them. While it is not wrong to emphasize passages that make sense or minister deeply to me, there is a danger in ignoring aspects of God’s character so that He fits my personal image of Him.

I was doing exactly that during

a dry spell in my walk with God. While reading the first chapter of Judges, I was disturbed at practices such as cutting off people’s thumbs and big toes, pressing captives into forced labor, and offering daughters to those who captured cities. Those things just seemed *bad*. I also couldn’t understand God. Often He blessed those who annihilated a city, but rebuked those who left survivors.

Instead of jumping over to the Psalms, I cried out, “Who are You, God?” As always, the Spirit was ready with an answer. I began to write down every piece of information the passage offered about God.

Some of it was basic, but I listed it anyway. I also wrote down information that did not fit my preconceived notions about God. As I wrote, my dry Old Testament time, which had seemed like an obligation, transformed into a bold experience – more like finding clues to a mystery than performing a daily ritual. I was getting to know God. He was still the same kind Physician who had healed my dog when I was eight, the same artistic Genius I could not doubt when I viewed creation, and the same patient Father who led and protected me even through my questioning and rebellious college years. But He was so much more!

Recently while in the book of 1 Chronicles, I skimmed over name after genealogical name, then tried asking, “Who are You, God?” Here’s a step-by-step example of how I studied 1 Chronicles 13 using that simple question.

Start with prayer. I express my desire to see God’s character,

what He loves, what He hates, how He relates to people, why He included these phrases in His Word, and anything else He desires to reveal to me.

Read the passage. After reading all of 1 Chronicles 13, I focused on verses 7-11. David and a group of men are moving the ark to the City of David. They're celebrating and praising God with all their might. An oxen stumbles; a man touches the ark to steady it. God becomes angry, and the man dies on the spot. David then gets angry at God. Out of fear, he leaves the ark with a local family.

List what you can observe about God. I include things I've heard before, as well as information I've never considered. Here is my list:

- God gets angry.
- He considers certain objects holy — specifically, the ark.
- He sometimes strikes people dead.

List what you can deduce about God. For instance, a passage may not say, "God loves _____," but God's actions may demonstrate His love. I'm careful not to assume things; I try to stick to facts. For this passage, I will add to my list:

- When God gives an instruction, He expects it to be followed precisely.
- Even when people are worshipping Him, He may choose to discipline those who ignore or disobey His laws.

Look up the corresponding verses listed in your Bible's cross-reference notes. Do they explain why God reacted a certain way? Do they clarify any uncertainties? In Numbers 4:15, for

example, God states, "They [the Kohathites] must not touch the holy things or they will die." Now I add to my list:

- God gave a clear warning before striking a man dead.
- God does not react in strange and unpredictable ways with people. He makes Himself clear, or at least He does in this case. (I will have to study more to see if He always gives clear instructions.)

Include what God does not do. God does not *do* anything in verse 11. But can His inaction teach me about His character? David is now angry at God and doesn't understand why God reacted as He did. What God *doesn't* do to David teaches me that He doesn't strike people dead or punish them just for being angry at Him. I can add that to my list. He also doesn't send an angel to explain to David why the man had to die. On my list I write:

- God doesn't always explain Himself.
- However, in order not to box in God, David did not ask for an explanation.

Allow His character qualities into your worship. After moving through a passage in this manner, I speak to God about what I've

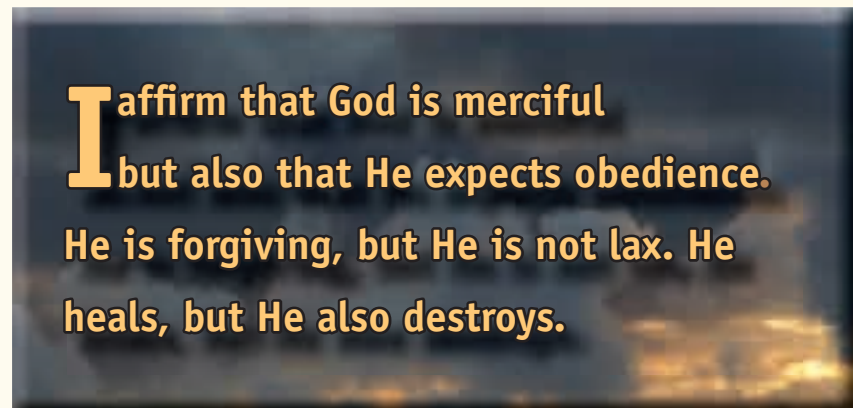
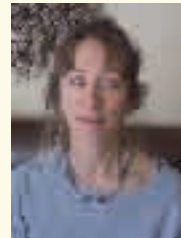
discovered. Is He to be feared as well as adored? Do I feel more thankful for the new covenant Jesus made through His blood? I affirm that God is merciful but also that He expects obedience. He is forgiving, but He is not lax. He heals, but He also destroys.

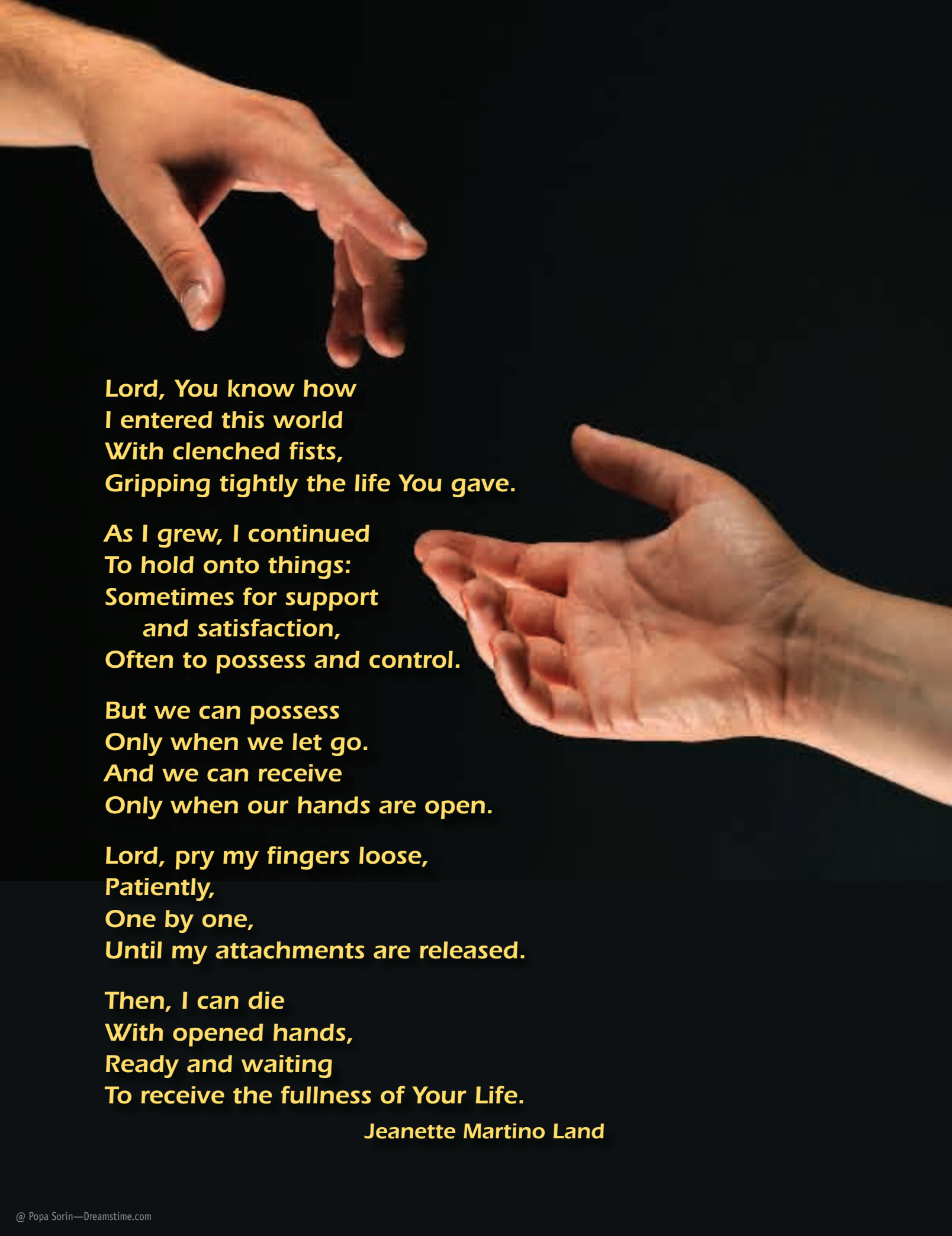
Seeing God

Even in the dustiest places in Scripture, we may find a hidden gem about the God who created all we see, gave freedom for all to choose, made Himself nothing so that all who would follow Him could become something, and placed it all within our grasp in His recorded Word.

As we see God for who He really is, we'll be more prepared to fit into His plans and live life His way, casting aside the old boxes into which we may have tried to squeeze Him. **BA**

The BA staff regrets to report that **Dawn Yrene** passed away since submitting this article. We offer our sympathies to her family and wish them God's comfort.





**Lord, You know how
I entered this world
With clenched fists,
Gripping tightly the life You gave.**

**As I grew, I continued
To hold onto things:
Sometimes for support
and satisfaction,
Often to possess and control.**

**But we can possess
Only when we let go.
And we can receive
Only when our hands are open.**

**Lord, pry my fingers loose,
Patiently,
One by one,
Until my attachments are released.**

**Then, I can die
With opened hands,
Ready and waiting
To receive the fullness of Your Life.**

Jeanette Martino Land

Did you know . . .

- that many magazines and newspapers have either ceased their print publications or are in a death struggle because of the growing popularity of electronic media?
- that the BA is one of the oldest religious periodicals in America, one of a few with no subscription price? We depend on the generosity of readers and the tithes-offerings of CoG7 members.



The Church of God (Seventh Day) and Bible Advocate Press weathered the first year of this economic storm well. The past few months, however, have brought declines in our tithe and offering support. We hope the content of this issue inspires you to join other faithful contributors in providing for the financial needs of this magazine. Thank you!



LifeSpring School of Ministry

Larry Marrs, Director

Training for Church of God (Seventh Day) ministries is taking on new and ambitious challenges, insuring greater preparation of persons to meet the tough challenges of ministering in a culture characterized by severe brokenness and rapid moral decline.

The challenges

- becoming much more purposeful in developing the entire person (spiritually, emotionally, socially, mentally) for ministry
- incorporating mentoring and discipleship for character-building, spiritual development, and practical skills development
- seeking out and training a new generation of highly effective instructors and other personnel
- developing funding sources during difficult economic times

What's been done

- questionnaires sent to ministry leaders across the U.S. and Canada, bringing together a collective wisdom on training
- student body development (approximately 180 have declared for the diploma of pastoral ministry program)





Administrative Assistant Makayla Schlenker

- instructors specializing in curricular areas to increase student outcomes
- consolidation of classrooms to facilitate instruction and supervision, as well as cost effectiveness
- formation of a task force to formulate proposals for establishing a college with a vital difference, focusing on the rabbinic model of discipleship Christ used

What's needed

- all of us crying out to God for His vision and provision for ministries training in CoG7
- development of needed programs and personnel to meet the challenges (previous page)
- financial commitments to match the God-sized jobs that face us as we respond to His direction

Will you seek God as to your role in this process?
Thank you!

Southern Cal's SWORD Camp

Truth be told, there was skepticism about the number of young adults who might attend the first Young Adult (SWORD) Camp in Southern California — until a whopping 18 campers came from Nevada



to join their California friends. This August 20-23, 2009, event was not just another camp; God's grace fell upon disillusioned hearts at Cedar Falls. Our campers went home with the spiritual and social experience they came for.

The camp could not have been so successful had it not been for the inspiring and motivating workshops brilliantly delivered to a group of eager minds by Hiram Esparza Plata, Raul Lopez Espinoza, Heber Vega, and Larry Zaragoza.

The outcome was the revival of a church group who may appear non-existent but who have a promising future. These 50 or more young adults want to be on fire for the Lord, and the Holy Spirit was ever so present with a new flame to make that happen.



Quarterly Gathering and Super Sabbath

More than 300 folks from Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas met in Albuquerque on September 12 for a strong day of worship, learning, and fellowship. Five weeks later, most of the Albuquerque church came north for an October 17 Super Sabbath in Denver. Pastor Troy Gedack (Colorado Springs) gave the morning sermon to a crowd of about 300, and the afternoon message was given by Raul Lopez Espinoza of Mexico.

MessageWeek

MessageWeek Ministries, based in Western Australia, has recently produced three short, broadcast-quality film adverts that may be used with your local outreach projects. Thirty seconds in duration, they are in a variety of media formats ideal for local television.

Producer John Klassek explains that his work for twelve years has involved the production of some 385 gospel films that have streamed through the



John Klassek with his wife, Rebecca

in local television. The two most recent scripts, *No Accident* and *The Rest of God*, were written by CoG7 Missions Director William Hicks.

We invite you to make use of these gospel films. Explore how you can do this at www.message7.org.

Generosity Checklist for 2009

Another year will soon become history, so it's time to reflect on your 2009 goals. What have you done to advance His story?

- () reviewed your charitable giving record
- () made a major gift you planned
- () recently written or updated your will and included a portion of your estate to support gospel work

The Office of Planned Giving of the Church of God (Seventh Day) stands by to assist you. Write to P. O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233 or to planned-giving@cog7.org.

Recent Deaths

With sorrow but not without hope, we report the death of **Pastor John Martinez** of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. After military service in which he earned many medals of honor, John heard the gospel call and spent his last 25 years in the service of the Lord. He is survived by his wife, Pat, four children, and twelve grandchildren. To read John's testimony



John Martinez

about coming to Christ and Christian ministry after many years as a self-described "monster" in the military, visit *BA Online* (www.cog7.org/BA).

Lay Pastor Mario De Leon of the Stamford, Connecticut, congregation, passed away on October 15. Preceded in death this past May by his wife, Ruth, he is survived by three children — Jairon, Mario Jr., and Karina.

Music for Missions

Admirers of singing evangelists John and Katherine Kiesz will be glad to know that their musical albums are now available on CD. For one or both of the CD's, write Missions Ministries, P. O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233, or call 303-452-7973 with a credit card handy. Suggested donation: \$20 for one CD; \$35 for both. All proceeds go to support CoG7's Missions Abroad.

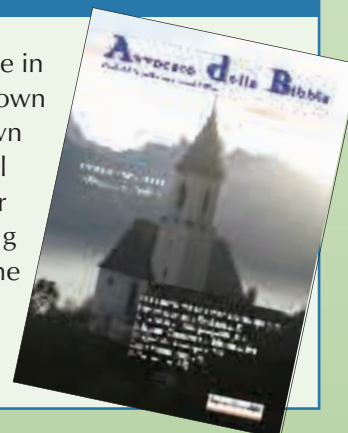
New Adult Lessons

The Beatitudes is the title for a new series of Bible Studies for Adults quarterly. These lessons open up a deeper understanding of the ten short verses in Matthew 5:3-12, the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. Each lesson causes students to search their own hearts and relationships with the Lord and with one another.

Helpful teacher's guides are available for these studies. The price for the adult student book is \$3.25, and the Teacher's Guide is \$5. Order from Bible Advocate Press, P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233; 303-452-7973; or bap.orders@cog7.org.

Italian BA

Our sister conference in Italy now publishes its own version of the BA, shown here. The magazine will be published every four months; the first printing was 500 copies. Visit the Church's site at www.chiesadidio.org.





XXII Hispanic Women's Retreat Comes to San Francisco

San Francisco felt the presence of 300+ sisters in Christ September 4-9, 2009. Ladies from Mexico, Maryland, Chicago, Texas, Minnesota, and elsewhere gathered to celebrate the theme "Remember Me" (1 Samuel 1:11). Guest speakers Eva Delgado, Esther Alemán, and Athena Solis-Portillo gave powerful messages that made our women reflect on how they want to be remembered.

Retreat founder Sylvia Corral has coordinated these annual Hispanic women's events for 22 years. This year she turned over her position to Sister Rosie Davila of Corpus Christi, Texas. Sister Corral explained, "I am not leaving; I'll just be a co-pilot from now on." She encouraged the women to support Rosie as they have her, and she thanked God

and them for allowing her to serve.

Grace Sanchez, new director of North American Women's Ministries, visited with the ladies and answered their questions.

The sisters from El Paso, Texas, unveiled their new ministry, OCEA (Operation Christ in Action). Its volunteer staff includes a psychologist, doctor, social worker, and several teachers. OCEA's mission is to help cancer patients and women who have suffered domestic violence. It even alerts young women on identifying abusive behavior in their boyfriends before they marry. Questions about this ministry may be directed to Sister Minerva Lopez at minervalopez25@yahoo.com.mx.

Next year's retreat will be September 3-6 in Baltimore, Maryland. Many have already registered, so don't be left out! Call Edith Valle at 410-808-9240 or Roxana Murillo at 301-498-1850 for more information.

Benefits of BA Online

Now you can download each issue of the BA in PDF format with the click of a mouse. Just visit www.cog7.org/BA and click on the latest PDF or on the cover of any of the past eight issues.

Think of the benefits of going online only: You can download and read the latest issue before the print version arrives in regular mail, and the BAP saves postage.

If you choose to read the online PDF of the BA each issue, please contact bap.orders@cog7.org so we can adjust the mailing list accordingly. Or contact bibleadvocate@cog7.org for more information.

CoG7 Author

Dorothy Nimchuk came by her writing skills naturally. Her dad, Elder Archie Stiede, served as editor of the *Bible Advocate* in the 1960's. Dorothy, who serves on the editorial staff of *Afterglow*, recently completed her book *Larry and the Latchkey Kid*. To check out her other books and perhaps order a copy, contact Dorothy at P. O. Box 1136, Fort Qu'Appelle, SK, Canada S0G 1S0; 306-332-4108; nicnim@sasktel.net.

Dorothy and her husband, Elder Nick Nimchuk, celebrate their golden wedding anniversary this month in their Saskatchewan home.

What's Coming Up?

SW District SWORD Rally: "Consuming Fire"

December 4-5 at "The Way" CoG7, Willis, TX
 Speakers: Allen Gray, Aaron Orr, John Njogu
 Music by San Antonio Heart of Worship Church
 Volleyball/basketball tournaments Saturday night
 Contact Dan/Jacqui Melgoza (swdsword@yahoo.com; 210-723-5950) or Aaron/Sonya Orr (christisnear@hotmail.com; 713-203-2048)

Phoenix, AZ, Super Sabbath, with IMC President Ramon Ruiz; activities for kids and youth

December 19, 9:45 a.m. - 6.00 p.m.

6750 North 7th Ave. - two blocks south of Glendale, in Phoenix

Annual G. C. Ministries Directors and District Superintendents Meeting in Denver: January 10-12, 2010

Annual Lord's Supper Service in each congregation is scheduled for Sunday evening, March 23, 2010



SHINE, our CoG7 Medical-Dental Mission team, is slated for service in Jamaica, March 30 - April 7, 2010. For more information on this trip, please visit <http://cog7shine.org> and www.cog7.org/BA. Two members of the '09 mission to Honduras are shown here serving a young mother and her infant daughter. [.org](http://www.cog7.org)

STATEMENT

Of the ownership, management, and circulation (required by the Act of Congress of August 12, 1970; Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code) of the BIBLE ADVOCATE, published eight times per year at Broomfield, Colorado for September 30, 2009.

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If the *Bible Advocate* has blessed you and if you could give \$60 or more per year (\$5 per month) so the BA can bless others, then we invite you to join Editor's Circle for 2010. Your support will help us reach new BA readers with the grace and truth of Christ.

To join Editor's Circle, please return this coupon or call 303-452-7973.



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A Therapeutic Community

We often speak of the church's mission in terms of the Great Commission: Preach the gospel to every creature. Recently a new dimension has been reached. We now understand the church to have an "integral mission" that includes preaching, edification, worship, and service — everything within the communion of Christ's body. We must not set aside the therapeutic dimension in the mission of the saints.

Healing the sick was a fundamental part of Jesus' ministry. The apostles and the first century church continued this therapeutic work (Acts 5:16; 8:7).

The sick are part of the human condition even among the redeemed. We are already saved from sin's guilt, but we have not yet been completely transformed from its effect. Thus it is necessary to develop the therapeutic aspect of the pastoral calling of the church.

We do not attempt to promote healing services or "miracle nights" that try to anesthetize hearers so they do not feel pain. Nor do we promote "emotional amnesia," inviting believers to forget their problems through ecstatic worship. The emotional



and temporal quickly end, and the believer returns to his reality.

What can the church do for the emotional and physical health of believers?

Eliminate unnecessary suffering at its source. Many believers suffer from misguided ambition, personal negligence, and lack of discipline in their personal lives through problems of their own making. This suffering, for the most part, makes us sick and weak; it is *not* suffering related directly to the gospel. Just the work of eliminating unnecessary suffering is something therapeutic (1 Peter 4:15, 16).

Recognize that Christian faith is therapeutic by nature. Faith has implications both for our future and for the present. "Your faith has made you well" (Matthew 9:22) continues to have the same effect in our time. It is not a suggestion; it is God's reality at work in us spiritually that positively affects all our being.

Promote a personal encounter with the Father. An inappropriate image of God can cause us anxiety and fear. Frequently we see God as someone thirsty for revenge, a merciless judge who confronts our sins with His gaze. But more than 170 New Testament texts speak of God as Father (Romans 8:15 and others), and this image surpasses all others. Though we cannot deny the reality of judgment, we must take refuge in God as our loving Father.

Come together as a church family. With seven billion people in the world, humans still feel lonelier than ever. The technology that connects the cyber world paradoxically disconnects us from others. Broken families and loneliness afflicts multitudes of people. Jesus refers to the believers as the real family (see Mark 3:33-35).

Promote confession of sin. Often we conduct ourselves erroneously regarding sin. We try to hide it, generating anguish and fear. This makes us sick and worsens our feelings of guilt. The Bible recommends confession (James 5:16; 1 John 1:9). The church, then, has the great privilege of promoting a God who not only saves us but also heals us (Psalm 103:3).

— Ramon Ruiz Garza
IMC President



Benefits of Prophecy

Old Testament instructions were very explicit when it came to men who claimed to be prophets of the Lord:

But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death." You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?" If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him (Deuteronomy 18:20-22, NIV).

In the twenty-first century, one might wish that God's standards for prophets might also carry over to men who now interpret those prophecies. Speaking of His second coming, Jesus told His followers, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come" (Mark 13:32, 33, NIV). Unfortunately this has not discouraged many from predicting with amazing self-certainty the time our Lord said no one knows!

Gilbert Cranmer, one of our denomination's founders, suffered the Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844, because he, like thousands of others, believed William Miller's claim that he had figured out Bible prophecy and knew exactly when Christ would return. But William Miller was not the last to claim perfect understanding of the Bible's prophecies concerning the future. In their article "Why Is It Wrong When Christians Predict When Christ Will Return to Earth?" Drs. John Ankerburg and John Weldon note the following modern false interpreters of end-time prophecies: Edgar Whisenant, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in*

1988; D. A. Miller, *Watch and Be Ready! 1992 Millions Disappear*; Harold Camping, *1994?*; and Lester Sumrall, *I Predict 2000*.

Can you imagine how many folks may have become disillusioned with Christ as these dates came and went? I'm guessing that false teachers of Bible prophecies might be more restrained if the Old Testament rules for prophets applied.

How should God's people regard the futuristic prophecies of God's Word? Is there value in studying them? Yes. Let me suggest three benefits.

First, they help confirm that the Bible is God's Word. Because of the requirements noted earlier, true prophets of God often predicted near-future events so that, when their predictions came true, people would know that the person was a true prophet of God and that his message concerning the present could be trusted. Because of biblical prophecies that have since proved accurate, we too may have confidence that, whether foretelling or forthtelling, the words of the biblical prophets are God's Word.

Second, biblical predictions encourage our belief that God is sovereign over the affairs of men. Fulfilled predictions prove that God indeed can set up nations and take them down, use powerful men to accomplish His purposes, and tell us in advance exactly what is going to happen.

Finally, biblical predictions about events still future motivate us to stay vigilant and committed in our faith. Jesus, who commanded, "Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come" (Mark 13:33, NIV), also instructed, "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door" (vv. 28, 29, NIV).

— Loren Stacy
G. C. Board Chairman

SPRING VALE ACADEMY

New Look

SVA's energy team warms classrooms, lowers bills

Owosso, Michigan: New exterior insulation with a durable stucco finish has been applied to classrooms and gymnasium at Spring Vale, thanks to the Academy's energy team. The completed project improves comfort for students and teachers in winters ahead, while reducing heating costs for the life of the building.

- Contact SVA's energy team about future projects: Ken Riggs (1mobileken@gmail.com)
- Contact SVA about student enrollment for second semester, beginning January 12. Call 989-725-2391 or visit www.springvale.us.

