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BA
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Kingdom and Glory



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Kingdom and Glory

Welcome to the final months and days of 2014 — another not very good year, according to many. On page 3 of this year's first BA, we wrote: "There's a lot more going on in the world, both bad and good, than most people know about. . . . God is right now fulfilling His Word to bless all families of the earth through Christ and the gospel of His present and future kingdom." Agree?

Starting back in 1998, we've dedicated the final BA each year to prophecy-related topics and what the future holds. Here's what you can expect in this issue:

- A potent intro to *glory* in the Bible, by Whaid Rose (p. 4). You should hear him preach it, too!
 - A reflection by Robert Coulter on CoG7's original touchstone (p. 8). If you ever feel torn between longing for Christ's return (because of the rescue it brings) and dreading that great day of the Lord (because of the turmoil it threatens), read this!
 - Paulo Coelho's update on the signs of the Second Coming (p. 16). Evidence for Jesus' return is even more compelling in the last century than it was in the first.
 - David Kidd's simple and reassuring take on the message and meaning of Nahum the prophet (p. 18). Don't let the Minors be a thicket of Old Testament text you never explore!
 - Kim Papaionnou's well-crafted piece on "not hell," and the editor's effort on "not heaven" (pp. 10-14). What you read here will not be a carbon copy of what you hear from most other sources.
- If these topics don't warm you up, we have others that dive into themes of Thanksgiving (p. 22), extreme ardor (p. 15), and giving to mendicants (p. 20).

This is BA's seventeenth consecutive year of ending with prophecy. May it find readers more skilled in the Scriptures and more confident of eternal divine favor upon those who embrace Christ for all He's worth. If grasping God's kingdom glory as both present now and still future gives you a spiritual headache, take these two texts and e-mail me in the morning:

"God . . . calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Thessalonians 2:12). "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Yours is the kingdom and . . . the glory forever" (Matthew 6:10, 13).

— Calvin Burrell



The Glory of God

This word trumps our best thoughts of divine worth and royal radiance.
by Whaid Rose

The word *glory* is common in Christian circles. When worship leaders invite the congregation to “give God the glory,” they substitute *glory* for *praise*. *Glory* can be a synonym for *boast*: “God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14). Theologians use a form of this word in outlining the three aspects of salvation: justification (deliverance from sin’s penalty); sanctification (deliverance from sin’s practice); and *glorification* (deliverance from sin’s very presence). Here, *glory* has a futuristic meaning. Heaven, for many, is a place called *glory*.

Innocent as they may be, these usages of *glory* can obscure the word's true meaning. More than a worship leader's cliché, more than a future hope, the glory of God is a present and wonderful reality!

Defining *glory*

In Scripture, God is the God of glory (Psalm 29:2), the king of glory (24:10), and the Father of glory (Ephesians 1:17). He has set His glory above the heavens (Psalm 8:1); His glory fills the whole earth (Isaiah 6:3); and to Him belongs "the glory forever" (Matthew 6:13).

Despite these texts, we're still left without a concise definition. So let's look at the words translated "glory" in Scripture.

The first is *ka-bode*, a Hebrew word meaning "heavy, to make weighty." As gold's value is determined by weight, so *glory* speaks of richness and abundance — God's inestimable value. Paul speaks of "an exceeding . . . weight of glory" that far outweighs our present trials (2 Corinthians 4:17). When news of Israel's defeat and the ark's capture by the Philistines sent Phineas' wife into labor, she named her son Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" (1 Samuel 4:21). The prefix *ik* here signifies the opposite of *ka-bode*. The loss of the ark — the very presence of God — meant the absence of any weight of glory.

The second word is *doxa* (Greek). It denotes an estimate about the value of something or someone. How much is God worth? *Doxa* points to His inestimable value, the absolute perfection and majesty of His

character. In Christian liturgy the word *doxology* refers to the act of ascribing worth and value to God, usually expressed in hymns composed for this purpose.

No more than we can define God, none of us can fully define His glory. But parsing "glory words" gives helpful hints. Combining *ka-bode* and *doxa*, we get *radiance, splendor, beauty, unsurpassed worth*. The glory of God is the perfection and excellence of His divine nature. His glory is His very essence.

Glory is also defined in relation to light that emanates from God's being: "God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see" (1 Timothy 6:15, 16, NIV). We cannot see Him because of the brightness and radiance of this light, a reflection of His divine attribute called "glory." When Moses stepped out of God's presence, his face shone with such radiance that the people were afraid to look upon him (Exodus 34:29, 30). This explains the existence of light prior to the creation of sun, moon, and stars on day four of creation. And it explains the light in the coming New Jerusa-

lem: "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp" (Revelation 21:23, NIV).

The psalmist gets this: "He wraps himself in light as with a garment" (Psalm 104:2, NIV), and so does James: "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17, NIV). The hymn writer helps us sing it:

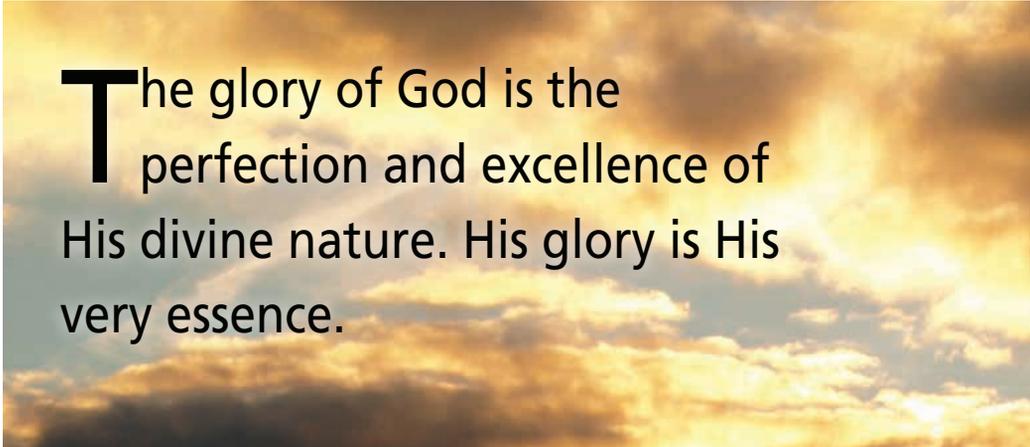
Immortal, invisible, God
only wise,
In light inaccessible hid
from our eyes.

The fourth stanza is classic:

Great Father of Glory, pure
Father of Light
Thine angels adore Thee, all
veiling their sight;
All laud we would render, O
help us to see:
'Tis only the splendor of
light hideth Thee.¹
How awesome is our God!

Guiding principles

My thoughts on glory are shaped by what I've learned over the years from others who've delved deeply into this topic.



The glory of God is the perfection and excellence of His divine nature. His glory is His very essence.

Here are a few principles that have radically reshaped my view of God and what it means to love and serve Him.

First, God's glory is His greatest passion, and everything He's ever done is for His own glory. Consider God's two most important mighty acts: creation and redemption. Revelation 4:11 says we were created for His glory, and Jesus understood that His death was for the same purpose (John 17:1).

Second, the whole earth is filled with God's glory (Isaiah 6:3). The hymn writer wisely notes that many are blind to this truth: "Holy, Holy, Holy! Tho' the darkness hide Thee,/Tho' the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see. . . ."2 But it's true nonetheless. A day is coming when the whole earth will be filled with "the knowledge of the glory of the Lord" (Habakkuk 2:14), but even now, His glory fills heaven and earth!

Third, God chooses to share His glory with us. Some find this doubtful, saying that this divine essence isn't man's to share. But 1 Corinthians 15:40, 41 teaches that there are different levels of glory. And we read in Psalm 8 that God crowned man with glory at creation. This glory is

the seal of the "Imago Dei," the reason sin is defined as falling short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). A day is coming when the glory lost through sin will be fully restored. Meanwhile, God wants to restore it gradually — the point of the first line of John Sammis' well-known song: "When we walk with the Lord/In the light of His Word,/What a glory He sheds on our way!"3

But God doesn't waste glory. He sheds it on our way for a reason: that we might put it (Him) on display. That is the purpose of the Christian life. Each of us is a work of art (*poema* in Greek, Ephesians 2:10), a masterpiece, created for the sole purpose of reflecting His glory to a watching world. Like the moon that has no light of its own but reflects the light of the sun, we become reflectors of God's light, which shines from the face of His Son Jesus. Paul pens it beautifully: "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). Makes sense, for Jesus is the "brightness of [God's] glory" (Hebrews 1:3).

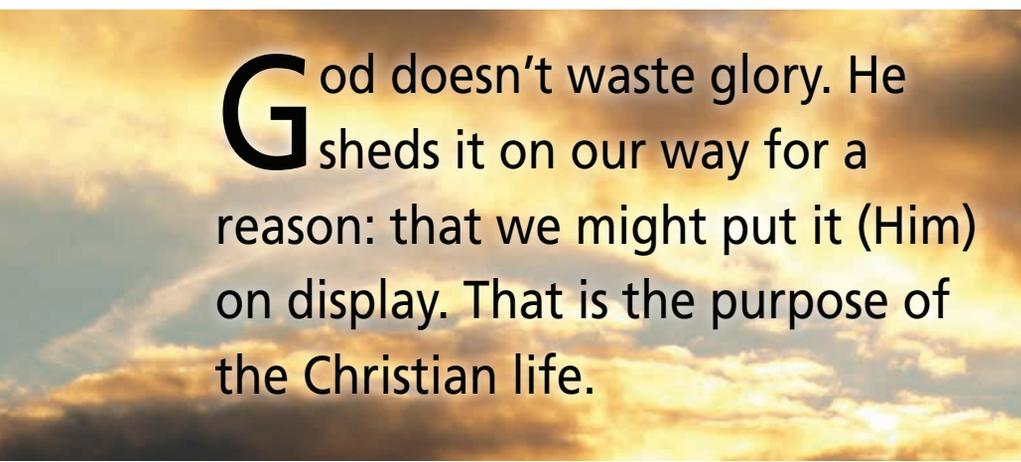
The human dilemma can be

narrowed down to a tension between God's need to be glorified and man's need to be satisfied. To fellow strugglers, John Piper offers good news: "In Christ, God's need to be glorified, and man's need to be satisfied, are no longer at odds. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him, and we are most satisfied in Him when He is most glorified in us."

What matters most

Glory is about transformation — from one level of glory to the next. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul asserts that the glory of the old covenant pales in comparison to that of the new because of the source of its light: Jesus. Paul concludes with this beautiful statement: "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

So when all is said and done, only one thing matters: the glory of God. It is God's greatest passion, man's "chief end," and the power at work in us. "To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:21). **BA**



God doesn't waste glory. He sheds it on our way for a reason: that we might put it (Him) on display. That is the purpose of the Christian life.

Whaid Rose, president of the General Conference, lives in Denver, CO, with his wife, Marjolene.



Notes

1. *hymnal.net*
2. *Worship in Song*
3. *Ibid.*

Questions & Answers



In Revelation 13:16-18, is John warning against taking microchips into our hand or body? Is that the mark of the beast?

The theme of worship is the background of Revelation 13. Worship is specifically mentioned five times and directed to both the dragon and the beast. The two-horned beast of verse 11ff uses different methods to enforce worship of the first beast: deceive people with impressive miracles, confer death upon the non-compliant, and limit buying and selling to those who would comply.

Many nations in history, including Babylon (Daniel 3), have issued decrees on worship. Financial pressure and the death penalty have often been used for leverage. Worship has not been part of modern talk about microchips for business transactions. If they are used, microchips will not likely be the only option. Business tries to increase the ways to pay a bill, not make it harder. Microchips fit the same category as Social Security cards and bar codes. Both had their turn to be suspects as mark of the beast.

— Elder John Lemley

Given the nature of Revelation, I tend to interpret this entire passage symbolically, rather than literally. The symbol was a powerful one for John's readers, who would likely think of *phylacteries* worn on Jewish hands and foreheads. These small boxes marked a people that belonged to the one true God and who were committed to worshipping and obeying Him alone. When John speaks of a mark on the forehead or hand that shows one's belonging to the beast, he is referring, not to a literal mark but to an allegiance, a loyalty, a belief system. He is referring to those who have not committed themselves exclusively to God and the Lamb.

Those who insist most strenuously that the "mark of the beast" be taken literally usually insist that "the beast" be interpreted as a smooth-talking, charismatic, human politician! But despite

many claims to take the text of Revelation literally, everyone who interprets the book is compelled to interpret its symbols symbolically. As New Testament scholar Craig Koester says, "The question is not whether to read the text symbolically, but *how* to read its symbolism" (*italics his*).¹ It is far more consistent to interpret the mark as symbolic along with the beast than it is to arbitrarily decide that the beast is a symbol but the mark is not.

Thus, I think it wise to consider the mark of the beast symbolic of a socio-economic system in which false worship is connected to commerce. Such a situation was familiar to the first readers of Revelation. Koester explains:

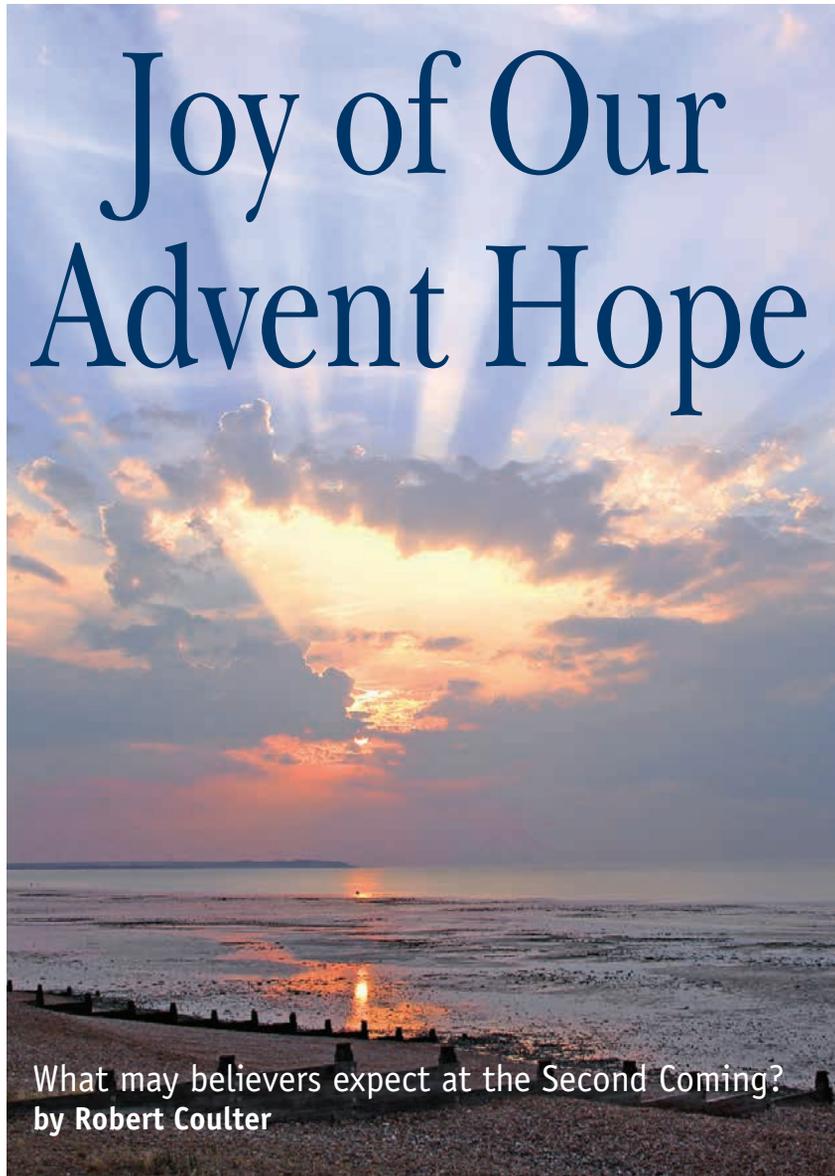
Those who sought to advance themselves socially or economically would have wanted to participate in the local trade guilds, although the social life of these guilds often included rituals and meals in honor of a pagan deity. Business contracts typically went to those who were on good terms with Roman authorities, including those who were involved in the deaths of Christians . . . As sales were made, people used coins that bore the images of Rome's gods and emperors. Thus each transaction . . . was a reminder that people were advancing themselves economically by relying on political powers that did not recognize the true God.²

Such systems exist in modern cultures to varying degrees. However, a microchip in itself hardly qualifies as a link between religion and commerce. Those who desire to avoid the mark of the beast need not fret over technological advances. Rather, they should focus on what is explicitly emphasized in Revelation: unabashed worship and unwavering loyalty to God and the Lamb in the face of a sinful culture that pressures us to worship and serve at the altars of power, money, pleasure, and exploitation.

— Elder Israel Steinmetz

1. Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 134.
2. *Ibid.*, 131-32.

Joy of Our Advent Hope



What may believers expect at the Second Coming?
by Robert Coulter

As a teenager in the 1940s, I attended a Salem branch of the Church of God (Seventh Day). At that time the Church was preaching the imminent return of Jesus and the third angel's message as a warning of impending judgment upon worshippers of the beast (Revelation 14:9, 10).

Other elements of this teaching were that the Antichrist was preparing to enforce the "mark of the beast" upon the Christian world (13:11-16). Nations of the north were preparing to descend

upon Palestine to destroy the Jews (Ezekiel 38). But the United States and her European allies would go to Israel's defense, leading to the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:16). In the midst of that war, Jesus would descend to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14) as the seventh plague of great hailstones fell (Revelation 16:21).

The Church's presentation of gruesome events at Jesus' return scared me. On the other hand, I observed that New Testament writers anticipated His second

advent with joy. Paul thought Jesus might return in his lifetime (1 Corinthians 15:51) and expected to receive a crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8). Peter wrote of receiving an inheritance that never spoils or fades (1 Peter 1:4).

Awesome and spectacular

We rejoice in Jesus' personal promise to return: "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back . . ." (John 14:3). That promise was repeated when Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1:11). The Holy Spirit within us guarantees Christ's return and the receiving of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13, 14).

The return of Jesus will be a spectacular display of God's power and glory! Every saint who ever lived will witness the awesome sights and sounds announcing it: "For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man . . . They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory," accompanied by a loud command, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet call of God (Matthew 24:27, 30, 31).

Paul taught that the saints living at Jesus' coming will have no advantage over saints resting in the grave. The dead will be raised in time to be awed by the sights and sounds of His coming. The living and resurrected saints will be caught up together to meet the Lord and to dwell with Him eternally (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). These words provide comfort, not fear, to God's people.

The hope of the saints of all ages will be realized when Jesus

comes in resurrection power. Paul wrote that Christ was the first to be raised from death to immortality and that the saints will follow: “so in Christ all will be made alive. . . . each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him” (1 Corinthians 15:20, 22, 23).

Paul happily referred to the vindication of saints at Jesus’ coming as “the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed” (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

Jesus’ return ushers in the timeless kingdom of God, ending the ravages of sin and death: “Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God . . . For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Corinthians 15:24, 25). The last enemy is death. This transfer of authority introduces the new heaven and earth, signifying that ageless kingdom when “the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. . . . There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:1-4).

Maintaining hope

Though Jesus’ return will be all joy for the faithful, we should expect more turbulence in the world between now and that final event. Many of us are accustomed to an affluent, peace-loving, and tolerant – even permissive – society where we enjoy practicing our faith without fear. But that is changing. Christians are no longer respected for their moral values. As they speak out

on issues like homosexuality and abortion, they are looked upon as intolerant radicals. The persecution and martyrdom of believers in many places around the world could become common to our society before long.

We must not become disillusioned by the threat of being tried for our faith. Jesus advised us that the world hates, persecutes, and kills (Matthew 24:9; John 15:18, 19). “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body,” He counseled, “Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

Our commitment of faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ must be more than lip service. Like the centuries-old community of Christians in Mosul, Iraq, who refused to compromise or convert to Islam but fled their homes and possessions under the threat of death, we must be completely committed to the Lord’s work!

Our hope is not in this godless world, in possessions or position, but in Jesus. He told Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25, 26). Jesus counseled His disciples not to worry about the necessities of

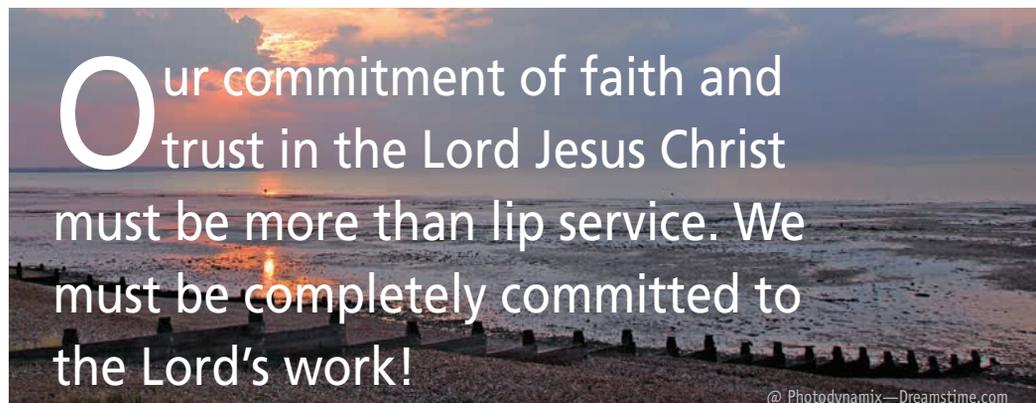
life. God knows our needs and will provide (Matthew 6:25-33).

The author of Hebrews stated Jesus’ promise and a proper response to it: “‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5, 6).

Paul’s joyful expectation of Jesus’ coming was not shaken by his impending martyrdom: “Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8).

Like Paul, we too may await Christ’s promised return with positive anticipation. Whatever trials come to Christians between now and then can be faced with confidence, without fear! **BA**

Robert Coulter, a CoG7 minister since 1955, lives with his wife, Ida, in Northglenn, CO. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



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Shedding Light on Outer Darkness

A fresh look at the language of hell.
by Kim Papaioannou

The topic of hell has held a strange fascination for Christians through the centuries. And while one hears less about it today, all ecclesial bodies attempt to give some answer to the tantalizing question of what will happen to the wicked in the Day of Judgment. The majority view has been that hell consists of everlasting, excruciating torment.

Against this, a small but vocal minority has held that such a teaching is incompatible with the loving and just character of God. Instead, they maintain that judgment will result in the destruction of sin and sinners and prepare the way for the new heavens and new earth, where there will be

no more pain, death, or suffering of any kind.

There are various judgment motifs, and each is important in its own respect. One that has played a key role has been the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This motif appears three times (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) and is assumed twice more (24:51; Luke 13:28). “Weeping and gnashing of teeth” appears in the above five “outer darkness” texts and twice on its own (Matthew 13:42, 50). These phrases have often been understood as reflecting the horrors of hell — the outer darkness being its dark and gloomy nature, while the weeping and gnashing of

teeth are the sorrow and pain of its torments.¹ But are such views correct?

This short study will explore these terms in their context. Properly understood, they point away from the supposed torments of hell into other more reasonable but equally sobering realities.

Exclusion

We first look at the outer darkness. In Matthew 22:13 the term concludes the parable of the wedding garment, and in Matthew 25:30 it concludes the parable of the talents. The phrase appears in Matthew 8:12 in the context of the healing of a centurion’s servant. In Matthew 24:51 the outer darkness is implied through the use of the Greek locative adverb *ekei* (“there”)² and concludes the parable of the evil servant.

Lastly, Luke 13:28 is part of the parable of the narrow gate. All true disciples should seek to enter this gate in order to enter the kingdom and feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Those who choose not to enter will be left outside, where (*ekei*) there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

So what is this mysterious outer darkness? A place of torment? A description of hell?

Note that all five texts discussed above appear in the context of a banquet. In Matthew 8:12 and Luke 13:28 the banquet is the heavenly feast where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are present. That a feast is in view is evidenced by the word *anaklithesontai*, or “recline” (banqueting meals in the ancient world were eaten while reclining)³, in Matthew 8:11 and Luke 13:29, and

by the mention of the *oikodespotes* in Luke 13:25. The master of the house closes the door so that no more guests may enter.⁴

In Matthew 22:13 a banquet is clearly stated, since the whole parable of the wedding garment takes place in the context of a wedding feast. In Matthew 25:30 (parable of the talents) a banquet is not mentioned specifically but is assumed. The rich man returns from his lengthy travel, calls his servants to account, and invites the faithful two to enter the “joy” of the master — clearly a celebration for his return.⁵ And in Matthew 24:46-51, the parable of the evil servant, again we have a master returning from a long trip, whereby a joyous celebration for his return would be the norm.

Banquets in ancient times, just like today, usually took place in the evening. In a time when there were few lights to lighten a dark night, an obvious contrast existed between a lighted banquet hall and the darkness outside. The phrase *outer darkness*, therefore, is descriptive: “the darkness which is outside [the banquet hall].” It is not language of torment but language of exclusion.

Sorrow and anger

Those who find themselves outside the banquet hall will experience weeping and gnashing of teeth. Is this a description of torment, or is something else in view?

The Greek for *weeping* (*klauthmos*) can refer to a range of emotions, like joy (LXX Genesis 45:2; 46:29) and eager anticipation (LXX Jeremiah 31:9). But the word refers mostly to sorrow (LXX Judges 21:2; 2 Samuel

13:36; Ezra 3:13; Isaiah 65:19). Nowhere is it used in relation to torments of any kind. The Greek for *gnashing of teeth* (*brugmos tōn odontōn*) consistently denotes anger (Acts 7:54; LXX Job 16:9; Psalm 35:16; 37:12; 112:10; Proverbs 19:12), never the pain of torment.

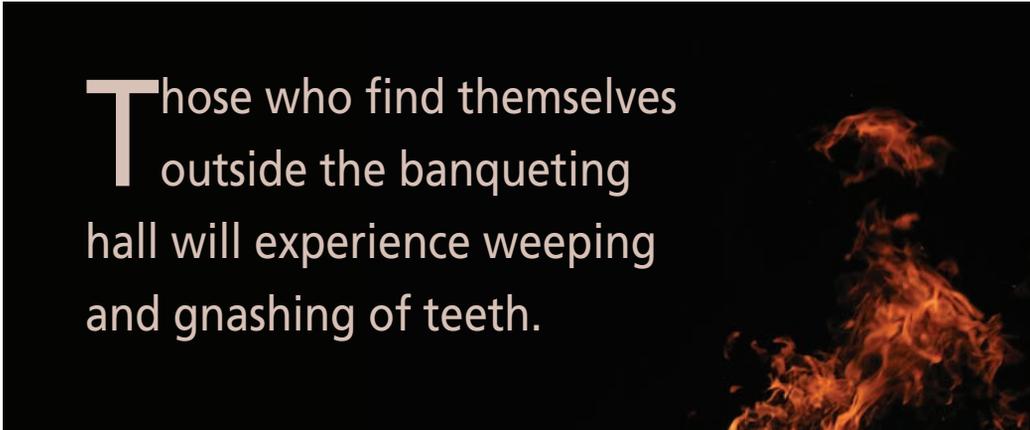
That the people excluded from a banquet could experience both these emotions is understandable. Sorrow is a natural reaction when a person realizes that something good has been lost. The same is true of anger. The context of the five passages discussed above evidences a pattern: namely, disaffection with the master. In the parable of the talents, the servant who refused to make use of his talent was already negatively predisposed toward his master. When questioned why he did not use his talent, he replied, “I knew you to be a hard man . . .” (Matthew 25:24). Not surprisingly, such negative feelings turned to anger when he saw the two worthy servants welcomed into the banquet, while he was thrown out.

In Matthew 8:12 and Luke 13:28 and the heavenly banquet, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, those who are welcomed are gentiles from the far corners of

the earth. Those excluded are Jews who have failed to believe in Jesus. They were the natural heirs of the kingdom, the “sons of the kingdom” (Matthew 8:12). But much to their chagrin, they find themselves excluded. Indeed, in Luke 13:24 they “strive to enter” the banquet consciously, maybe forcefully.⁶ Clearly they are not happy with the master’s decision to exclude them.

In Matthew 22:13 (parable of the wedding garment) the anger of the man excluded is again easy to understand. Some scholars suggest it was customary for a wedding host to oversee that guests had adequate attire.⁷ The man chooses not to avail himself of such service, indicating that he considers his own clothes of better quality. When the king confronts him and orders him to be thrown outside, the man naturally feels angry that the king has failed to appreciate the quality and beauty of his garments.

And in Matthew 24:45-51 (parable of the evil servant) the servant is clearly unhappy because the master has arrived unannounced and caught him mistreating his fellow servants and wasting possessions. Indeed the rationale behind the servant’s prodigal lifestyle was that the



Those who find themselves
outside the banquet
hall will experience weeping
and gnashing of teeth.

“master is delaying his coming” (v. 48). The sudden arrival of the master therefore causes intense anxiety and anger to the evil servant.

In all the above instances the anger is directed at the master, a symbol of God. Those who are left outside feel they should be inside and therefore are not happy with the verdict.

The above picture appears coherent enough: a heavenly banquet, unworthy individuals left outside experiencing weeping (sorrow) and gnashing of teeth (anger) because of their exclusion. Nothing is said about hell or torments.

Two texts

Two final texts mention weeping and gnashing of teeth with no suggestion of a banquet or an outer darkness. The first concludes the parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:42). Jesus explains that this parable is about the kingdom of God, whereby the good seed represents the saints to be gathered into the kingdom and the tares represent the wicked. They and everything that offends (v. 41) will be cast into the furnace of fire, where

there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The other text is Matthew 13:50, concluding the parable of the net. Just as fishermen separate the good fish from the bad, in the day of judgment the angels will remove the wicked from the midst of the saints and cast them into the furnace of fire, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Could these two references be descriptions of the torments of hell? Four facts suggest no.

First, the phrase “cast them into the furnace of fire” is from Daniel 3:6 and the story of the three Hebrew boys. The purpose of the furnace there was not to torment but to destroy. Second, in the parables of the net and the wheat and tares, the wicked are compared to bad fish and tares, which are burned not out of vengeance or for torment but because they are no good.

Third, in the parable of wheat and tares “all things that offend” (Matthew 13:41), animate and inanimate, are thrown into the fire.⁸ Will the fire torment these forever? No, it will destroy them. Fourth, as a general rule of exegesis, words and motifs should be understood in line with their

primary meaning unless strong evidence suggests otherwise. As such, since “weeping and gnashing of teeth” nowhere else refers to torment, the phrase should not be understood as referring to torment here.

Exegetical interrelation suggests that the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” in Matthew 13:42, 50 should be understood the same way as in Matthew 8:11, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30; Luke 13:28, referring respectively to the feelings of sadness and anger that the wicked experience when they discover they are excluded from the kingdom.

Loss and tragedy

The Day of Judgment will not be pleasant. For God, it will be a day when He will do a “strange” work (Isaiah 28:21, NIV) in the destruction of sin and sinners; for sinners, it will be fearsome (Hebrews 10:31). But whatever temporary physical suffering that day may bring, in using the language of “outer darkness” and “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” Jesus focused on other realities — not the physical pain but the immensity and sadness of the loss. The different banquets in question are all symbolic of the kingdom of God. To be left in the darkness outside means to be left outside the kingdom.

A sense of tragedy is in all these stories. All who find themselves excluded could and should have been in the kingdom. Nobody needed to be left outside. Everybody could have been in had they bothered to enter.

Jesus died for all and wants all to be in His kingdom. He has

continued on page 23



In using the language of “outer darkness” and “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” Jesus focused on other realities — not the physical pain but the immensity and sadness of the loss.

Are these popular ideas true or false?
by Calvin Burrell

To many Christians, few themes are more precious than heaven, a topic in which fact and fiction are easily confused. Try to identify truth or myth in these four statements. The comments that follow each are our effort to help in the process. Read the Bible for the final Word.

Truth or myth?

Statement 1: Heaven is the eternal home of the faithful, promised in Scripture.

Comment: Jesus and His apostles seldom speak or write about heaven as the destiny of God's people. Neither is that sort of talk and teaching found in the Old Testament. The phrases *go to heaven*, *going to heaven*, or *went to heaven* may occur in a few paraphrases, but not in literal translations of Scripture. Instead, terms like *kingdom of God*, *My Father's house*, *a city whose builder and maker is God*, *Zion*, *a place, with Christ, where I Am*, *before the throne*, *in His temple*, and *glory* describe our eternal home — but rarely *heaven*. Thus, statement 1 is mostly myth.

Statement 2: Heaven is the wispy, far-away dreamland of popular imagination.

Comment: The Bible's gospel is not much about us going there, as three-year-old Colton Burpo claimed he did; it's more about heaven's Lord coming here. He came to earth once to live, die, and live again. And He's coming again to resurrect



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the dead and restore all created things. When this millennial restitution is complete, the Holy City will come down from heaven to the new earth, where God himself will live with His people forever. Statement 2 states a cultural truth, not scriptural fact.

Statement 3: Heaven is the intermediate state between death and resurrection.

Comment: The thought that people go to heaven or hell when they die weakens major Bible teachings about the future:

- Resurrection of the dead.

If popular belief about heaven and hell is correct, then a future resurrection is unnecessary, since the righteous dead already enjoy their eternal bliss and the wicked are now in torment.

- Final judgment. If prevailing

Quotes from N. T. Wright in *Surprised by Hope*

For many millions of believing Christians in today's world, the second coming is part of a scenario in which the present world is doomed to destruction while the chosen few are snatched up to heaven (p. 120).

At no point in the gospels or Acts does anyone say anything remotely like, "Jesus has gone into heaven, so let's be sure we can follow him." They say, rather, "Jesus is in heaven, ruling the whole world, and he will one day return to make that rule complete" (p. 117).

Yes, there is a promised rest after the labors of this life, and the word *heaven* may be an appropriate, though vague, way of denoting where this rest takes place. But this time of rest is the prelude to something very different, which will emphatically involve earth as well. Earth – the renewed earth – is where the reign will take place, which is why the New Testament regularly speaks not of our going to be where Jesus is but of his coming to where we are . . . (p. 190).

"God's kingdom" and "kingdom of heaven" mean the same thing: the sovereign rule of God (that is, the rule of heaven, of the one who lives in heaven) . . . (p. 201).

. . . the resurrection and ascension of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit . . . are designed not to take us away from this earth but rather to make us agents of the transformation of this earth . . . (p. 201).

To snatch saved souls away to a disembodied heaven would destroy the whole point. God is to become king of the whole world at last (p. 202).

The 700+ occurrences of *heaven* in the Authorized King James Bible present a variety of tones and overtones. "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

opinion is correct, then a future Day of Judgment is redundant. The destinies of the dead were already determined on the day they died.

- Christ's return. If at their deaths the saved are raised to heaven and the lost are sent to

hell, then Jesus' second coming is evacuated of much of its force, and the moment of death replaces Christ's return as the "great day of the Lord."

Statement 3 raises issues and serious questions about its truth.

Statement 4: Heaven is our escape from great tribulation, via the rapture.

Comment: The hope of escape from a troubled earth to heaven can furnish many alibis for not doing all we should to improve earthly life here and now. Besides lacking firm Bible support, the pre-tribulation and mid-tribulation rapture theories exacerbate this no-fear blooper: The earth will soon burn, but we'll be gone! Statement 4 too is more myth than truth.

Bible truth

Now that we've seen a little of what heaven isn't, let's reflect on what it is.

In the Bible's story, heaven is the firmament (i.e., air or space) – the part of God's total creation that's not earth (Genesis 1:1, 6-8). This firmament has two levels: the near-space and atmosphere around the earth, where birds and airplanes fly, and the outer space in which our solar system and all galaxies abide. In these heavens, God set the birds and the sun, moon, and stars He had made (vv. 14-20).

Further, heaven is God's throne (Matthew 5:34; Revelation 4:1, 2). Writing about himself, Paul tells of a man caught up to Paradise – the "third heaven" (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). What he saw there is not described, nor could he utter the inexpressible words he heard.

Not a physical location past outer space, this ultimate heaven is God's inner sanctum, a most holy place apart from the created space-and-time universe, a dimension of the eternal spirit Deity and His holy angels. That's what the Bible's heaven is! **BA**



by Dirk Anderson

The woman spoke not a word; her actions said it all as she washed Jesus' feet with her tears (Luke 7:38). But her tears were nothing compared to the torrent of love pouring from her heart. Her hands cradled an alabaster box of pure nard, worth a year's wages — a gift of immense value, fit for a King.

The woman then kissed Jesus' feet. The Romans were prolific kissers. Friends were greeted with a kiss on the mouth or cheek, and persons of importance were greeted with a kiss on the hand. Subjects would greet a king by kissing his feet. Mary's kiss was no sensual act but the highest adoration. To those skeptics gawking at her in disgust, every kiss screamed, "This is my King!"

Where did she obtain such selfless love? From the extravagant love of her Mentor. Mary was a partaker of God's nature. His love was so stirring, it transformed sinners into saints. His love was so deep, it did what no nails could ever do: It held Jesus on the cross. God's love was so extravagant, it compelled the Creator to surrender His life for His creatures (Ephesians 5:2).

The story continues: "And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil" (John 12:3). The stupendous act of Jesus at Calvary has filled the theater of the universe with the fragrance of His extravagant love. His nature is to not just love but to love *extravagantly*.

This *agape* love is a sign of the true church of God: The fragrance attracts people to Jesus. Entertainers don't attract sinners

Extravagant

to the Father, nor a charismatic preacher or talented praise singers. It is people who experience the extravagant love of the Father through our selfless acts of love. It is sinners who witness in us passionate worship commensurate with the Object of our love.

Mary did not permit the cold-hearted critics to distract her from her adoration. She was laser-focused on her King, enamored by His grace and glory. She was there for Him, not for them. When the critics expressed their outrage over her gift, Messiah silenced their babbling: "She has done a beautiful thing to me" (Mark 14:6, NIV).

Jesus recognized in Mary's extravagance a reflection of His own raging love. Jesus was not stingy. To the hungry He gave bread and fish. To the disciples He gave power to heal and cast out demons. He gave five talents to one, two to another; He gave sight to the blind, health to the leper. He gave richly to those who didn't deserve a cent. He gave and He lives to give.

Consider the tokens of God's generosity. The Creator painted the plain fields with colorful flowers, then delicately scented them. He fashioned a variety of delicious fruits and vegetables, grains, and spices to make eating

a joy. God didn't just give us ears to hear words; He made our ears to hear melody — the song of the bird. He went out of His way to garnish our earthly home with beauty: foam-capped waves that crash on the white, sandy beaches; green hills and snow-capped peaks. He gave us blue lakes and clear mountain streams, the shining moon and diamond-studded night sky.

But most of all, the Father gave His only begotten Son, His most precious possession. What more could He give than He has already given? The least we can do is give Him our heartfelt adoration. When we truly experience Jesus' extravagant love, our lukewarmness will be set ablaze. No longer will we be content with half-hearted, feeble worship. Our hearts will overflow with passionate adoration, just as Mary's did two thousand years ago when she walked into a room and blew everyone's mind. Her adoration was proportionate to the value of the One she adored. It was worship worthy of a King. Is ours? **BA**

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Is there anything new to watch for?

by Paulo Jorge Coelho

One of the Church's recurring themes has been our expectation of Christ's return as Lord and King. Jesus and His apostles warned of the proximity of that event and of the need to prepare and be alert (Luke 21:34-36; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3; James 5:7-9; 2 Peter 3:10-12).

Despite these warnings, the lack of interest in this subject fluctuates. If the prophetic signals of Scripture seemed implausible and repetitive back then (2 Peter 3:3, 4), how much more they are today. The Devil wants people to fall asleep, forgetting to watch and losing the inspiration that Christ will return according to God's promise (Hebrews 10:25).

"Old" signs

Some signs of Christ's return occur often, with greater or lesser intensity. Some say that these signs are not very weighty — mere repetitions of events and trends of the Roman Empire, at which time they were written. As we revisit some of these signs, notice the difference in quality now from any past fulfillments.

Wars and rumors of wars (Matthew 24:6a). There have always been wars, but the past hundred years are unique. With the first two world wars and the development of nuclear, biological, and chemical military arsenals, continued life on earth is at risk for the first time in history.

Famines, pestilences (Matthew 24:7b). This is a paradoxical age. The world has never



been so rich in material goods, but millions still can't satisfy their basic needs. Despite advances in medicine and human welfare, the mass movement of people today allows for infectious epidemics to spread rapidly around the globe.

Earthquakes and other natural disasters (Matthew 24:7c). From ancient times, natural disasters have caused suffering and death. In recent years they have increased in frequency and intensity (*The Economist*, October 12, 2013, p. 93).

Moral, religious decline (Matthew 24:4, 5, 12, 23, 24; 2 Timothy 3:1-5). Moral decay and religious confusion have long existed. Now, however, those who claim connection to Jesus Christ are divided into hundreds of streams and movements, sometimes antagonistic to each other and often far from the Lord's Word. Also, societies descending from the Judeo-Christian root suffer a moral crisis as never before, losing their biblical roots for immoral lifestyles condemned by God. "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes,

will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8b).

Skeptics disregard these signs because they are not really unique and have occurred over several time periods of human history. So let us see if our era is unique in events that, according to the Bible, will precede the second coming of Christ.

"New" signs

Seen in the light of the Bible's information, recent history reveals singular events that have been fulfilled in our days. These should provide a strong warning that Jesus' coming is getting closer.

Rebirth of Israel in 1948. After centuries of dispersion, persecution, and suffering, the people of Israel are back in their land and have re-founded the nation. This unprecedented event in the Christian era relates to biblical prophecy and the promises concerning Messiah's coming (Zechariah 12:8-10). What's happening around Israel today is one of the most important signs to



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SECOND COMING

watch regarding Jesus' coming as King to reign in Jerusalem (Psalm 83:1-8).

Exponential scientific development. The modern era has no equal. Since the industrial age began in the early 1800s, a revolution has continuously accelerated and multiplied in all fields of science, expanding to boundaries that seemed unattainable just a few years back. Rather than attract humans to perceive a God who can be clearly seen in nature and scientific revelation, this new stage of knowledge empowered men with the illusory belief of self-sufficiency, that believing in a Creator God is mere superstition (Romans 1:18-22; Daniel 12:4b).

Global village. Maritime discoveries, driven mainly by fifteenth century Portuguese and Spaniards, began a new era in world globalization. This closer relationship between all countries and their people accelerated in the second half of the twentieth century. Now the world lives in ever more interconnected ways — economically, politically,

and socially in a complex system. Never before has humanity witnessed such interdependence of local and regional realities as a truly universal system, where barriers of distance and language cease to be of great significance. The Bible calls this global system and interdependent life of humanity "Babylon the great" (Revelation 18:1-3). Prophecies say that everyone will be affected by these events (Luke 21:25-27). This apparently robust world system creates conditions for a more intense global crisis, making us nearer in world relationships but more fragile and insecure than ever. This is mirrored in the figure of a "giant with feet . . . of clay," portrayed by the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's vision. The statue symbolizes the human governance systems since the time of Babylon to the present (Daniel 2:33, 42).

Global gospel. This movement has also allowed the near-fulfillment of a prophecy regarding Christ's return: God's Word with its gospel message will be available around the world (Matthew

24:14; Revelation 14:6). Today the Bible has been translated, in whole or in part, into more than twenty-five hundred languages. Radio, television, and Internet distribute the gospel further and further. For the first time, most of humanity can receive God's Word in some way. Another generation soon will take the gospel to the last unreached people group, and then "the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

These recent unique signs regarding the Second Coming should break the skepticism of those who look at the Bible and scoff at the imminence of that event. Despite growing evidence that should warn us all, many will become more skeptical toward the Word. If not careful, those in the church can fall prey to the same attitude and risk of unbelief (vv. 12, 22, 36-39).

Hangin' on to hope

More than guessing the day of Christ's coming, the Bible's signs should alert us to the need to prepare for that day and for hard times and sudden changes in this globalized world (Luke 21:25-27; 1 Thessalonians 5:3-11).

To a humanity that's more and more despairing, we must counter-pose with the hope brought in God's Word. The present and future sufferings are no more than a brief moment announcing a kingdom of happiness, harmony, and love that Jesus will set up when He returns. **BA**

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Nahum: Historian or Prophet?

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Good guidance often comes from unexpected sources — like minor prophets. by David Kidd

The prophet Nahum wrote about the spectacular downfall of ancient Nineveh. His writings lend support to the Bible as an accurate historical source. The question is whether Nahum wrote only history or chillingly accurate prophecy.

Nineveh, capital of the ancient Assyrian empire, was long known only through Scripture. The book of Jonah says Nineveh was an exceedingly great city. As great as it was, no archaeological evidence supported its existence until relatively recently. Skeptics had a field day.

Nineveh was first excavated in the late nineteenth century by Sir Austen Layard and other archaeologists who looked closely at

its ruins. *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2002) states that it was Assyria's oldest and most populous city, on the east bank of the Tigris River. Nineveh's wall was wide enough for three chariots, side by side.

Many temples and an impressive palace were found in Nineveh, with King Ashurbanipal's library containing twenty thousand tablets or fragments on mathematics, religion, botany, chemistry, and literature. The existence of Bible characters such as Sennacherib, Shalmaneser, and Tilgath-Pilneser was confirmed by what the archaeologists unearthed. With Nineveh's existence proven so spectacularly, Bible skeptics had to eat some serious humble pie.

Nineveh's fall

In 612 BC a combined army of Babylon and Medo-Persia captured and destroyed the city, as foretold by Nahum. As-

syria had cruelly oppressed the northern kingdom of Israel for about a century when Nahum, a prophet in Israel, pronounced God's word of vengeance against Nineveh (1:2).

Then he predicted in some detail how Nineveh would fall: "They shall be devoured like stubble fully dried . . . I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions . . . Fire shall devour the bars of your gates" (1:10; 2:13; 3:13).

Britannica confirms the relevance of fire to Nineveh's destruction in 612 BC. Traces of ash were found in many parts of the city's once high, fortified walls.

In a poetic way, Nahum also forecast the great speed of Nineveh's fall: "All your strongholds are fig trees with ripened figs: If they are shaken, they fall into the mouth of the eater. . . . The gates of your land are wide open for your enemies; fire shall devour the bars of your gates" (3:12, 13).

Britannica says the city was besieged in 612 BC and ceased to be important after that. This suggests a siege of less than a year. In *The Fall of Nineveh* George Meisinger writes:

When one considers that Psammetichus besieged Ashdod for twenty-nine years . . . a city of considerably lesser dimensions than Nineveh, it is amazing that Nineveh fell in just three months. However, the prophet Nahum predicted that this great city would fall with ease. He prophesied that as a ripe fig falls off a tree when shaken, so Nineveh will fall.¹

Meisinger suggests it was only God's might that brought Nineveh down so quickly.²

Nahum foretold the devasta-

tion and finality of Nineveh's destruction:

But with an overflowing flood He will make an utter end of its place . . . He will make an utter end of it. Affliction will not rise up a second time . . . Thus says the Lord: "Though they are safe, and likewise many, yet in this manner they will be cut down when he passes through. . . . Your name shall be perpetuated no longer" (1:8, 9, 12-14).

Thus the book of Nahum proves to be accurate in many ways, telling of a remarkable downfall that surely speaks of God's hand. What should really cause us to stop and reflect, though, is that Nahum does not claim to be writing history. His writings are predictions — a bold and chilling prophecy of a heavily defended city's quick demise by fire and flood, not to rise up a second time.

Respected prophet

Is it possible for us to know whether Nahum wrote before or after Nineveh's fall? It is more reasonable to accept that he indeed wrote before that fall than after because *his book has been given the great respect of being chosen to sit alongside the Bible's other highly esteemed books of prophecy*. Please think with me about why this is so.

Imagine if I had written about the terrible events of September 11, 2001, in the US — *two days later*, with exact details of what happened. Then imagine if I claimed to have written that *before* 9/11. People would expect me to offer some kind of proof for this amazing claim. If I could not prove it to a wide or respected audience, then my claim

would be ignored and soon forgotten.

Nahum's prophecy has not been ignored or forgotten. It sits alongside Isaiah's spectacular prophecies of Christ's first coming — and others. Learned and careful men who arranged the Bible's canon were convinced Nahum was a true prophet of his time. He must have proven that to his contemporaries. Thus the onus of proof should be on those who say Nahum did not write before Nineveh's downfall. Considering this, one may stand in awe of the pedigree of Nahum's prophecy and of the prophet's God, Yahweh.

Fragile lives

Important applications arise from this story. The strongholds of Nineveh seemed invincible, but in fact they were like ripened figs ready to fall by a light shaking. Nineveh fell because its people found no favor with God, and the same can happen today. Eternal disaster can come upon us quickly at any time. Our lives are fragile; they can be lost at any moment by a simple mistake behind the wheel or by a heart attack. If we have not found grace in the eyes of the Lord, this can mean an utter end for us too — like Nineveh.

More positively, any strong defenses built against God can come down quickly and easily, as did Nineveh's. If we are open to God's Spirit, we can be brought close to Him even today. Jesus would like that. His coming will be like a thief in the night, when we may be unprepared as were the Assyrians. If we watch and are ready always, our name will be perpetuated for all time.

As Nahum wrote, "The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked" (1:3). Let us be certain that we're pleasing in God's sight, through Christ.

In preparing this article, the author acknowledges much reliance on Josh McDowell's Evidence That Demands a Verdict (Here's Life Publishers, 1979). BA

Notes

1. Master's thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary (1968), 87; quoted by Josh McDowell in *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, 298.
2. *Ibid.*, 88.

David and Angella Kidd attend and serve in the Adelaide church in South Australia.



Learned and careful men who arranged the Bible's canon were convinced Nahum was a true prophet of his time.

The Savvy Samaritan

Generous giving is among the highest virtues; wise giving secures its benefits. **by R. Herbert**



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As he came over the brow of the small hill he saw the beaten and bloodied man lying at the edge of the road. The Samaritan hurried to him and tended the man's injuries as well as he could before carefully helping him onto the back of his mule and setting off for the nearby inn (Luke 10:25-37, paraphrased).

Fast-forward two thousand years. Today the Good Samaritan would probably call emergency services and help the injured man as much as possible until police and ambulance personnel arrived.

Thankfully, such things are rare occurrences in most people's lives. But what of the more fre-

quent times when many of us are confronted by lesser situations of someone in need? You know. As you walk out of a shopping center, someone approaches you with "Could you spare a few dollars?"

We have seen the signs many people carry, pulling at heartstrings from every possible direction: "Homeless." "Veteran." "Injured." "Hungry." "Please help – God bless." Some may reflect genuine necessity, but police officers and social welfare agents know that for a good number of people, this is just a business. They are not truly destitute. You know this, too, but how are we to judge a given case? What is the Christian's right response when asked for help in such circumstances?

Caring and caution

Dozens of scriptures show our responsibility to those in need. Certainly Jesus cared for such people (John 13:29b) and commanded that we care also (Luke 11:41). No scripture is perhaps clearer on this aspect of love than 1 John 3:17: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?"

But God's Word is not divorced from reality. It shows that people sometimes do feign appearances for their own purposes (Joshua 9) and confirms the possibility that some who request aid may be doing so because they do not want to work. The apostle Paul stresses the unworthiness of such a cause and that "If a man will not work, he shall

not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

The wise Samaritan acknowledges both these perspectives, being caring yet careful not to waste the ability to help those truly in need. This approach is actually implicit in 1 John 3:17 if we look closely. Notice first that John's reference to "a brother in need" puts his statement in the context of assisting fellow believers (see also Romans 15:26 and elsewhere), though the principle can, of course, be extended to any human brother or sister requiring help.

But the two key words in this verse are *sees* and *needs*. The word *sees* clearly indicates that we have evidence of the person's condition. We are not bound to accept someone's statement of lack without "seeing" its reality. Even more important, the word *need* that John uses (*chreian*) clearly means such things as food and clothing — items that aren't frivolous. The two concepts actually go hand in hand, because real need is usually clearly visible, as it was to the Samaritan.

Wisdom and care

When we are asked for help and the situation seems genuine, a primary response might be to call appropriate assistance. Police and other services are trained and prepared to offer a hand to individuals in difficult circumstances. But if the situation does not appear to warrant this, we might ask ourselves, *Is this person really in need? Will any help we give be put to good use?*

Sadly, when offered food or items of clothing, many asking for help will decline the offer, as they really want cash for such things as alcohol or drugs.

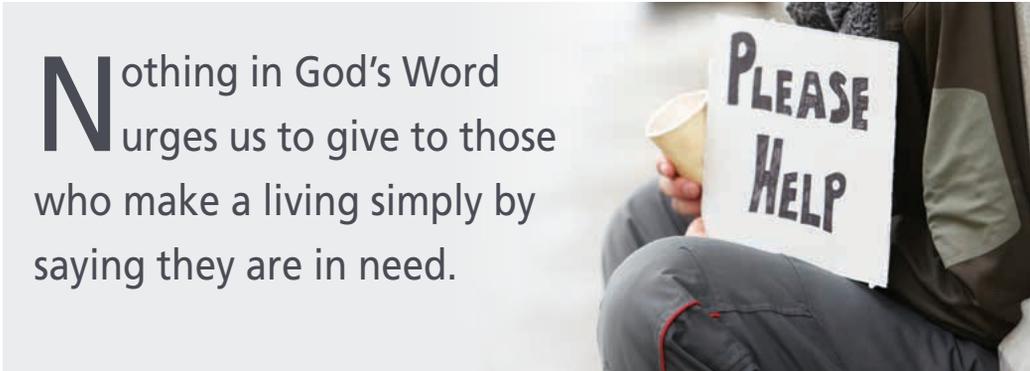
We should consider the moral responsibility of not enabling an addiction whenever cash is requested. We also owe it to the needy to be good stewards of our resources and employ them wisely.

Today the wise Samaritan can often do more good by contributing even small amounts to worthwhile charities that carefully administer their aid. The most desperate needs are often far from where we may be. But even then we wisely choose charities that have been carefully screened or developed by groups we trust, like our churches. Before donating to other charities, the Internet-savvy Samaritan may want to check some of the online sites run by monitoring organizations (such as *charitynavigator.org*) to verify their ratings and use of funds. Many "good causes" spend a great deal of their donations on overhead, and some may use funds for purposes that address nonessentials. We can magnify the good we do by choosing charities wisely, perhaps volunteering time with good ones, and by praying for the success of those that serve people with genuine wants. We should also realize that sometimes the best help we can give is not tangible (Matthew 11:5b; Acts 3:1-6).

None of this is to say that we should pull back from physically assisting others who don't have adequate means of support. Belief devoid of willingness to help those in real need is a poor excuse for true religion, as James so clearly shows (James 2:16; Isaiah 58:7). Some people choose to err on the side of kindness when asked for help, even if they feel they are being taken advantage of. Some carry a few easily accessed dollar bills separate from billfold or purse for legitimate cases.

But we should not feel swayed by words of "need" written on cardboard signs, or by unsubstantiated requests for cash. Nothing in God's Word urges us to give to those who make a living simply by saying they are in need. Everything in God's Word shows that we should not hesitate to help where help is truly required. We must be wise Samaritans and careful stewards of our available resources if we are to assist others to the fullest extent of our ability. **BA**

R. Herbert (a pen name) writes for a number of Christian venues, including his websites *Tactical Christianity.org* and *LivingWith Faith.org*. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



Nothing in God's Word
urges us to give to those
who make a living simply by
saying they are in need.

I Hope You Are Dissatisfied

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It's good to be grateful, but the line between contentment and apathy is fine. **by Sarah Andrews**

Are you feeling blessed this year? I hope you're gratified again with life's blessings — but not too satisfied.

We are indeed a blessed people with much to be thankful for. Our most meager conditions in this country are rich compared to the world's majority.

The blessings aren't all physical possessions. Our founders declared this a nation of "free" people, where average citizens could choose their course of life. Much of the world wakes up every day to live (and sometimes give) their lives for a king or dictator. America has long been the hope of the "tired and poor" and "huddled masses" yearning to be free.

Major cultural changes have occurred in our country, but for the most part, we are happy for our blessings. While much of the world has long lived on a subsis-

tence level, we live in a land of plenty. We would be remiss to *not* be thankful.

And yet my heart grieves. The American Dream is a lovely thing, but it isn't the dream God had for us when He created humanity. The very best this world offers falls pitifully short of what God had in mind. This is not the way it's supposed to be.

Unknown bliss

I wonder what life was like in Eden: walking and talking with God and knowing Him in perfect trust, without the clutter and clatter of this world. We don't even *miss* what we've missed out on. To us, our world is how it's always been. We don't recognize the torment and limitations on our lives because we have never known otherwise and because we are so distracted by a material world.

A children's Bible story book we have paints the story so well. Adam and Eve had wanted for nothing and didn't know of a way contrary to God. They had no concept of deception, envy, or strife — no predators or in-

clement weather. They lived in harmony with their loving Creator and all creation.

The book goes on to describe (with some license) how blissful Eden must have been and how devastating it was to be banished from it: alone, out in the cold, and all but completely severed from God. I've read this Bible account often but never grasped the magnitude of the loss of Eden nor wept for the loss.

Restoration

In a sense, you and I have also been banished from that garden. We don't dwell on it or miss it — because we never knew it. To us, America is as good as it gets. This is our home, where we belong, right?

I hope not. Jesus has bought back our inheritance. He has made a way for us to have that "Eden experience" — and much more. I hope America and this way of life is not our "bowl of soup" that we are willing to buy in exchange for our birthright.

I love this country. I love what it was founded on and the role it has played in history. We have

it good here on Earth, but this country isn't the answer. It's been comfortable — too comfortable. Our hearts and minds should always yearn for that higher calling, not higher incomes. And if that means we seem a little out of step with our culture, so be it.

A prayer written by Sir Francis Drake (a pirate, of all people!) sums it up well:

Disturb us, Lord, when/
We are too pleased with
ourselves,/When our dreams
have come true/Because we
have dreamed too little,/When
we arrived safely/Because we
sailed too close to the shore./
Disturb us, Lord, when/With
the abundance of things we
possess/We have lost our
thirst/For the waters of life;/
Having fallen in love with
life,/We have ceased to dream
of eternity/And in our efforts
to build a new earth,/We have
allowed our vision/Of the new
Heaven to dim./Disturb us,
Lord, to dare more boldly,/
To venture on wider seas/
Where storms will show Your
mastery;/Where losing sight of
land,/We shall find the stars./
We ask You to push back/The
horizons of our hopes;/And
to push back the future/In
strength, courage, hope, and
love./This we ask in the name
of our Captain,/Who is Jesus
Christ.* **BA**

*Sources: freshworship.org/node;
echurchprayer.wordpress.com

Raised in the World-wide Church of God, **Sarah Andrews** now attends CoG7 in Spokane, WA, with her husband, three daughters, and several of her extended family.



Shedding Light on Outer Darkness

continued from page 12

sent multiple summonses and continues to do so. But in a sad repetition of the story, people often cannot be bothered. When the door closes, those who find themselves outside may weep and gnash their teeth, but it will be too late.

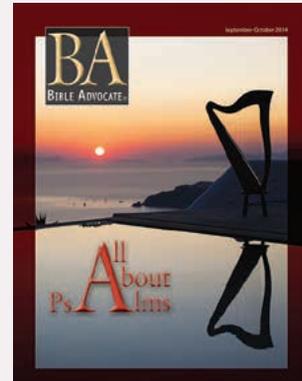
So is the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth a description of the supposed torments of hell? No. The emphasis is rather on the sadness of unnecessary loss. The greatest tragedy in the history of this world is that people who should be in the kingdom will find themselves outside. As such, the phrase is above all a summons to heed the call of salvation. Today.

BA

Notes

1. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 11.
2. See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary 33b, 725.
3. Luz, 11; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)*, *The Anchor Bible*, 1020, 1026.
4. Fitzmyer, 1021.
5. See David L. Turner, *Matthew*, 601.
6. See Fitzmyer, 1025; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel*, 747-8; BDAG, s.v. ἰσχυρόν.
7. Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 328-9.
8. Luz, 269.

Dr. Kim Papaioanou heads the PhD program and teaches New Testament at Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines.



Savoring the Psalms

Received my copy [September-October '14] and really enjoyed it.

C. S.
Facebook

Sat down and read the entire issue last night. Excellent!

L. A.
Facebook

Thank you for the wonderful Psalms issue of BA!

R. W.
Tucson, AZ

I enjoyed the latest issue. But I did have to smile at your list of worship forms [First Word, p. 3]. You left out dance. My favorite psalms on the topic: 30:11; 149:3; and 150:4.

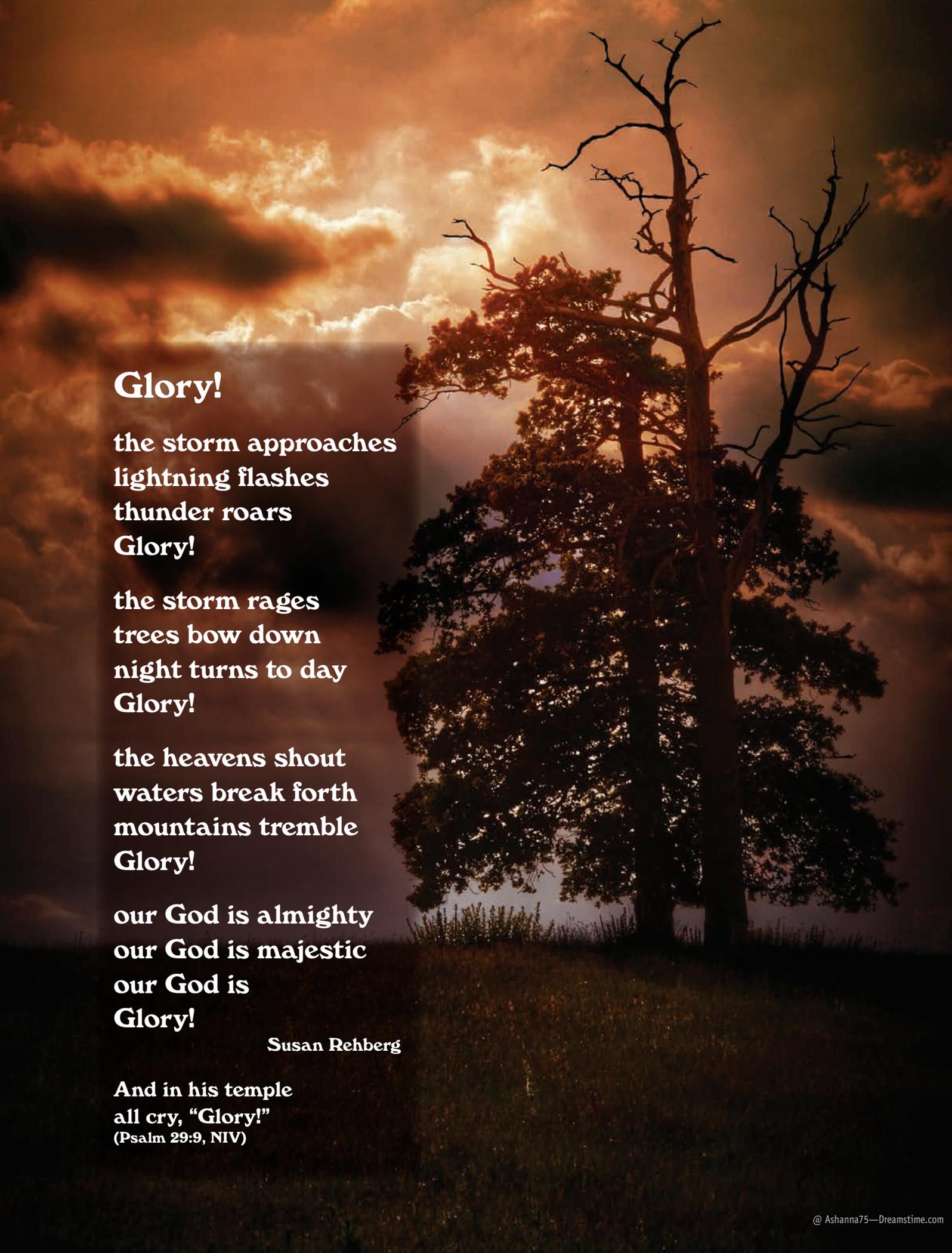
M. W.
Eugene, OR

Thanks to Bill Simmon's [article] on [Michtam] Psalms [p. 20]. It's so encouraging. Amen! Keep on.

K. H.
Facebook

I enjoyed ["Embracing the Psalms," p. 10]. Yes, there is power in studying, reading, and praying the Psalms. I thank You, Jesus. May You bless the author of this article.

R. D.
BA Online

A dramatic landscape featuring a large, dark tree with some green foliage on the right side, set against a sky filled with heavy, dark clouds. A bright light source, likely the sun, is breaking through the clouds, creating a strong glow and illuminating the scene. The foreground is a dark, grassy field.

Glory!

**the storm approaches
lightning flashes
thunder roars
Glory!**

**the storm rages
trees bow down
night turns to day
Glory!**

**the heavens shout
waters break forth
mountains tremble
Glory!**

**our God is almighty
our God is majestic
our God is
Glory!**

Susan Rehberg

**And in his temple
all cry, "Glory!"
(Psalm 29:9, NIV)**



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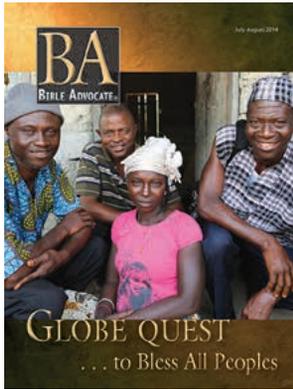
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Support *Bible Advocate*

The BA magazine depends on its friends for financial support. Some options are

- Cash donations. These offerings can be given by check (to P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233) or online at www.cog7.org. You can also sign up for an automatic bank draft by calling the Conference office (303-452-7973).
- One-time gifts. Large assets like stocks, bonds, excess retirement funds, or property are welcome gifts. (If an asset's value has increased, donating it first allows you to avoid paying capital gains tax on the profit.) Major gifts can be given either to the BAP Operating Fund (used for current expenses) or to the Bible Advocate Endowment Fund (to be invested, with annual earnings

used for capital improvements and/or operations), or they can be divided between the two.

- Bequests. A charitable bequest is a frequently used method to support charities, allowing persons to express their philanthropic wishes. A bequest in behalf of the *Bible Advocate* may be worded like this:

"I want to give [a specific amount, asset, or percentage of your estate's residual value] to the *Bible Advocate* ministry of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day), P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233; (physical address 330 W. 152nd Avenue, Broomfield, CO 80023); phone 303-452-7973; tax I.D. [this number will be provided]." Similar wording can be used to designate gifts for General Conference operations or for any other agency or ministry of the Conference.

Questions may be directed to the Office of Planned Giving in Denver (contact info above).

Capital Experience in CA

At the Northern California Youth Camp (Capital Mountain Camp in Weimar), July 7-13, 67 junior campers and 28 senior



campers learned about the armor of God and prepared to march into battle. Seven of our youth gave their hearts to Jesus; others accepted the Lord and went home to be baptized. From the bouncy boxing, the water slide, and the Bible classes to the daily worship, Bible trivia tournament, and firesides with pastors Jose Hernandez (seniors) and Larry Zaragoza (juniors), we were truly blessed and encouraged at every turn — a great camp. See you next year! — *Levi Van Fossen*

Oregon Pays It Forward

In 2013, Larry Zaragoza challenged the youth at Sis-Q Meadows Youth Camp to give a dollar each to assist Kenyan pastors with transportation needs. By the end of camp, our adult staff and senior campers had donated \$450 — enough for five bikes.

Here you see Pastor Leonard Koech and CoG7 youth with bikes that will greatly help pastors in southwest Kenya (Bureti,



Analysis of Evolutionary Arguments

Dr. Richard Jensen, trained philosopher and CoG7 minister, has been giving a series of college-level lectures on the logic and implications of naturalism, materialism, scientism, and evolutionary theory. Delivered live at the Colorado Springs, Colorado church each Sabbath beginning in October (11:00 a.m. Mountain Time), these lectures are archived and available for audit at cscog7.org. Supplementary materials are available at artofreasoning.com. To learn more, e-mail Dr. Jensen at rjensen@artofreasoning.com or Pastor Troy Gedack at office@cscog7.org.

Narok, Transmara, Nyamira, Kakamega districts) reach remote villages with the good news of Jesus Christ. G. C. Missions sent pictures of these bikes to share at camp, letting youth see what was achieved by their giving. With the theme of the 2014 camp "Pay It Forward," we were challenged to assist with another project – in Sierra Leone. The Church there has planted 225 acres of rice to help orphans and widows provide jobs for members, fund outreach, and save seed for replanting. Folks there will use these resources to build a church, pay a pastor, buy bicycles, and plant more churches.

Each acre will cost \$45 for seed to plant. By the time we left camp Sunday, we had collected \$540 – enough to plant twelve acres! Bryan Cleeton says, "We have an account called 'Sierra Leone Farms' where those funds will be utilized right now. If you send an offering, just put that in the memo. The harvest takes place in December/January."

If you have a camp, retreat, or local event coming up, we'd like to challenge you to sponsor a few acres. It's pretty amazing how God blesses and multiplies if only we do our small part. (And to think we spend \$45 on a dozen coffees.)

– Harold and Vona Ogren,
Greg and Lori Haffner
Sis-Q Meadows Youth Camp,
Cave Junction, OR

Mile High Success in AZ

Surrounded by pine trees and mountains, youth from three states attended camp near the mile high city of Prescott,



Fulfilling Your Mission

Chicago was the "happening place" where 318+ women from the US, Mexico, and as far away as Guatemala came for the XXVII Annual Hispanic Women's Retreat, August 29 – September 1. IMC President Ramon Ruiz encouraged us to seek God's guidance and find our place in serving through our church. Sylvia Corral gave a history of these retreats. Brian Baker promoted Widows and Orphans Ministry, and Eva Delgado challenged us to find and develop our mission in spite of obstacles.



Ramon Ruiz

The retreat team used wonderful slides to promote G. C. Missions, SHINE, Cristo Viene, Sierra Leone, and other projects, encouraging us to support all ministries in our local churches and CoG7 worldwide. Clothing, purses, and other personal items were donated by the women, and an on-the-spot auction raised more than \$5,000 in two hours. The total raised for missions was nearly \$8,000!

Ramon Ruiz wrote: "Congratulations are in order for the CoG7's Women's Ministry in the US and Canada for their support of various ministries that work together as [the] General Conference of North America and the International Ministerial Congress."

These retreats, an annual pilgrimage for many women, are



now scheduled for Los Angeles in 2015, for Houston in 2016, and for Maryland in 2017. We'd love to see you there!

– Sylvia Corral



Spring Vale Highlights

CoG7's Spring Vale Academy in Owosso, Michigan, had an excellent enrollment season, enrolling 23 new students – up from a total of 39 last year to 50 this year. Students represent thirteen states and two foreign countries. SVA is excited about its international recruiting, with one student from Mexico and two exchange students from China. Foreign students are having a great time, and the school is enjoying the cultural diversity!

The school year is off to a bang with the boys soccer team and girls volleyball teams competing with local districts. In September, Jody McCoy presented a multi-series creation seminar to the benefit of SVA and the local Owosso church. – *Darrel Walters II*

Arizona, July 21-28. Camp director Angie Kaufman and fourteen supportive staff kept 62 youth well occupied, with sermons from camp pastor Israel Steinmetz and others.

Field trips to Out of Africa Wildlife Park and Red Rock Crossing, and a tug-of-war over a mud pit, were some of the fun things we did. The camp ended with three baptisms and two



more planned at home churches.

In response to “What did you like about camp?” campers wrote: “the worship services and sermons . . . the personal testimonies . . . the group activities . . . the campfires and the sunset wagon ride . . . games and activities – prank night . . . inspirational sermons . . . meeting new people . . . it filled my heart with blessings, hope, and faith . . . screaming my heart out to the Lord . . . the sermons were too long.”

So there you go! To all those who made this camp possible, God bless you! – *Angie Kaufman*

Looking Ahead to 2015

- Spring Vale's second semester begins January 13 (springvale.us)
- Annual Lord's Supper service in every congregation, after sunset, April 2
- National Women's Conference in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, England, UK, May 23-24; contact: [marvet simpsonsaved@hotmail.com](mailto:marvet.simpsonsaved@hotmail.com)
- June 30 – July 4: General Conference Convention in Milwaukee, WI (cog7.org/convention)

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 bimonthly at Broomfield, Colorado for September 30, 2014.

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What G. C. Missions does . . .

- Cristo Viene
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- Orphans/Widows
- Sustainability Projects
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November is Missions Emphasis



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NAMC Study Begun

In its recent meeting (see back cover), the North American Ministerial Council called for a committee to study items in the public's attention — human sexuality, gender and marital relationships — in the light of Scripture, and report to the council in 2016.



Oklahoma ministers Gerson Gonzalez and Barry Mauldin

Disaster Relief in Sierra Leone

Since early July, the Ebola outbreak has claimed the lives of 31 CoG7 members in this small West African nation. More than 30 have survived its effects, with no new deaths reported from mid-August through mid-October. Significant Disaster Relief Funds (DRF) are providing the Church in Sierra Leone with food for orphaned children, quarantined families, and medical workers and with transportation and support for the sick. In larger cities like Freetown and Makeni, 50 CoG7 teams of five members each have been mobilized by G. C. Missions with Bibles, t-shirts, and transportation to educate the public about preventive measures to avoid the virus and to share the hope of Jesus Christ. Your prayers and DRF support in the coming months for our brethren there will be greatly appreciated.



DRF helps members fight Ebola in eastern Sierra Leone.



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International Congress

IMC Officers Meet in the US

Officers of the International Ministerial Congress (IMC) met September 21-22 at the Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center, Talladega, Alabama, for these purposes:

- to analyze the current situation of the seven worldwide congress zones;
- to strengthen the strategies of all IMC ministries and projects around the world;
- to resolve important issues of the Church at an international level.

The following resolutions were approved:

1. The next IMC session will take place, Lord willing, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, October 2016. We invite each zone representative and each conference president to mark this month in their agendas and make the necessary plans to send their delegates and observers. More details will be provided shortly.

2. The first Sabbath of November of each year (starting in 2015) will be designated as the World Day of the International Ministerial Congress. Zone representatives, conference presidents, district superintendents, and pastors worldwide should note this change. The IMC officers will provide all information to be shared with the membership on that day.

3. An IMC translation



IMC leaders meet in Shocco Springs, AL: Heber Vega (secretary) of Maryland; Calvin Burrell (vice president) of Colorado; Ramón Ruiz Garza (president) of Monterrey, Mexico; Henry Harley (vice president) of Kingston, Jamaica; Bryan Cleeton (G. C. Missions assistant) of Colorado; and Carlos Ceron (treasurer) of Tijuana, Mexico.

team has been added, coordinated by Pastor Paulo Coelho (Portugal) and including Isai Urizar (Canada), Heber Vega, and Katina Arzet of the United States. If you speak any language other than Spanish, English, French, or Portuguese and would like to collaborate with this team, please contact Heber Vega (hebervega@gmail.com) or Ramon Ruíz (ramonruizg@hotmail.com).

4. Starting the second quarter of 2015, a credentials program for the missionaries of Cristo Viene and other pertinent IMC ministries will be implemented. More information soon. Contact Bryan Cleeton (Bryan.cleeton@cog7.org) or Ramon Ruíz ([\[ruizg@hotmail.com\]\(mailto:ruizg@hotmail.com\)\).](mailto:ramon</p></div><div data-bbox=)

5. Starting January 2015, we will provide a form for the annual reports of each member conference and IMC sympathizer, according to the 2012 resolution from London. Presidents of each conference should be ready to complete this report form.

6. SHINE will have its 2015 Medical, Dental, and Evangelistic mission in Aguascalientes, Mexico.

7. A new executive director of IMC should be announced soon. This person will be a field representative to strengthen the work of the seven zones worldwide.

— Ramon Ruíz Garza



Beauty in Worship

Our desire for the good, the true, and the beautiful links us to our Creator, the source and embodiment of all goodness, truth, and beauty. God's beauty is a reflection of His divine nature called "glory," which describes the radiance and splendor that emanate from His very being. We cannot add to nor subtract from God's glory, yet our ultimate purpose is to glorify God. Therefore we should be concerned about making God beautiful, as John Piper affirms: "God created us for this: to live our lives in a way that makes Him look more like the greatness and the beauty and the infinite worth that He really is. This is what it means to be created in the image of God."

But God is not just the source and embodiment of beauty. God is concerned about beauty, particularly as it relates to worship. This is clearly seen in His detailed instructions for construction of the tabernacle (Exodus 25-39). The meticulous details concerning its furnishings and decorations, the colors and exact size of the curtains, and even the design of the priest's garments, are said to be "for glory and for beauty" (28:2).

Yet rejection of all things Roman Catholic resulted in an aversion to the ornate and the beautiful in Protestant worship. This has been multiplied tenfold as beauty is debated in our culture and as the contemporary church places higher value on the pragmatic and utilitarian, so that some church buildings are intentionally designed to give no hint that it is a place of worship. (Some of this is motivated by a proper desire to avoid formality, emphasizing worship from the heart rather than by external appeal.)

Where does this leave us? In his book *Into the Depths of God*, Calvin Miller writes, "The tragedy of the Christian arts in the golden-calf

era of the church is that we have lost the 'global sense' of making God beautiful" (p. 73). Idolatry is the greatest obstacle to our worship. So Miller explains that "Idols do not come from large hearts and great imaginations. . . . Golden calves are the glitzy work of those Aarons who have not traversed the upper slopes of Sinai" (p. 73). Our imaginations are enhanced by beauty in worship, the principle behind the worship of the tabernacle.

Agreed, we must be careful to not mimic tabernacle worship, lest we turn the grace of Jesus into disgrace. But neither should we ignore the principle it underscores: ". . . God was concerned that the experience of His people in their worship of Him would communicate His glory and His beauty, which the Old Testament repeatedly refers to as 'the beauty of holiness' (2 Chron. 20:21; Pss. 29:2; 96:9)."

This was Solomon's motivation for the magnificent temple he built, the reason the worship of heaven (in Revelation) is adorned by such exquisite beauty, and the passion of Christians throughout the centuries whose edifices and worship display grandeur. This line from the old hymn "All Beauty Speaks of Thee" is apropos: "The deep-toned organ blast/That sweeps through arches dim,/Hints of the music vast/Of Thine eternal hymn." This isn't a call to build cathedrals and pipe organs. It's a call to understand why some do and to worship on earth as it is in heaven by recovering the role of beauty in worship, regardless of the shape or size of our buildings.

— Whaid Guscott Rose

* R. C. Sproul, *How Then Shall We Worship?*, 135.





Ninety-nine CoG7 pastors and ministers met in mid-September for five days of study and practice of worship. Wives and other observers raised the number, and the rolling campus of Shocco Springs Baptist Center in Talladega, Alabama, supplied the setting for this council. Pray God to call more workers to His global harvest.

