

BA

BIBLE ADVOCATE

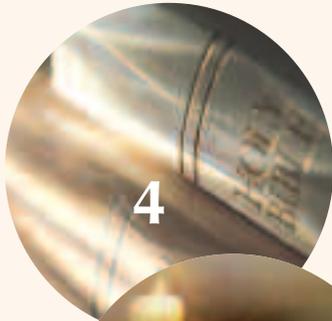
January-February 2005

The Word for the World

Does the Bible match history? (p. 8)

How to "crack" Scripture (p. 14)

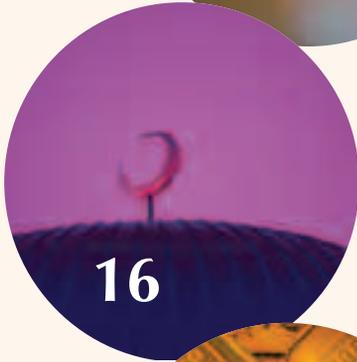
Koran vs. Bible (p. 16)



4



14



16



22

ARTICLES

- 4 **Is the Bible God's Word?** — by Steve Henderson
- 8 **The Bible: Rooted in History** — by Richard A. Wiedenheft
- 12 **God by the Book** — by Bob Hostetler
- 14 **Cracking the Book** — by Kathy Widenhouse
- 16 **Reflections on the Koran** — by Richard A. Wiedenheft
- 18 **Worldviews and the Christian** — by Alex Ciurana

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 **First Word** — Our 'Apologies'
- 7 **Questions & Answers**
- 11 **You Say . . .**
- 21 **Understanding Scripture** — The Synoptic Gospels
- 22 **Wealth** — Debunking the 'Curse' on Work
- 24 **Mail Bag**
- 30 **International Tour** — Argentina
- 31 **Last Word** — A People of the Book

26 CoG7 IN ACTION

- North American Women's Ministries
- National FYC
- Spring Vale Academy



Did you miss the last issue on **prophecy**? View selections from it and download the last six BAs at www.baonline.org.

Coming in the March BA:
Why creation instead of evolution?
What has Sabbath to do with Creation?

In the January and February issues of *Now What?*: faith healing and sexual addiction (<http://nowwhat.cog7.org>)



A publication of the
Church of God (Seventh Day)

This magazine is published to advocate the Bible, represent the Church, and glorify the God of grace and truth.

Volume 139 • Number 1

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The BIBLE ADVOCATE (ISSN 0746-0104) is published monthly, except bimonthly January-February, April-May, July-August, and October-November by Bible Advocate Press, 330 W. 152nd Ave., Broomfield, CO 80020. Periodicals postage is paid at Broomfield, CO, and at additional offices. Subscription is free to any who ask. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Bible Advocate Press, Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233-0677.

Bible Advocate Press

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Subscriptions and Orders

Bible Advocate Press
P.O. Box 33677
Denver, CO 80233-0677
TEL: 303/452-7973
FAX: 303/452-0657
E-MAIL: bibleadvocate@cog7.org
ORDERS: bap.orders@cog7.org

Notice: Send all address changes and other correspondence to the address above.

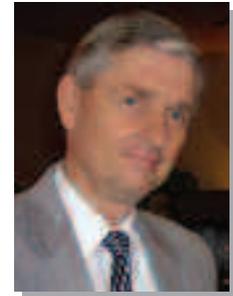
Publications Agreement No. 40042428

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

The Bible Advocate Online appears at www.cog7.org/BA.

Cover photo: www.comstock.com

Our 'Apologies'



Welcome to the new BA. Because our last facelift was seven years ago, we're beginning again in 2005 – with apologies.

Now that we have your attention, we should explain that the word *apology*, in this context, does not carry the common meaning of "confession of wrong, with regret." Rather, *apology* here implies a formal defense of what others ridicule and reject. Closely related is the study of apologetics, defined as a systematic presentation of facts and reasons in defense of Christian faith.

Effective faith teams should employ both offensive and defensive strategies in the game of life. We play offense when we carry the action – the message of Jesus – to the unbelieving world. Call that evangelism. We play defense when we resist the actions of a hostile world against God, Christ, and the Bible. Call this apologetics.

Does an enemy actually run attacks against our Lord, His Word, and His church? He does. Read some current samples:

"The Bible is unreliable, full of myths and contradictions. Its teachings, especially on morality, are hopelessly outdated."

"With no independent reality, God is merely the byproduct of man's psychological and emotional needs. Instead of God creating man in His image, man created God in his."

"The world's religions teach mostly the same things; none is superior to others. It is fanaticism to say that Jesus Christ is the only way to God."

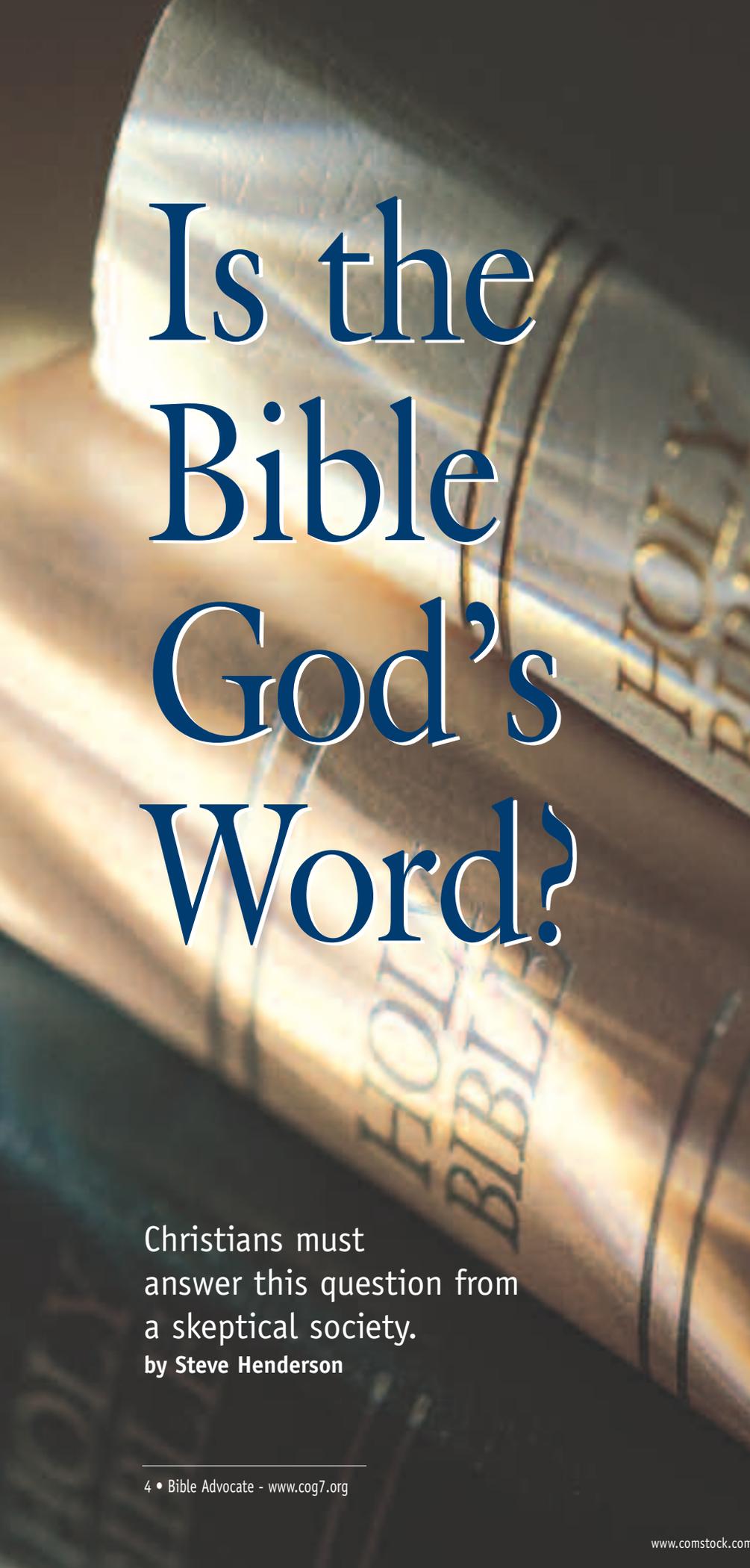
"The historical Jesus, if He ever existed, was not the miracle man of the Gospels. He could not have been virgin-born and certainly did not rise from the dead."

"The church is outdated, and sin is obsolete. The future belongs to New Age thought, not to Christians and their supposed 'Second Coming.'"

One reads or hears these attacks in some form almost daily. In their wake, many believers find their faith foundation first cracked, then fully eroded. To defend against such assaults, the BA dedicates its 256 pages in 2005 (up from 240 in 2004) to helping you "be ready always to give an answer [i.e., to defend, to apologize] . . . of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15, KJV).

"How can we know the Bible is reliable?" is our first apologetics sub-theme of the new year. Good reasons to believe are at your fingertips. Right here and now, we apologize!

— Calvin Burrell



Is the Bible God's Word?

Christians must answer this question from a skeptical society.

by Steve Henderson

If the Bible is true revelation from God regarding Himself and man, then we have a sure anchor for life and hope for the future. If the Bible is merely the product of man's speculation, then we are adrift at sea without truth or hope.

Because of my skepticism and ignorance, I did not always believe the Bible to be God's Word. But when I began investigating it, my eyes were opened to compelling evidence that led me to faith in Jesus Christ. Here are the reasons I came to believe in the authority and reliability of God's Word.

Historical witness

Christianity declares that its truth-claims rest squarely on certain historical facts that are open to investigation. For example, consider the number of early documents that exist for other writings from the ancient world. Eight copies of Herodotus' historical works and only five copies of Aristotle's writings have found their way to the twenty-first century. Twenty old copies of the historian Tacitus' works and only seven from the first century's Pliny are available today.

Contrast the evidence for these respected works with that for the New Testament. More than 5,300 Greek manuscripts and another 10,000 copies of the Latin Vulgate are known to exist, giving us more than 15,000 manuscript copies or portions of the New Testament. Considering the handful of early manuscripts for Tacitus and other ancient writers, how much more confident should we be of

the New Testament in view of its enormous manuscript evidence.

Archeology

The silent testimony of soil and rock often substantiates Bible history. Archeologists have consistently found the names of government officials, kings, cities, and other biblical accounts when secular historians doubted that such people and places existed.

Last century, archeologists unearthed 17,000 "Ebla tablets" dated from 2,300 B.C. One of those lists the cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar in the exact sequence they appear in Genesis 14:8. Until these tablets were found, existence of Sodom and Gomorrah had been doubted by scholars and historians.

The book of Acts names 32 countries, 54 cities, and nine islands confirmed by archaeology without an error. The temple mount in Jerusalem provides good evidence that a great structure for God once stood on that spot.

By contrast, archeology has repeatedly failed to support Mormon claims about events that supposedly occurred in the Americas long ago. Cities, persons, names, and places in the Book of Mormon have not yet been found. In the same way, the Koran's claim that Abraham and Ishmael built the Kabala in Mecca (Surah 2:127, The Cow) is not supported archeologically.

Fulfilled prophecies

The Almighty said, "I am God, and there is no other . . .

declaring the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:9, 10a). The Bible consistently foretells events that would later come to pass just as they were forecast.

The prophet Micah, for example, foretold Bethlehem as the town of Jesus' birth hundreds of years before the event (Micah 5:2). The prophets also foretold the family of His birth, as well as His death, burial, resurrection, and events after His resurrection.

Using the science of mathematical probability, Professor Peter Stoner asserts that the chances of one man literally fulfilling eight key prophecies of the Christ would be one in 10 to the 17th power. Jesus fulfilled not just those eight but 29 Old Testament prophecies in a single day! He predicted the destruction of the Jewish temple before He died. Forty years later, it happened, just as He said. The Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem, destroyed that magnificent temple, and scattered the people.

Add to this a couple hundred more prophecies, and the conclusion is obvious: The Bible must have for its author One who knows the end from the beginning.

Unity

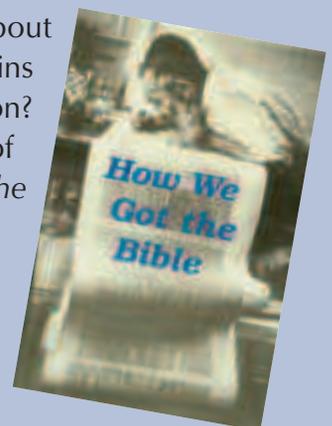
The Bible's 66 books were written in three languages (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic) by 40 authors over a span of 1,500 years. By contrast, the Koran is based solely on what one person, Mohammad, allegedly saw and heard.

The Bible is not based on the subjective experience of one person. Its writers were men from every plane of life: kings, fishermen, shepherds, prophets, tax collectors, etc. Also, most types of literature can be found in this one Book: poetry, prose, argument, theological treatise, proverb, parable, prayer, allegory, satire, and oration. In a work so diverse, we would normally expect variance, discrepancy, contradiction, and discord. On the contrary, we find the most significant unity in Scripture. From Genesis and its lost tree of life, to Revelation and the tree of life restored, a golden thread of God's love and redemption runs through each book, connecting them all.

To a lifetime student, every part of the Bible complements every other part to form one ever-deepening and persuasive whole.

From the BAP

Ever wonder about the Bible's origins and preservation? Order a copy of *How We Got the Bible*, by Jerry Griffin (\$5.31, postage paid). See page 3 for contact information.



Testimony of Jesus

Many modern Bible skeptics wage war over Genesis with its stories of Creation, Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, etc. Remarkably, Jesus anticipated these objections by endorsing that very portion of the Bible where the hottest conflicts would come. He referred to the beginning when God made them male and female and referred to Noah's flood and Lot's flight from Sodom as historical events.

Jesus also clearly endorsed the Old Testament by drawing sharp contrast between the elders' traditions and the teachings of Moses: "[You make] the word of God of no effect through your tradition . . ." (Mark 7:13). In another place, Jesus declared the inerrancy of the Torah: "Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18). This is verbal inspiration with a vengeance,

coming from the Lord Jesus himself!

After His resurrection, Jesus expounded Scripture to the disciples: "All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me" (Luke 24:44). Here our Lord put His seal upon all three divisions of the Old Testament as accurate and trustworthy.

Jesus lived sinlessly, taught faultlessly, worked miraculously, and was raised victoriously. What He spoke about the authority of Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35). What Jesus endorsed as God's Word, then, must be affirmed as such. It is either Christ and the whole Bible, or no Christ and no Bible!

Preservation

Scarcely was Scripture complete when people started noticing three things about it: The Bible condemns our sin, demands we renounce our selfishness, and insists that we obey

God instead. Therefore, people hated the Book and determined to destroy it. Nero tried to exterminate the Christians but found he couldn't keep up with their spreading Word. Fronto, the most accomplished rhetorician of his day, trained his verbal prowess to destroy the Bible, but couldn't. Celsus tried it with his genius, and he failed. Diocletian summoned the military and political forces of Rome to discredit and destroy Christians with their

Bibles, and he lost his battle.

In *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell quotes Bernard Ramm, who describes the attack on the Bible:

A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the inscription cut on the tombstone, and committal read. But somehow the corpse never stays put. No other book has been so chopped, knived, sifted, scrutinized, and villified [sic]. . . . The Bible is still loved by millions, read by millions, and studied by millions.

Enduring Book

This Bible not only has been preserved against great opposition but also remains the best-selling book of all time. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Matthew 24:35). Think of the magnitude of this claim and what it says about the One who said it!

What man has produced can be destroyed; what God authors goes to the ends of the earth. The Bible is a book we can trust. It provides a charted course we can follow, a sure anchor when the storms of life blow. If we read and obey its truths, it will keep us straight and bring us to the safe harbor of eternal life. **BA**

Steve Henderson serves as an evangelist for the Church of God (Seventh Day) and lives with his wife, Daneen, and family in Heavener, OK.

Online

A story about **Steve Henderson's** alcohol and drug addiction appears in the archives of *Now What?* (www.cog7.org/BA/NowWhat). Look for "Back From the Dead" under Past Topics (Drugs and alcohol). Steve's story is also available in tract form. See page 3 for contact information.

Questions & Answers

I have trouble discerning between my emotions, the Devil's temptations, and the voice of God. How do I know when the Holy Spirit is talking?

The first step is deciding to follow God's Word fully by walking in all the truth we know. The Lord wills that we live in purity and holiness (1 Thess. 4:3-5) and promises to direct us as we acknowledge Him in every way (Prov. 3:6). God's plainest talk is found in Scripture, uncompromised by demonic influence or personal emotion.

Though God-given, emotions are not a reliable basis for decision-making. When we delight in the Lord, He gives us the desires of our heart (Psa. 37:4). This is not "name it and claim it"; rather, as we develop a lifestyle of worship and delight in God, He directs our yearnings, our emotions.

The Devil's temptation leads to destruction (John 10:10). Resist him, and ask God for protection from his deceitful ways.

Pray for the Holy Spirit's anointing and for wisdom to know the voice of the Lord (James 1:5). Seek godly wisdom from Christians gifted in discernment and experienced in counsel. We may receive quick and clear direction at times, but then situations drive us to our knees and the heavens seem silent. Accept this as the Lord's invitation to seek Him more diligently and yield to Him more fully. Though the answer lingers, wait for it. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you (James 4:8). God speaks softly; His counsel is always in harmony with what He already said in the Bible.

— *Elder John Howell*

Where is Enoch, if he didn't see death (Heb. 11:5)?

Enoch is in the grave, just like all the faithful listed in Hebrews 11. Verse 13 states, "These *all* died . . ." — including Enoch, mentioned in verse 5.

To "see death" has more meanings than to experience death. Hospital caregivers may encourage families to leave the room so they will not "see death" when a loved one expires. Perhaps Enoch was

whisked away to avoid witnessing some horrific loss of human life, and later died.

The text in question says that Enoch was "taken away" but does not say "to heaven." Assuredly, he was not taken to his eternal reward because Hebrews 11:39 says that the faithful of this chapter "did not receive the promise." They will be rewarded when the last generation of believers are rewarded (v. 40).

This understanding from the close context fits perfectly with the statements of Hebrews 9:27 ("It is appointed for men to die once . . .") and of John 3:13 ("No one has ascended to heaven . . .").

— *Elders Max Morrow and Wesley Walker*

Is possessing icons of Jesus a form of idolatry?

Icon means "image." Here it refers to any physical representation of Deity: pictures, paintings, mosaics, statues, sculptures, etc. Our invisible Spirit Father God, can never be represented by icons (Deut. 4:9-12; 15-18) — with one exception: The Son, Jesus Christ, was God's perfect image, or icon (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). We need no other, and none is permitted.

Debate over depicting Christ physically has a long history in the Church. Roman Catholicism allows statues and paintings of Jesus for veneration, not for adoration. Eastern Orthodoxy permits pictures and mosaics, not statues. Many Protestants approve limited use of Christ-pictures but insist that they are not objects of worship.

Based on the second commandment (Ex. 20:4-6) and other texts (Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:22, 23; 1 Cor. 12:2; 1 John 5:21), we avoid use of pictures, paintings, images, statues, or other icons of Jesus Christ. Visual reminders of His humanity may be helpful for teaching children, but adult believers need not use icons for other purposes.

Simple reminders can easily become objects of reverence and opportunities for idolatry. Because that line is easily crossed, God warns us about this by prohibiting the use of images in worship. Let us heed the warning.

— *Elder Calvin Burrell*

The Bible: Rooted in History

There are solid reasons to believe that the Bible isn't just another book. by Richard A. Wiedenheft

During the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, many scholars held that the Bible was just a collection of religious stories invented, embellished, and handed down by Hebrew parents. Noah and Abraham were imaginary folk heroes, the Hittites never existed, and Moses didn't write the Pentateuch because the laws were far too advanced for his time. Further, the New Testament was believed to be full of errors and generally unreliable.

Even today, a few scholars, called *minimalists*, still claim there is . . . little or no history recorded in the Scriptures. . . . that ancient Israel as described in the Bible never existed, that Abraham, Moses, and Kings David and Solomon are fictional characters of Hebrew mythology, that the entire Old Testament was composed in the middle of the first millennium B.C. . . . by religious leaders seeking to establish a pedigree for a people just released from exile.¹

Archeological discoveries of the recent past, however, have thoroughly discredited the idea that the Bible is just a collection of folktales. And most scholars, even nonreligious ones, have gained a healthy respect for the historical record of Scripture. To be sure, many details have not been and never can be independently verified, but so much of the cultural context and so many details have been verified that we can be confident in concluding that the Bible is a book rooted in real history.

Below are samples of the many discoveries of archeology and history that corroborate the accuracy of Scripture.

Code of Hammurabi

In the winter of 1901-02 a French team of archeologists discovered in Susa (located in modern Iran) a *stela* (stone monument) dating from the eighteenth century B.C., roughly the time of Isaac and Jacob. Made by Hammurabi, king of Babylon, the eight-foot-high pillar contained the king's image along with some 282 laws, known as Hammurabi's Code. Originally in the temple of Marduk in Babylon, the pillar was apparently carried to Susa by some later conqueror.

The laws inscribed by Hammurabi reveal a high level of civilization and many similarities to (and differences from) the laws of Moses given to Israel about 300 years later. Hammurabi's stela provides silent testimony that Moses could have written down the legal system of the Pentateuch.

Ebla tablets

There was a time when skeptics doubted the historicity of Abraham and other patriarchs. Some said the term *Canaan* was incorrect, and they argued that the Hittites never existed. Then the Ebla tablets were discovered in the 1970s near the Euphrates River in northern Syria. Part of a royal archive, they are thousands of commercial, legal, and literary documents written in cuneiform script on clay. Dated around the middle of the third millennium B.C., centuries before Abraham, the tablets give evidence of a thriving, literate civilization in northern Mesopotamia. They use the term *Canaan* just as

Genesis does. They name the five “cities of the Plain” (Genesis 13:12; 14:2; 19:29) including Sodom and Gomorrah. They describe dealings with the Hittites, who periodically dominated much of that area from their capital in what is now Turkey.

Ancient Jericho

Scripture indicates that the Israelites under Joshua took Jericho after marching around it seven days. The walls collapsed; the soldiers stormed into the city and burned it. Sounds like a great legend, but archeologists have found evidence of just this sort of destruction to ancient Jericho.

Beginning in 1907, a German team carried out the first major excavation of Jericho. They found piles of mud bricks around the base of the mound on which the ancient city was built. Then in 1930 British archeologist John Garstang began work there. In a layer he dated to the middle of the fifteenth century B.C., Garstang found evidence of destruction by fire and of walls that had fallen outward so completely that the Israelites could have easily rushed into the city.²

British archeologist Kathleen Kenyon worked on the site in the 1950s. Using more modern archeological methods, she confirmed that the piles of bricks were from the wall that had collapsed and that the city had burned.

Disagreeing with Garstang’s dating, Kenyon placed the destruction around 1550 B.C., too early for either of the dates generally proposed for Joshua

(1440 and 1240 B.C.). However, contemporary archeologist Bryan Woods thoroughly studied Kenyon’s findings and believed her dating analysis was wrong. He concluded that Garstang was correct: “The pottery, stratigraphic consideration, scarab data, and Carbon-14 date all point to destruction of the city around 1400 B.C.E.”³

Dan stela, or ‘House of David’ inscription

The Bible records an ongoing struggle between the kingdom of Israel, with its capital in Samaria, and the Aramean kingdom ruled from Damascus. The respective kings, Ahab and Ben-Hadad, fought multiple times, as did their successors. Treaties

were made and broken; towns near the border frequently changed hands. But did all this actually take place?

In 1993 archeologists excavating at the site of ancient Dan came across dramatic evidence of this very conflict. In the ruins of a gate complex they found a large piece of a stela attributed to Hazael of Damascus. Two smaller portions of the monument were found nearby a year later. Pieced together, they reveal an amazing account of the struggle between Damascus and the “House of Israel” and “House of David” — names clearly visible in the inscription. Also visible are portions of what appears to be the names of kings Jehoram and Ahaziah, whom Hazael takes credit for

A Word of Caution

A great deal of archeological material is of questionable authenticity. Some antiquities dealers attempt to foist fake artifacts on the public to make money. Initial claims — the kind that make news headlines — are sometimes demonstrated to be false, and it is not uncommon for scholars to disagree about the significance of finds. Sometimes Bible students latch on to anything that appears to support their beliefs, without making sure the evidence is sound.

For example, an Israeli antiquities dealer recently announced discovery of a first century limestone ossuary (bone box) previously unnoticed in his collection. The ossuary itself was not unusual, but the inscription was. Translated, it reads: “James the son of Joseph the brother of Jesus.” If authentic, it could be a powerful witness for the historical Jesus.

Notable experts examined the find and proclaimed it genuine. Others were skeptical, especially given the fact that it was found in the dealer’s warehouse, not in the ground. After careful study, the Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) proclaimed that the ossuary was genuine but that the inscription was a forgery. However, supporters of the ossuary’s authenticity question the methods used by the IAA and note that not a single Christian scholar was included among their experts.

— *Richard A. Wiedenheft*

killing. According to the Bible, Jehu, who may have been cooperating with Hazael against Ahab, was directly responsible for their deaths.

Archeologists believe the stela was originally erected sometime between 840 and 800 B.C. to commemorate Hazael's victories over Israel and Judah (2 Kings 10:32; 12:17; 13:3). Soon thereafter Israel retook Dan, however, and the monument was broken in pieces and used as part of the new gate complex. The discovery is unprecedented because it is the first artifact that clearly mentions the name of King David.

Sargon II

Until the nineteenth century, the existence of the Assyrian King Sargon II, mentioned in Isaiah 20:1, was doubted by Bible skeptics. But that was before 1843, when the ruins of his entire palace were discovered at Khorsabad (in modern Iraq). Among the finds was a record of the destruction of Samaria, accomplished by Sargon's predecessor, Shalmaneser V, who died about the time Samaria fell in 722-721 B.C. In

the inscription on his palace wall, Sargon II takes credit for the victory:

[The inhabitants of Sa]merina, who agreed [and plotted] with a king [hostile to] me, not to do service and not to bring tribute [to Ashshur] and who did battle, I fought against them with the power of the great gods, my lords. I counted as spoil 27,280 people, together with their chariots, and gods, in which they trusted. I formed a unit with 200 of [their] chariots for my royal force. I settled the rest of them in the midst of Assyria. I repopulated Samerina more than before. I brought into it people from countries conquered by my hands. I appointed my eunuch as governor over them. And I counted them as Assyrians.

The spade of the archeologist unearthed direct confirmation of the Assyrian policy of resettlement as recorded in 2 Kings 17:24.

Confirming New Testament history

While the existence of Jesus has been widely acknowledged by secular historians, the details of the New Testament record have often been doubted. In fact, many scholars a century ago considered the New Testament full of errors of time and place — highly unreliable as a historical document. However, discoveries of the past century-and-a-half have demonstrated that the opposite is true. Luke, in particular, has proven to be a reliable historian!

Luke records that Jesus was born when Quirinius (Cyrenius) was governor of Syria, Herod

was king of Judea, and Augustus was emperor of Rome (Luke 2:1-3). Historians knew that Quirinius had been governor in A.D. 6-9, but this was not during the reign of Herod, who died in 4 B.C. Luke must have gotten his facts mixed up. But the discovery of a fragment of an inscription at Antioch revealed that Quirinius had been in Syria twice. The first time was 6-4 B.C., dates that fit with Luke's account.

Because he didn't agree with the Roman writer Cicero, Luke was believed to be mistaken in not placing Iconium in the district of Lycaonia, the same area as Lystra and Derbe (Acts 14:6). However, Sir William Ramsay discovered a monument that confirmed that Iconium, though very near Lystra and Derbe, was considered to be a Phrygian city — just as Luke had said.

The book of Acts is sprinkled liberally with references to various magistrates and officials. They are "proconsuls" in some areas, "governors" in others, "praetors" in some locals, "politarchs" in yet others. There are "lictors" or "serjeants." So many titles in so many places, and Luke gets them right time after time. He had done his homework!

No blind faith

The evidence cited above is only a small portion of what is available. Books have been written demonstrating general agreement between the biblical record and what has been discovered by archeologists and historians. Of course, this doesn't prove that every person,

continued on page 24

Online

Want to read additional quotes from scholars and more evidence for the Bible? Read the full version of this article on the *Bible Advocate Online* (www.cog7.org/BA).

You Say...

Many people say we should never serve on a jury to judge anyone; that is God's job. Does serving on a jury disobey the Lord's command not to pass judgment?

No, jury service is not disobedience. Each of us is born a criminal, for all sin is a crime against God. Faith in Jesus the Christ and in His paying the price for our crimes is a spiritual matter and should not be confused with the need to face the lawbreakers of this world and sit in judgment.

Being Christian does not exempt us from the laws and judgments of this world or from holding others to them by sitting on a jury. What we do on earth, whether Christian or not, will be judged by the world's standards.

Look at relationships vs. rituals, principles vs. rules, and ask, "Why?" Find the root principle. Study original intent behind the immediate situation. This is mindful application of principle as opposed to mindless enforcement of rules. Look at all things as a case history for your own situation. Make judgment in righteousness (John 7:24). Show no partiality (Prov. 24:23). Read Jethro's advice in Exodus 18.

— *Stephen C. James (inmate)*
Florence, AZ

"Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matt. 7:1). The Bible's word *judge* is from the Greek word *krino*, which has several nuances of meanings, like choosing, making a judicial decision, ruling, and suing. The key thought here is the idea of presiding over someone.

Verse 3 makes it clear that the problem is not in the judging itself but in the hypocrisy of judging others when you are the more guilty party. "First remove the plank from your own eye . . ." (v. 5). You should not stand in judgment of others when you are guilty of crimes of greater seriousness.

But should you excuse yourself from all judging?

Not necessarily. We need to be able and willing to judge when it is necessary, especially among ourselves (1 Cor. 6:1-3). If you are going to judge angels, you can certainly judge court cases. But do you really want to? That is an individual choice.

— *Wily Elder*
North Miami, FL

Biblical authority for serving on a jury is found in Romans 13. Paul says, "The powers that be are ordained of God" (v. 1, KJV). In other words, all levels of government (jurors included) are appointed by God. They are God's ministers for good to maintain law and order, to serve and protect us, and to punish those who deserve it (vv. 2-4).

Those who believe Christians should not serve as jurors or in other government capacities must believe that God appoints only the heathen and unconverted to these duties. We should be involved at all levels of our government to do our best to keep our nation's values founded upon the Word of God.

— *Steven and Rebecca Zuraff*
Newalla, OK

We Ask

Based on considerable fossil evidence, dinosaurs once roamed the earth. What is their relation to biblical history, and why are they not mentioned in Scripture?

Your answers to this question, if received by **February 15**, will be considered for publication in a future issue and may be edited for length and clarity. Please mail or e-mail them to the editor.



God by the

- God of **Genesis**, You created the world and made it teem with life.
- God of **Exodus**, You led Your people out of bondage and made them a nation.
- God of **Leviticus**, You established Your worship in Israel and now throughout the whole earth.
- God of **Numbers**, You are Lord of all, of the many and of the few (and of the alone).
- God of **Deuteronomy**, You are the great Lawgiver.
- God of **Joshua**, You lead Your people to victory.
- God of **Judges**, You always return Your people's heart to You.
- God of **Ruth**, You care for all and establish Your work through widows, the poor, and foreigners.
- God of **Samuel**, You raise up priests and prophets to do Your bidding.
- God of **Kings**, You establish and depose the rulers of people.
- God of the **Chronicles**, You do not leave Yourself without a testimony of Your mighty works.
- God of **Ezra**, You always show up when Your Word is exalted.
- God of **Nehemiah**, You rebuild and restore Your people time and again.
- God of **Esther**, all nations, peoples, and times are in Your hands.
- God of **Job**, You are sovereign over all, and no one can accuse You of wrong.
- God of the **Psalms**, You fill my heart with song, my mouth with praises, and my feet with dancing.
- God of **Proverbs**, You are God only wise, and in Your hand is all knowledge.
- God of **Ecclesiastes**, You bring all our vanity to the dust.
- God of **Solomon's Song**, You are my beloved, and I am yours.
- God of **Isaiah**, You are exalted, a God who fulfills His promises.
- God of **Jeremiah**, You are a God of great and mysterious ways.
- God of **Lamentations**, You are a God who weeps for His people.
- God of **Ezekiel**, You are a God of signs and wonders.
- God of **Daniel**, You are a God who honors faithfulness and brings low the proud.
- God of **Hosea**, You are faithful, even when I am faithless.
- God of **Joel**, You restore all that Your righteous wrath destroys.
- God of **Amos**, You warn Your people again and again of the dangers and deceits of sin.
- God of **Obadiah**, You will establish Your kingdom, God of all nations.
- God of **Jonah**, You show mercy to all who repent.
- God of **Micah**, You repeatedly show compassion to Your wayward children.

Book

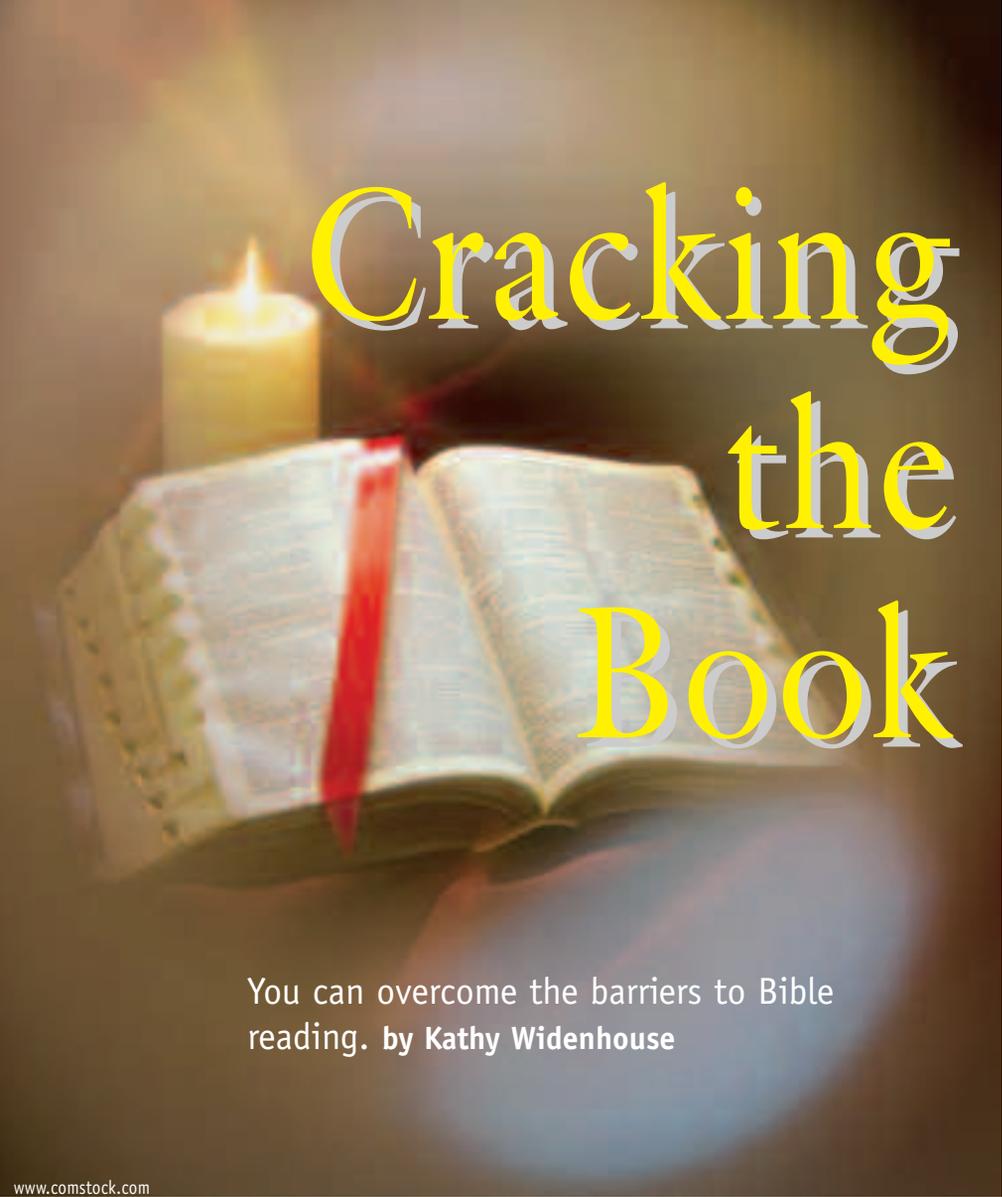
by Bob Hostetler

God of **Nahum**, You judge the nations in righteousness.
God of **Habakkuk**, You alone are the strength of Your people.
God of **Zephaniah**, You turn back our enemies and make us glad.
God of **Haggai**, You are worthy to be honored among men, among all nations.
God of **Zechariah**, God of visions, You show Yourself — a God of revelation.
God of **Malachi**, You are constant and pure, desiring a religion of the heart and not an outward show, and I praise You with my whole heart.

* * * *

God of **Matthew**, You are my King.
God of **Mark**, You are the Supreme Servant, the example of true humility.
God of **Luke**, You are Lord of all.
God of **John**, You are the Living Word, the great I AM.
God of the **Acts**, You are the Author of the church, the Pioneer of the faith.
God of **Romans**, You are the Salvation-Worker.
God of **Corinthians**, You are a God of order and righteousness who established both in Your church.
God of **Galatians**, You are the great Liberator, a God of freedom and grace.
God of **Ephesians**, You are a God of light and unity and unfathomable riches.
God of **Philippians**, You are a God of joy!
God of **Colossians**, You are preeminent, a God of glory.
God of **Thessalonians**, You are a God of hope.
God of **Timothy**, You are the great Shepherd.
God of **Titus**, You are always working, always doing good.
God of **Philemon**, You make brothers of all men.
God of **Hebrews**, You have made Jesus greater than all things: all priests, all covenants — all.
God of **James**, You are a practical God.
God of **Peter** and his letters, You are true and victorious in all things.
God of **John** and his letters, You are love and truth.
God of **Jude**, You are able to keep me from falling.
God of **Revelation**, You hold the future — and all my times — in Your hand! **BA**

Bob Hostetler lives in Hamilton, OH.



Cracking the Book

You can overcome the barriers to Bible reading. by Kathy Widenhouse

In American homes the Bible has taken on the status of an icon with little practical value, according to pollster George Barna. When asked, “What book has most influenced your life?” in a recent Library of Congress survey, respondents awarded the Bible the number one position. But only 44 percent read the Good Book on their own during the week, and of that group only 13 percent claim to read it daily.

“Americans revere the Bible,” says George Gallup, Jr., “but, by and large, they don’t read it.”

Why not? Reading the Bible is not illegal here as it is in Laos. It won’t lead to fines and imprisonment as it might in Vietnam. It doesn’t cost a week’s wages to obtain a copy as it does in the Philippines.

Perhaps you rank among the majority who do not read the Bible regularly on your own. You’ve considered it, been exhorted to try, or even attempted it a few times, yet you can’t seem to make it a habit. Here are eight obstacles that prevent us from cracking the Book – and how to get around them.

1 Time

“I don’t have time to read.”

But we do have time – if we read in spurts. *Unleashing Connection* reports that in one year, the average American reads 3,000 forms or notices, 100 newspapers, and 36 magazines – but only three books. These trends suggest why a *USA Today* print format is so popular. We like to get our information in short doses that are easy to digest.

“Half the books of the Bible can be read in 10 to 45 minutes each, and many of them can be read in less than 20,” says pastor and author Robert Morgan. “The entire Old and New Testaments can be read aloud slowly and with expression in less than 71 hours.”

Read just one chapter of the Bible each day, and in a month you will have completed the book of Proverbs (31 chapters) once or the epistle of James (five chapters) six times.

2 Inertia

“I have no idea where to begin.”

Poll your Bible-reading friends, and ask them what their favorite book is. Then try reading it. Or use a Bible with a built-in reading plan, such as *The One Year Bible* (Tyndale House) or *The Daily Bible* (Harvest House). These present Scripture in manageable portions and work through it in logical sequences.

3 Confusion

“I just don’t understand the Bible.”

Many of us think of the Bible as a technical manual written in

Christianese. But there are “biblical help” buttons a reader can push to get some quick guidance.

Translations. Choose an easy-to-read translation, like the *New International Reader’s Version* (written at a third-grade level) or a paraphrase, like *The New Living Translation*.

Reference tools. Invest in a few basic references, such as a Bible dictionary, a Bible atlas, and a concordance to bring clarity to the text.

4 Boredom “The Bible is so dull.”

Not if you enjoy romance (Ruth), adventure (Jonah, Acts), or conflict (Judges). There are tales of conquest and war (Joshua), scandal and suspense (David and Bathsheba, 2 Samuel), and deceit and corruption (Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5).

God stocked His library with a variety of genres for interesting reading: narrative, letters, poetry, history, and prophecy. If you naturally gravitate to the biography section in a bookstore, start with the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). If you love poetry, try Psalms first.

5 Need “I don’t see how the Bible applies to my life.”

The Bible offers practical advice on issues we face every day: love (1 Corinthians 13), leadership (Nehemiah), marital bliss (Song of Solomon), courage (Esther), and investments (Matthew 25). It has how-to articles (how to choose or be a good wife, Proverbs 31) and

time management models (Matthew 6:33).

Use a topical Bible arranged according to subject, and read every passage about an issue that challenges you. Take notes as you read. Become an expert on what Scripture says about that subject.

6 Church “I hear Bible readings in church. Isn’t that enough?”

“The Bible,” says Billy Graham, “is the road map for life.” When I examine a map, an expert like my pastor can show me the most effective route to take. But I become more familiar with how to navigate the road – life – when I read the map and follow it myself.

7 Negative baggage “The Bible reminds me of”

Many of us associate the Bible with negative experiences. Instead of examining Scripture on its own merits, we plop it onto a discard pile along with

dry worship, hypocritical congregations, and insensitive Christians from our past. Is that fair?

8 Discomfort “The Bible makes me feel uncomfortable.”

Conviction is one function of Scripture. “For the word of God is living and active,” says the writer of Hebrews. “Sharper than any double-edged sword . . . it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (4:12, NIV).

As we read the Bible, we may have to face some hard truths about ourselves. Is that worthwhile? Said the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, “The life which is unexamined is not worth living.”

Perhaps your Bible is secreted away in a closet. Don’t miss the treasure of God’s Word. Get it off the shelf today. **BA**

Kathy Widenhouse lives in Lake Wylie, SC.

Jumpstart Your Bible Reading

Use these references as a starting point for reading the Bible.

- *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*, by Max Anders (Thomas Nelson/Word)
- *The Bible Made Easy*, by Mark Water (Hendrickson Publishers)
- *Bruce & Stan’s Guide to the Bible*, by Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz (Harvest House)
- *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to the Bible* by Stan Campbell, James T. Dyet, and Jim Bell (Alpha Books/Macmillan)
- *QuickStart to the Books of the Bible*, by Greg Brothers (Pacific Press)

— Kathy Widenhouse

Still stuck on how to tackle the Bible? Try reading it through in two years with the help of a reading plan created by the Bible Advocate Press. Contact the BAP for a copy (see p. 3) or download it at www.cog7.org (Publications).

Reflections on the Koran

by Richard A. Wiedenheft

In recent months, I read the Koran for the first time. One reading doesn't make an expert, but I did come away with some reflections for sharing.

Relatively short

The paperback I read, translated to English by N. J. Dawood, is 435 pages, about the same length as the New Testament. The Koran is divided into Surahs, or chapters, arranged in no discernible order.

Salvation by faith and good works

Eternal life is earned by trusting Allah and His prophet and by a life of good deeds.

Therefore proclaim to all a woeful doom, save those who embrace the true Faith and do good works; for theirs is an unfailing recompense (Surah 84, The Rending).

But you, My servants, who have believed in Our revelations and surrendered to Our will, shall on that day [of judgment] have nothing to fear or to regret. Enter Paradise, you and your spouses. . . . Such is the Paradise you shall inherit by virtue of your good deeds" (Surah 43, Ornaments of Gold).

Given that it's a holy book for millions, that it shares much in common with our Bible, and that it's so short, I think it's sad that more Christians haven't read it.

One major theme

The overarching message is one of exhortation and warning: Accept Allah as the only God, Mohammad as his prophet and apostle, and the Koran as Allah's last and greatest revelation. Over and over, readers are warned of dire consequences if they fail to believe. Jews and Christians who refuse to accept Mohammad are considered unbelievers.

We have made the Koran easy to remember: but will any take heed? To Pharaoh's people also came the warning. But they disbelieved all Our signs, and We smote them. . . . Are your unbelievers better men than these? (Surah 54, The Moon).

Little narrative

Most narratives and characters in the Koran come from the Bible, though details don't always agree. Stories are usually not retold in full but are referenced as warnings about what

happens to those who don't obey God (Allah) and His prophets.

Long ago, We sent forth Noah to his people. He said: "Serve God, my people, for you have no god but Him. Beware of the torment of a fateful day." . . . They denied him. So We saved him and all who were with him in the ark, and drowned those that denied Our revelations (Surah 7, The Heights).

Hell

The Koran's concept of hell is similar to orthodox Christianity's, but the torments are often described in graphic and literal terms.

Garments of fire have been prepared for the unbelievers. Scalding water shall be poured upon their heads, melting their skins and that which is in their bellies. They shall be lashed with rods of iron (Surah 22, Pilgrimage).

Paradise

In dozens of passages, the reward of paradise is given in terms of never-ending pleasure: leisure, eating and drinking, fine raiment, gardens with plenty of

shade and running water, and bashful virgins as companions. Contrast this with the biblical view of the resurrected saints enjoying the worship and praise of God and fellowship with the Lamb.

But the true servants of God shall be well provided for, feasting on fruit, and honoured in the gardens of delight. Reclining face to face upon soft couches, they shall be served with a goblet filled at a gushing fountain . . . They shall sit with bashful, dark-eyed virgins, as chaste as the sheltered eggs of ostriches (Surah 37, The Ranks).

Justification for Mohammad

Parts of the Koran seem to be a justification for Mohammad's questionable actions. One involved his marriage to the divorced wife of his adopted son; another, his involvement with a slave girl. The Koran exonerates him in both and warns those who would find fault with what Allah has done.

And when Zayd divorced his wife, We gave her to you [Mohammad] in marriage, so that it should become legitimate for true believers to wed the wives of their adopted sons if they divorced them. God's will must needs be done. No blame shall be attached to the Prophet for doing what is sanctioned for him by God (Surah 33, The Confederate Tribes).

Jesus: God's Son?

While accepting that Jesus was miraculously conceived, the Koran scorns the teaching that He was the begotten Son of

God. On the other hand, it accepts that Mary was miraculously conceived, a tradition not taught in the Gospels. The Koran teaches that Jesus was a specially created mortal prophet like Noah, Abraham, and Moses (and Mohammad) and that He was taken to heaven when He died. It denies He was crucified and resurrected.

The angels said to Mary: "God bids you rejoice in a Word from Him. His name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary. He shall be noble in this world and in the world to come, and shall be one of those who are favoured. He shall preach to men in his cradle and in the prime of manhood, and shall lead a righteous life." "Lord," she said, "how can I bear a child when no man has touched me?" He replied: "Even thus. God creates whom He will. When He decrees a thing He need only say: 'Be,' and it is" (Surah 3, The 'Imrans).

They say: "God has begotten a son." God forbid! Self-sufficient is He. . . . Surely for this you have no sanction (Surah 10, Jonah).

Fighting for Allah

The Koran puts great emphasis on warring for Allah. This is seen as an essential of Islam, which means submission to Allah. By one count there are 123 passages — by another, 164 — that teach the importance of fighting against unbelievers in support of Allah and His prophet, and only a few statements indicate otherwise. This emphasis could be compared to the Israelite wars of conquest and defense in Canaan, but it completely contradicts New

Accepts Bible

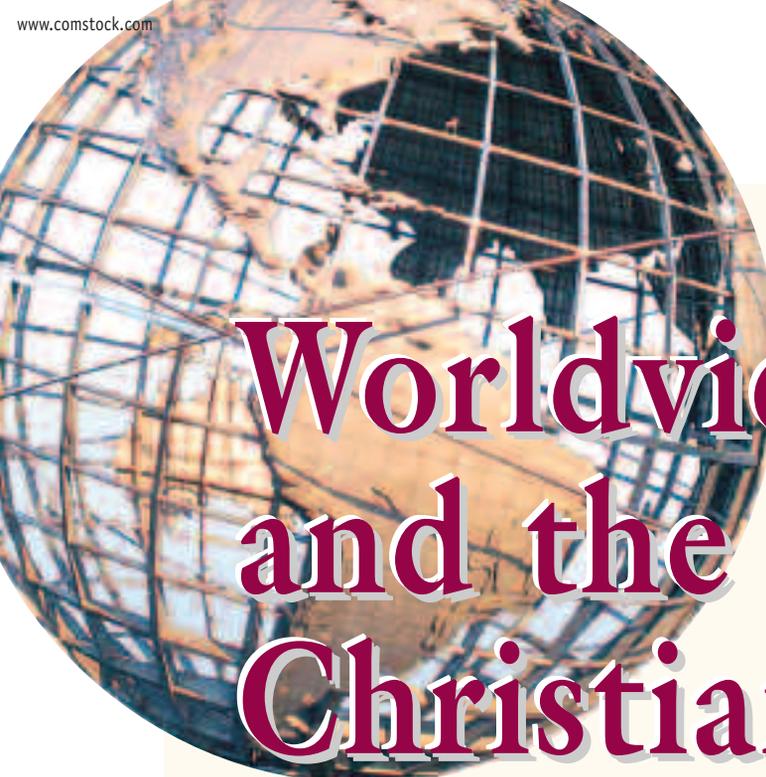
The Koran expresses respect for "Scriptures that have gone before" — the Torah and the gospel (Old and New Testaments) — and considers itself a confirmation of them. But it derides some Bible teachings, confuses the characters, and adds material not found in the Bible — supposedly revealed to Mohammad.

He [Allah] has revealed to you the Book [Koran] with the Truth, confirming the scriptures which preceded it; for He has already revealed the Torah and the Gospel for the guidance of mankind, and the distinction between right and wrong (Surah 3, The 'Imrans).

Testament teaching of evangelism by preaching, not by fighting. Indeed, the apostles were often persecuted, imprisoned, beaten, and banished, yet they continued to spread the good news without lifting the sword.

"When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefield strike off their heads and, when you have laid them low, bind your captives firmly. Then grant them their freedom or take a ransom from them, until War shall lay down her burdens. . . . As for those who are slain in the cause of God, He will not allow their works to perish. He will vouchsafe them guidance and ennoble their state; He will admit them to the Paradise He has made known to them. Believers, if you help God, God will help you and make you strong" (Surah 47, Mohammad).

The Koran is the primary holy book of Islam, the faith of the world's approximately one billion Moslems.



Worldviews and the Christian

What is thought and taught regarding the basic questions of life. **by Alex Ciurana**

What is the nature of reality?
What is a human being?
What happens when we die?
What is the significance of time and history?

These are important questions in the study of apologetics and worldviews. The conclusion a person draws concerning these foundational issues affects every facet of life.

Here we present seven notable worldviews and a Christian response to each. The order in which these are presented depicts the progression of Western thought in recent times.

Deism

A product of the eighteenth century's Enlightenment, deism emphasizes the transcendence of God. God is not personal; He does not interact with His creation nor intercede in the affairs of people. While the deist may live by the Bible's ethical teachings, he rejects miracles and the possibility of a personal relationship with God.

Christian theism (belief in the God of the Bible) conflicts with much of deism. Because Christians believe that the universe is an open system, that God can and does interact with His creation, we acknowledge God's sustaining and guiding hand in history and today. We believe in miracles. Its refusal to accept the Incarnation, Resurrection, or Ascension puts deism outside the pale of Christian orthodoxy.

Naturalism

Naturalism is a logical product of deism. After all, if God never visits His creation, perhaps there is no God at all. The denial of God's existence is the prime assumption of naturalism. This worldview teaches that matter — the material world — is all there is. Human beings, too, are merely matter. When a person dies, the material breaks down and ceases to be. There is no resurrection or eternal accountability.

Naturalism relies fully upon scientific enterprise. Biological evolution could rightly be called the "religion" of naturalism. Time is seen in the Western linear sense, but it has no meaning beyond the progress of the species.

The major tenet Christianity has in common with naturalism is the understanding of time moving forward in linear fashion. But toward what? Naturalism offers nothing of merit: no afterlife, no grand purpose, and no overarching theme. Naturalism robs humanity of inherent dignity, of the image of God we bear (Genesis 1:27). The Bible diagnoses the devotee of naturalism: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalm 53:1a).

Nihilism

Nihilism is brutally honest naturalism. If everything is a mere mix of matter and natural law, then there is no God, no afterlife, and no external source for verification of truth. Therefore, there is no knowledge, no human dignity or worth, and no hope. In short, everything is

nothing. There is no meaning to anything.

If every naturalist took his worldview to heart, it would be traumatic. No one can be a nihilist for long without going insane or committing suicide (which some have done). Such is the outcome of rejecting God's guidance.

The Bible teaches that Satan's to-do list consists of stealing, killing, and destroying (John 10:10). Nihilism steals a person's hope, kills a God-yearning spirit, and destroys the mind. It is one of the ruthless "doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1, NKJV). In contrast, the Christian knows no such despair, for our Lord has come that we "may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10b). The penetrating light of Jesus Christ conquers the darkness of nihilism.

Existentialism

In response to nihilism, existentialism seeks to preserve the person. Though all else may be a meaningless farce, humans are reality. It is solely up to each individual to make his/her life of value. The external world with all its absurdities must be overcome — not by faith in God but by the self. Each person is responsible for the meaning of his/her life. Thus, humanity is of prime importance.

While existentialism provides an answer to the dread of nihilism and restores worth to the individual, Christianity has little in common with it. Historical Christian faith holds that truth is objective — revealed in Scripture — while existentialism teaches it to be subjective — discovered within. This makes

existentialism shifty and pliable. For this reason, it has been utilized as a philosophical construct by atheist and theist alike.

Lastly, existentialism downgrades the importance of history, tending to see it as metaphor or myth. This is unacceptable to Christians who stake their souls on the veracity of historical facts: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Eastern pantheistic monism

So much for the evolution of Western thought. Enter eastern pantheistic monism (EPM), which has recently crossed the seas and arrived at the philosophical shore. With its non-dualistic dogma, EPM brings new angles to metaphysical questions. God is all, and all is God. Indeed, God can be found in either an infant's smile or a murderer's snarl. Seeing ideological distinction between the two is deemed as ignorance of the true nature of the divine.

Personhood and death are transformed in EPM. The vast majority that don't reach full spiritual acumen are doomed to reincarnation, the form of rebirth determined by karmic principles. Time is cyclical, forever turning like a wheel. Escaping this cycle of birth and rebirth is the goal. When this happens, prime reality is achieved and all individualities cease. Enlightenment is realized!

While most EPM ideologies are tolerant (at least in theory) of other views, Christianity cannot be so gregarious. The differences between Christian theism and EPM are so significant that reconciliation seems impossible. Christianity's God is separate from and transcendent over His creation. He is completely "other." Unlike EPM, Christianity maintains a distinction between good and evil, God and man, life and death, redemption and rebellion, etc.

Christianity also affirms the value of the individual. Each person remains the same person even after death. The Bible states, "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

New Age

Though the New Age movement is far from a solidified worldview, it has provided many with a more user-friendly mystical package than that of eastern pantheistic monism. One major appeal of the New Age is its adventurous view of humans — one of unbridled power, spirit guides, personal divinity, and cosmic travel. Humanity, through altered states of consciousness, can transcend earthly reality and enter into cosmic oneness. Many methods are used to achieve this experience, from meditation and alternative medicines to illegal hallucino-

No one can be a nihilist for long without going insane or committing suicide.

gens and projections of the psyche.

The New Age teaches that humanity is powerful and has a progressively brighter future. Its emphasis is more on the self as God than on the traditional eastern pantheistic emphasis on God as self. The difference may seem minor, but it can be quite a boost to the ego. Some of the great examples of the potential future of humanity for the New Ager include Buddha, various yogis, and even Christ himself.

With the New Age's burgeoning popularity, Christians must respond to its claims. Its eastern pantheistic principles can be rejected and attention given to its self-assured outlook on the nature and potential of humanity. The Bible declares, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

Painful as it may be to admit, this maxim is obviously correct. Violence, hatred, murder, theft, and greed are all around us and have been since the dawn of humanity. Progress promised by the New Age is not coming to pass. Thus, this worldview suffers from a lack of healthy reality and pragmatism. It doesn't work because it's not true.

Postmodernism

This most recent worldview presents us with a major shift in metaphysics. Instead of the time-enduring ontological construct of being-to-knowing, postmodernism usurps knowing and substitutes meaning. In fact, it maintains that "knowing" is not possible and that any worldview that claims to know is mistaken. Postmodernism rejects all claims to true accounts of anything. Nothing said or written or otherwise expressed encapsulates reality. Nothing communicates things as they actually are.

In the absence of knowledge, all that is left is meaning. If anything is meaningful, then embrace it. Once something loses its meaning, go and find new meaning. In the arena of postmodernism, philosophy is reduced to storytelling, not an examined search for truth.

The result of doubting God's self-evident truths decade after decade and century after century is the ultimate loss of confidence in knowing. We have gone from knowing what is real, what we are, what we are to do, and where we are going to, knowing absolutely nothing — except, of course, the fact that we can know nothing (an inherent inconsistency in postmodernism).

How pathetic intellectualism is when God is not invited to the party! We end up hurting ourselves and then think we're the wiser for it.

While postmodernism has been useful in disarming arrogant confidence in naturalis-

tic science and human reason, it has robbed more than it has given. Humanity has no intrinsic worth but must create worth through subjectivism and relativism. This is at odds with the clear biblical statement: "What is man that you [God] are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:4, 5).

Yes, the glory of the gospel is that we derive our worth not from our own intricacies and handiwork but from the One who declares us valuable. Valuable enough, in fact, to be rescued by His Son!

Theism

In the crowded maze of philosophies and worldviews, only one has stood the test of time as personally fulfilling and logically coherent. Only one adequately explains the origins of knowledge and engenders a confidence to trust that knowledge. Only one preserves the inherent dignity of man. Only one sees time — past, present, and future — as meaningful. And only one can speak assuredly of a person's final state after death. Christian theism is that one. How desperately our world needs the "old-time religion" offered in the Bible! **BA**

How desperately
our world
needs the "old-time religion" offered in the Bible!

Alex Ciurana, his wife, Christen, and their four children live in Spring, TX, and attend church in Galena Park. He has written a textbook on Christian apologetics. Scripture quotations were taken from the *New International Version*, except where noted.

To grasp the grace and truth of Christ with understanding and study . . .

The Synoptic Gospels

Every reader will notice many similarities among the first three New Testament Gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke — and many differences in style and content between them and the fourth Gospel, John. The first three Gospels are often called “synoptics” — Gospels with a common view.

There are contrasts among the synoptics, of course. **Luke** is a favorite because of its human touch. Written with a doctor’s precision, it is the Gospel for the Greeks and for Everyman.

Matthew is a top choice because of its many red-letter words and sermons. Revealing the Messiah, it is the Gospel for Jews and others who love the Hebrew Scriptures.

Mark may have been the base that Matthew and Luke edited and expanded. Stressing action, Mark was the Gospel for Romans. The differences among the three are less striking than their similarities. Ninety percent of Mark, for example, is also in Matthew or Luke, and many verses are nearly identical.

Facts about the Synoptics

- They are neither autobiography nor biography. Jesus wrote nothing we have record of, and the Gospels are more like “memoirs” of the apostles than a record of Jesus’ life. They record important facts about Him, recall some of His deeds and words, and bear witness to His mission.

The Kingdom Question

Jesus preached the kingdom of God. Did He refer only to a far-off time (Matt. 19:28), or did He also mean that the kingdom had already come in His ministry (12:28)? Many now agree that both elements were part of His message.

The kingdom was present in that God’s end-time activity to defeat evil and establish right was at work. In the person of Christ, the future kingdom had invaded the present (Luke 17:21). At the same time, the ultimate victory of God would not occur until the Son of Man would return in kingdom glory (Matt. 25:31).

Recognizing both halves of this truth, we can say that Christians live between “already” and “not yet.” The gospel proclaims the new world in the midst of the old. Salvation is both present and future. We have eternal life by faith now, but we await immortality in His presence. We have already been raised with Christ and entered His kingdom (Col. 1:13), but the final resurrection and kingdom consummation remains to be seen (1 John 3:2).

Material in this box adapted from Between Two Truths, by Klyne Snodgrass, pp. 18-23.

- Stories about Jesus are interspersed with His sayings. The Christ stories are often easy enough to grasp, while His sayings range from the simple to the difficult. The central theme around which the parables of Jesus and many of His sayings revolve — the kingdom of God — is itself a topic that requires careful study and distinction (see box).

- The Gospels were written in a certain place and time. The first century eastern Mediterranean world in which Jesus lived was Roman in its political structures, Greek in its language and culture, and Jewish in its religion. Each of these historical contexts factored strongly in shaping the words and deeds of Christ, and each makes its indelible imprint upon the biblical text itself.

Debunking the ‘Curse’ on Work

by LeRoy Dais

If you're like some folks in the workaday world, you consider work a curse placed on Adam and Eve after they sinned in Eden. Maybe the "I'd rather be fishing" bumper sticker on your car says it all for you.

The truth is, God *blessed* the first couple with work in His good creation — *before* they committed sin (Genesis 2:15). Work did become more difficult, however, after Adam and Eve fell into sin and were removed from the garden (3:17-19).

Later, God stressed the value of work, worded as a command: "Six days you shall labor and do all your work" (Exodus 20:9). Then He wisely added, "But on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest" (34:21), emphasizing the need for rest even during the busiest times.

Nothing in the Bible excuses humanity from doing what God commanded at the start. Paul went so far as to say, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Paul, of course, was not addressing those who are mentally or physically disabled but rather those who can work but don't.

Paul himself set an example as a diligent worker. Although he could have rightly received financial support for gospel service, he chose to support himself by manual labor and thus avoid burdening others (Acts 18:1-4; 2 Corinthians 11:7-9; 12:13-15).

Work does more than put food on the table; it builds our character, exercises our brains, and develops our bodies. If we work to the best of our ability, we gain the satisfaction of a job well done.

Occupations

A wide variety of professions contribute to our world (see box, p. 23). This list has multiplied in the last 2,000 years thanks to inventors, entrepreneurs, and planners. The explosion of electronics in our generation has opened even more doors.

God gives people many different interests, abilities, and talents to perform all kinds of jobs. A good example of this is the people who built the Hebrew tabernacle in the wilderness (Exodus 36:1).

After this construction, God instructed Moses to designate 8,580 Levites for the work of the tabernacle, "each according to his service and according to his task . . ." (Numbers 4:49). All God's work on earth is accomplished through people.

But God doesn't expect us to work on our own; He works with us to make us successful. Joseph experienced this after the hardships of his youth:

The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man . . . his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand (Genesis 39:2, 3).

Laban made this comment to his son-in-law, when Jacob planned to leave: "Please stay, if I have found favor in your eyes, for I have learned by experience that the LORD has blessed me for your sake" (30:27).

Employer responsibilities

Though the Bible does not mention the terms *employer* and *employee*, the master-servant relationship of New Testament

times comes close to that relationship. An employer is to love, serve, and encourage his employees, while he leads them and holds them accountable to perform their assignments.

Employers need to make a profit, but they must also treat their employees fairly and with dignity. After all, employers are responsible to someone, too: Christ (see Colossians 4:1).

An employer must do more than make demands of his workers; he must share his concern for them, lend an ear to their needs, and open his heart to their hurts. Job recognized that all humans deserve equal dignity and that God is aware when someone is treated unfairly:

“If I have despised the cause of my [employees] when they complained against me, what then shall I do when God rises up? . . . Did not He who made me in the womb make them?” (Job 31:13-15).

The Scriptures admonish employers to pay fair wages as well: “[The LORD] will be a swift witness against . . . those who exploit wage earners . . .” (Malachi 3:5). Employers should also consider how to help their employees improve their skills and earnings.

Employee responsibilities

Hundreds of Bible verses declare God’s desire for people to be totally honest. Consider two from Proverbs: “The LORD hates . . . a lying tongue . . .” (6:16, 17); “Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD” (12:22). Honesty with the employer and fellow employees is especially important. We may

be tempted to cheat, but the Holy Spirit helps godly workers avoid it.

A godly employee must be faithful to his employer and fellow workers by doing excellent work — even in the little things: “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much” (Luke 16:10). On-the-job faithfulness gets noticed. When Daniel was being considered for promotion in Medo-Persia, some tried to make accusations against him, “but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him” (Daniel 6:4).

The godly employee honors his employer even if his character and conduct are sometimes grating. “Servants [employees], be submissive to your masters [employers] with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh” (1 Peter 2:18).

Further, an employee should respect other employees. “Do not malign a servant [fellow employee] to his master [superior], lest he curse you, and you be found guilty” (Proverbs 30:10). Even if others damage our reputation or seek promotion ahead of us, we cannot allow ourselves to respond inappropriately.

A Christian can influence his workplace by faithful, unselfish conduct, even if sharing the gospel isn’t allowed. Such conduct may open doors to share Christ away from work.

Working for the Lord

The Lord provides us with work to do, as well as strength and skills to do it (Colossians 3:23, 24). Our responsibility is to be faithful witnesses and messengers for Christ in our occupation, whatever it be. Work is not a curse! **BA**

LeRoy Dais works at the Church’s offices near Denver, CO, and also serves with Crown Financial Ministries. Visit Crown’s Web site at www.crown.org.

Bible Occupations

Approximately 320 occupations are mentioned in Scripture, many of which are similar. The 170 distinct occupations can be classified under 17 categories:

- Agricultural
- Arts and Entertainment
- Business and Finance
- Communications
- Food and Beverage
- Government Service
- Health and Education
- Hospitality and Household Services
- Legal and Social Services
- Manufacturing
- Military and Defense
- Mining and Metals
- Real Estate and Construction
- Retailing, Wholesale, and Marketing
- Science, Industry, and Technology
- Transportation and Travel
- Miscellaneous

— *LeRoy Dais*

Mail Bag

Timely and informative

Nothing has ever been so timely and informative as the [October and November issues]. October offered helpful insights on the dark side of the Web. It came at a time when I had received a letter from someone feigning to be fatally sick and offering to donate \$19.5 million to our church! I was toying with whether to pursue this alluring offer when my copy of the BA arrived! I tell you, it sealed my resolve to refuse.

Then came the November issue, specifically tailored for me. Having completed university but not yet endowed with a job (while most of my non-Christian friends are already working), I am burdened with the responsibility of looking after my people. The thought-provoking analysis on being forever grateful has helped me appreciate and accept the problems I am passing through at the moment. Thank you very much.

B. M.
Kenya



Cheers for November

I was thrilled when I read "About Death, Resurrection, and Future Life" [p. 15]. I am 100 percent with you and have been for many years. In funerals I conduct,

I speak of the great, final resurrection at the return of the Lord Jesus. I also loved the items by Monique Acosta, Josepha Gomez, and James Vasquez's poem. I call it a masterpiece.

L. B.
St. Petersburg, FL

Family ties

Dad was a 1940s editor of the BA in Stanberry. Later I enjoyed working there in the mail room, proofreading, etc. I relate these things to let you know that thinking of you and the BA is very akin to thinking of family. We appreciate the serious emphasis you make on the importance of the Word of God — both the Bible and the Son

I'm glad BA is available to the whole world on the Internet. I continue to be amazed at the rapid changes in technology and the increase of knowledge. When I had questions as a teenager concerning my faith, this one factor that I could see happening all around me gave me assurance that God's Word is the truth for humanity and that His plan will be carried out no matter what unbelievers think.

W. C.
Tulsa, OK

Superficial reading?

I would like to continue receiving the BA but have been out of work for over two years. I'd like to point out that the magazine has no real "bite" to it. Its articles are somewhat insipid — not hard-hitting. They are comforting and soothing but not deep.

K. S.
Kannapolis, NC

The Bible: Rooted in History

continued from page 10

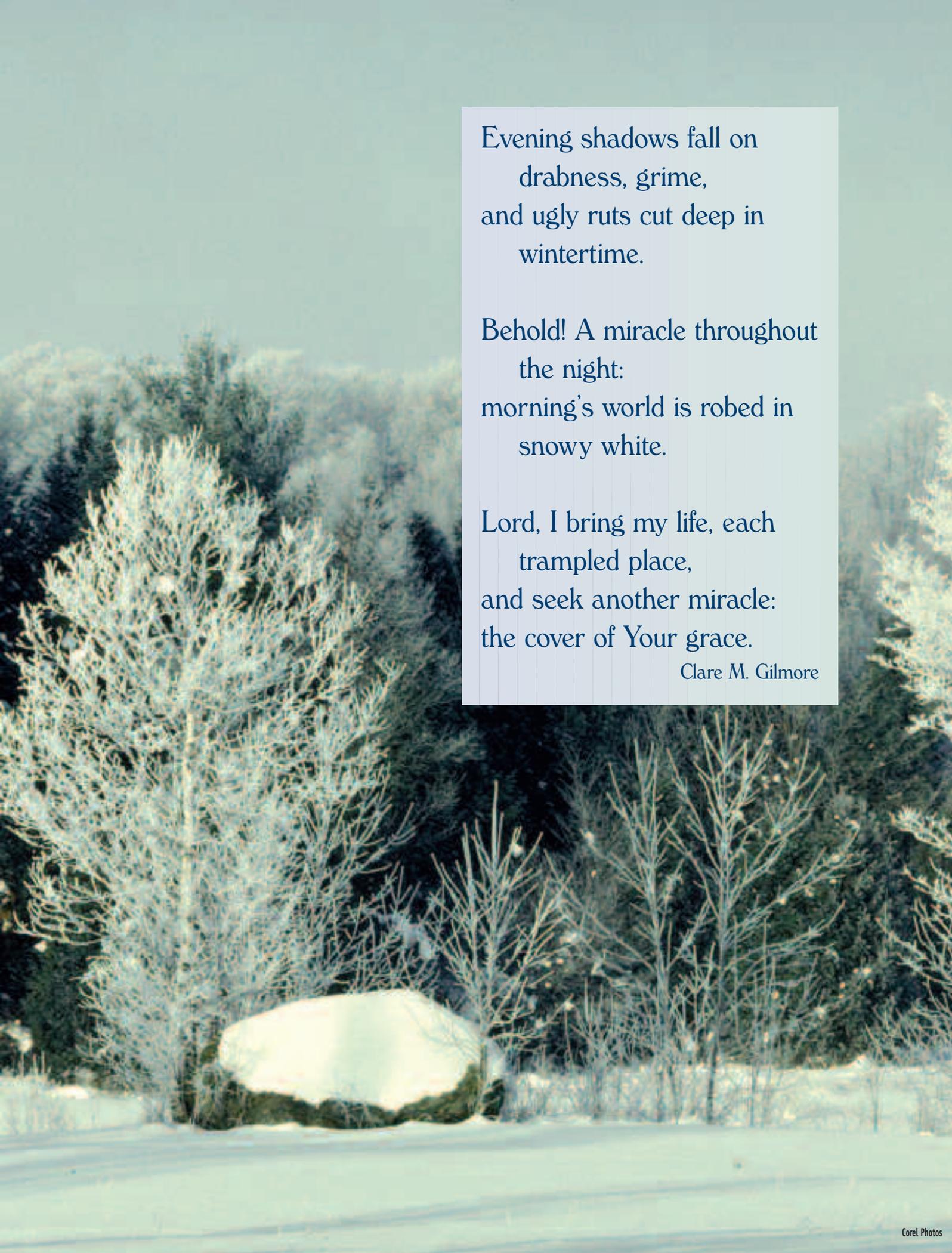
every location, and every event in Scripture is accurately described. There are ongoing debates about the dating of various finds and controversies about whether or not biblical events are in harmony with secular records. Skeptics will always have fodder for their efforts to disparage the Scriptures, but no longer can they simply dismiss it as a collection of legends and fairy tales.

As for Christians, while our confidence in God and the Scripture is a matter of faith, we can rest assured that it is not blind faith. Rather, it is faith based on the reality of a universe that cries out for an intelligent, powerful Creator and on Scripture that is rooted in real events of history. And if the Scripture has proven correct in so many details, it is not unreasonable to be supremely confident that it is also correct in its proclamation of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord — the way to life eternal! **BA**

Richard A. Wiedenheft and his wife, Darlene, live in Falls, PA.

References

1. "The Fight for History," *U.S. News & World Report*, 2004 Special Edition, p. 10
2. *The Foundations of Bible History: Joshua and Judges*, London: Constable, 1931; p. 145
3. Quoted by Bryant G. Woods in *Biblical Archeology Review*, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho?"; March/April 1990, p. 57

A winter landscape photograph showing a snow-covered ground in the foreground. In the middle ground, there is a large, smooth, light-colored rock partially covered in snow. Behind the rock, several trees are visible, some with snow on their branches and others that are dark green. The background is a soft, hazy blue sky.

Evening shadows fall on
drabness, grime,
and ugly ruts cut deep in
wintertime.

Behold! A miracle throughout
the night:
morning's world is robed in
snowy white.

Lord, I bring my life, each
trampled place,
and seek another miracle:
the cover of Your grace.

Clare M. Gilmore

CoG7 In Action



What's new with . . .

► Women's Ministries

- Newly revised Women's Guide Books are available for \$10, plus postage. See page 3 for contact information.



► Spring Vale Academy

- January 16 - Second semester of the school's 56th year begins. See p. 28.

Ministries Training Systems

- January classes in Houston, TX. For more classes and locations, see p. 28.

Publications

- New tracts from Bible Advocate Press: *The Divorce and Remarriage Dilemma*, *The Sacred Name of God*, *Maintaining Spiritual Health*

North American Women's Ministries

Mary Ling, Director

Our annual planning meeting in California kept the NAWM mission constantly in mind: "To unite women of the Church to further the Lord's work by encouraging each one to find her place in ministry." We had a healthy struggle working through some sobering questions, like "Is our organization effective?" and "Why do we do what we do?" We heartily agreed on the value this unique ministry brings to the Church and on our need to improve communication and develop a diverse funding base.

March 5, or any other Sabbath in March, has been designated as Women's Day Ministry. Its purpose is to provide opportunity for women to share their unique service and talents with the church. Women are asked to prepare and conduct the primary Sabbath worship program around the theme "Higher Ground: Unique in Our Differences." We suggest the service offering be set aside for the work of NAWM.

Plans have begun for a National Women's Retreat, perhaps March 14-16, 2006, in the Springfield, Missouri, area. Our '05 G. C. convention planning for women addressed placement, visibility, and maximizing our assigned space and bazaar contributions.

Our meeting included an enjoyable Sabbath with the Lodi church and at the home of Eva and Sharon Norton. Later that evening we ventured for a sightseeing trip of San Francisco — thrilling and sometimes breathtaking.

— Grace Sanchez

NAWM board meeting in Stockton (L to R): Pamela Madden Brown, Mary Ling, Sandra Shapitka, Marjorie McLaughlin, Romula Bergman, Grace Sanchez, Sylvia Corral



Be Free to Be!



The National FYC held its Youth Officers Meeting October 7-11, 2004, at the Youth Specialties National Convention in Dallas, TX. Present were Emmanuel Chavez (chairman), Naomi Diaz (co-chairman), Norma Chavez (secretary), and Kurt Lang (NFYC director). Ruben Marquez, Jr., Jason and Rose Rodriguez, and Dathan Cummings attended the YS convention, too!

“Why Am I Here?”

by Kurt Lang
National Youth Director

It’s been said that people need answers to three big questions: “Who am I?” “Why am I here?” “Where am I going?” The National FYC has adopted each of these for yearly themes.

In 2004 we helped youth with the first question. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, we are God’s children, adopted into His family, and joint heirs with Christ! He loves us as His own.

In 2005 we’ll continue our focus on fundamentals by answering “Why am I here?” We often answer this purpose question by saying what we’ll be when we grow up. What’s my career? We relate our purpose

to what we think we should be *doing* and how to prepare ourselves so God can *do* something through us. After all, Paul said, “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to *do* good works, which God prepared in advance for us to *do*” (Ephesians 2:10, NIV).

Or we hear that our purpose is to worship and glorify God. Regardless of how we worship, this, too, is something we may feel we *do* to bring God pleasure. It’s our job; our actions must fulfill that purpose.

On the other hand, I submit that our true purpose in life is not mainly about *doing* our careers and our worship but about *being* His faithful children.

Earthly children often see greatness in their parents and

want to mirror their success by growing up to be like Mom or Dad. Likewise, as God’s children, our purpose is to relate to our Father and honor Him by imitation. This is not just a phase we outgrow but God’s design for our physical and spiritual life. God’s intent all along was to walk and talk with us “in the garden” every day, in intimate relationship. He wants to be Father to us and we His true children. That’s why we’re here!

Think how proud parents are when children follow in their footsteps or live out the values they have instilled. God, too, is pleased when we choose to model our lives after Him. Our true purpose, then, is God’s design for His people: *to know Him and become more and more like Jesus* (Romans 8:29).

To develop this purpose, National FYC has chosen “Free to Be” for its ‘05 theme. As we learn who we are in Christ and the purpose for which God created us, we are freed from the world’s false perceptions of freedom. We are freed to serve the purpose for which God first designed us: to know Him intimately and reflect His image.

The world would say freedom is doing whatever we want. Not true. Freedom in God’s world is being freed from the bondage of sin and becoming what God intended us to be all along. Then we realize our full potential. I am *free to be* what God created me to be: His child who walks with Him and reflects His glory. What greater and more liberating calling could there be?

Spring Vale Academy

Jose Acosta, Director
Jon Albert, Principal

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Compelled to Preach?

Ministries Training System seeks a few good men to study for ministry at intensive mobile classrooms this year.

Houston, TX - January 15-30
Owosso, MI (Eng) - May 29 - June 2

Dallas, TX (Sp) - May 29 - June 2
Denver, CO - July 5-8
La Puente, CA (Sp) - Sept. 3-8
Oregon - dates to be announced

For more information:

303-452-7973 (English);
713-674-5978 (Spanish);
training@cog7.org.

Golden Year

Congratulations to Garland (Guy) and Joyce Brunson of Inola, Oklahoma, who celebrated their golden wedding anniversary on December 16, 2004. A graduate of Midwest Bible College, he served as pastor for some years.

Major Events in 2005

January 16-22 - Sanctity of Human Life Week (anniversary of Roe v. Wade)

January 23-25 - Annual G. C. Planning Meeting in Denver
March 5-April 2 - Annual G. C. Prayer Initiative:
"Empowered Through Prayer"

March 25-27 - Oklahoma Men's Retreat (and Dover workday)

April 22 - Annual Lord's Supper Service in every church

June 12-18 - Dover Family Camp, near Kingfisher, OK

July 4-9 - General Conference convention in Denver, CO (see back cover)

Dedication in San Antonio

About 300 worshipers from San Antonio and across Texas gathered to dedicate the new facility at 1342 Ceralvo Street on November 27. Area representative Elroy Gold gave encouraging words in the morning. The afternoon service included an audio-visual review of construction, songs of praise, words of thanksgiving, and many prayers. Guest pastors and ministers joined pastor Abel Salazar in dedicating the building and praying for the people.

Ceralvo Street church has been affiliated with the General Conference since 1928. The land where the new church sits was obtained in 1951, and an older church was demolished to make room for a new one, dedicated in 1968. This is now the third structure on the property. The second will be “converted” to a fellowship hall.

Construction on the new building started under the leadership of Pastor Arnulfo Salazar, who died before it could be completed. Minister Manuel Solis, age 94, has experienced most of the changes on Ceralvo Street and continues service at this location with many of his descendants. Words cannot express how we felt while thanking God for this new house of prayer.

— Naomi Salazar



Convocation in California

The West Coast District Hispanic Convocation in Fullerton, California, was a great success in worship, learning, and fellowship. Peak attendance on Sabbath, November 27, reached 1,103!

Speakers on the theme “Strong Families: Invincible Churches” included Ramón Ruiz and Carlos Ceron, president and treasurer of the International Ministerial Congress; David Rojas and Josafat SantaCruz, presidents of the Church in Mexico and Guatemala, respectively; and Eddie Villalba, director of administration for the General Conference in Denver. Also, Elders Mario Mora and Rafael Parra from Florida presented the “Cristo Viene” plan for world evangelism!

The Spirit of the Lord was present throughout as attendees expressed appreciation often for a well-planned event. The next WCD Hispanic Convocation is planned for 2006 in Northern California. Join us!



Radio Glory in Italy

Bill and Debbie Hicks had the pleasure of meeting with two churches on the island of Sicily last September. The Italian church, under the direction of Pastor Roberto Torre, has congregations in Randazzo, Catania, and Termini Imeresi, Palermo, and other study groups.

Elder Hicks, director of G. C. Missions Ministries, worked with the Church to develop their 1503 AM “Glory Radio” station — the voice of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Italy — which aired for the first time in November. The trip was a special event for the growing church and for Debbie Hicks, who met two cousins in Sicily by surprise. Noah and Bryan Cleeton from the Sacramento, California, church, had studied in Athens, Greece, during the summer and set out to tour Europe and visit churches in Italy before returning home. It was God’s plan alone when Noah found cousin Debbie and Bill in Sicily; his brother joined them later. God’s amazing grace brings brethren — and family — together from all over the world.

International Tour

Argentina

The first keeper of Sabbath to preach the gospel in these regions was Adán Korp. He traveled the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul and the Argentine province of Misiones in the early 1920s. In Brazil Carlos Müller, Guillermo Geier, and Augusto Sommerfeld accepted the message.

The Geier and Müller families moved to Misiones province in Argentina around 1925. The Gustavo Meretz family arrived from Germany, was converted by the message, and hosted the first church services in their home. The first baptism of ten souls soon took place, officiated by Pastor Guillermo Geier.

Sabbathkeepers from Ukraine settled nearby and got acquainted with the others. In 1930 they began holding services together in a large barn owned by Federico Burger, pastor. Preaching was in both German and Russian, with Gustavo Meretz as deacon and translator. Other early pastors were Herald Fiege, Basilio Malczewski, Segismundo Hanatzki, Alejandro Oszurkiewicz, and Miguel Malczewski.

Members worked mostly in farm communities, and their families were numerous. This compelled the young people to leave home, sometimes at an early age, to build their own future. Some continued to farm; others started small businesses. But many of them, one way or another, within their possibilities and limitations, tried to spread the message of the gospel in new areas where they lived. This was the means used, in the Master's provi-

dence, to disseminate His children and form many small congregations, geographically removed from each other.

This summary prepared from reports of descendants of Church pioneers in Misiones: Albina Sommerfeld Burger (age 87), Rose Rapp Burger (82), Michael Malczewski (75), Horst Meretz (74), and Arturo Müller (73).

Recent progress

- 1970** - First personal contact with the Mexican church through the visit of José Antonio Vega, a Mexican minister then living in Guatemala
- 1976** - First National Executive Council, with Pastor Alberto Burger, president
- 1980** - Recognition in National Service Record, with headquarters in the city of Oberá, province of Misiones
- 1981** - Visitors from Mexico: Ministers Rosalío Alonso and Pedro Martínez
- 1983** - First Pastoral Council, city of Maciá, with provinces of Buenos Aires, Entre Rios, Misiones, and the republic of Uruguay in attendance
- 1986** - The church of Argentina becomes a member of the International Ministerial Congress of the Church of God (Seventh Day). Pastors Alberto Müller and Alfredo Dzik attend the congress in the Mexican city of Cuernavaca.
- 2004** - Church has approximately 1,100 members in 30 congregations. It has consecrated 12 pastors and 27 elders and deacons. Pastor George Gillig serves as president.



The General Congress of the Church in Argentina and Uruguay celebrated in October 2004 in Maciá City, 350 km north of Buenos Aires, Argentina. More than 600 brethren in attendance included Ramon and Rebecca Ruiz of the IMC and Pastor Abelardo and Nohemi Alarcón, missionaries from Mexico. The Church now operates Bethesda School, with an enrollment of 25 students to supply its need for teachers, pastors, and evangelists.

A People of the Book

A little boy was spending time with his grandmother. While exploring her home, he stumbled upon a large dusty, old Bible. "What kind of book is this, Grandma?" he asked.

"Oh, that's God's book," she replied.

With a smile, he suggested, "Then we should send it back to Him. He may be looking for it."

Next time you're at church, stop by the lost and found and notice the number of Bibles that have become separated from their owners. As a local pastor, I was always amazed that many of these Bibles remained unclaimed for weeks. Imagine that on a given Sabbath, no one was able to find a Bible. Through neglect or indifference, the Word of God simply disappeared from pulpits, pew racks, and purses. Would that affect the way your church would conduct its services, or would anyone even notice?

In 2 Kings 22 we read the story of a missing Bible that nobody missed. Eight years into his reign, Josiah had neither seen the Book of the Law nor heard it read. During a church workday, the high priest stumbled upon it in the attic of the temple. The words of this Book were read to King Josiah, and he was so greatly moved that he tore his robe (v. 11). This sparked one of the most significant revivals in the history of God's people as they renewed their commitment to His Word.

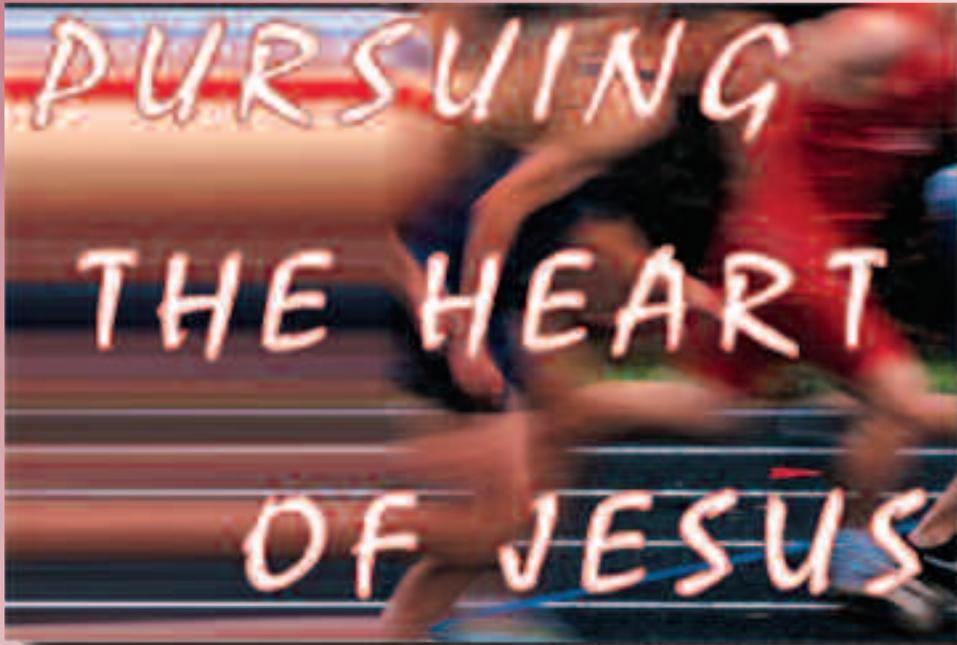
The Church of God (Seventh Day) holds a distinction regarding commitment to the Word of God. This movement began with Gilbert Cranmer's bold declaration of his passion for the Bible when he set out to preach: "My Bible, and my Bible alone." Since that time, the importance and centrality of the Bible have become part of our DNA. Accordingly, the very first statement in our Doctrinal Beliefs booklet tells what we believe about the Bible. It is from this commitment that this magazine, now celebrating its 142nd year, derives its name. And that's why this year's series on Christian apologetics begins with our defense of the Bible above all other so-called sacred literature. Yes, we are a people of the Book.

Such a distinction carries great responsibility. People of the Book must read it, meditate on it often, and apply its principles to daily living. I have mixed feelings about the push to return the Bible to America's public school classroom, for if the Bible is ignored or given only lip service at home, having it in the classroom can be misleading. In Josiah's day, there was only one copy of God's Word, and the Israelites had lost that! In our day, most Christians have several Bibles in different versions. Sadly, however, we find ourselves in the midst of a biblically illiterate culture.

People of the Book must be committed to care and accuracy in handling the Scriptures. Paul's counsel to Timothy to "rightly divide" the Word is a call to hermeneutics, the art of biblical interpretation. There is a correct way to interpret Scripture, giving attention to the genre of each text, the context of each verse, the intent of the author, and what the original audience understood when the words were first given. Taking a biblical truth out of its proper context and neglecting related truth usually results in heresy. God help us be true to our commitment to the Bible.

We are no ordinary people, because our faith in God is guided by no ordinary Book. So we bow to its authority. We marvel at the unity of its two testaments and 66 volumes. We rejoice in the clarity of its message and simplicity of its call. And let us be committed to rightly dividing its truths and defending its integrity.

— *Whaid Guscott Rose*



*2005 General Conference Convention
of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*



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