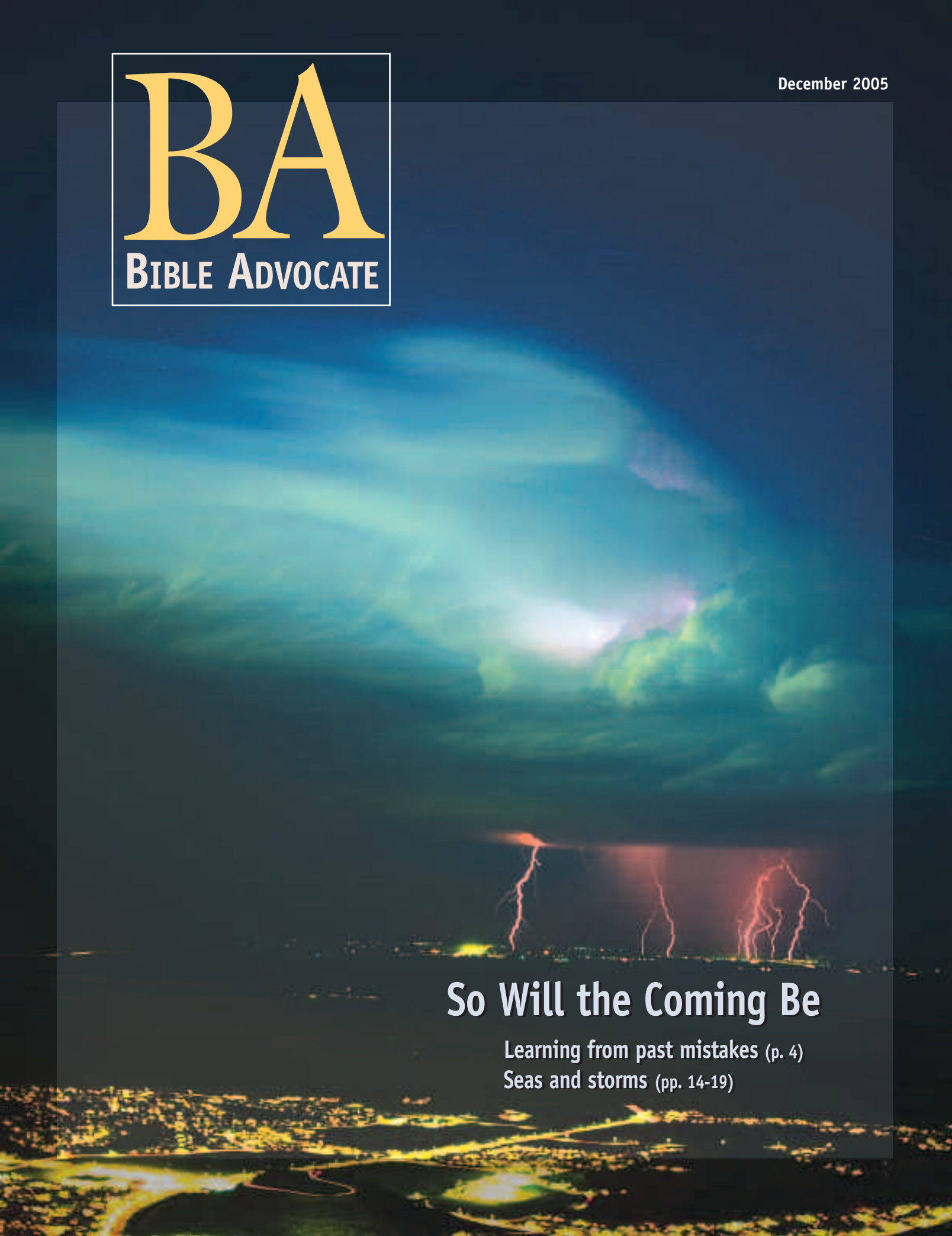




December 2005

A dramatic night photograph of a city skyline under a dark, stormy sky. Several bright, jagged lightning bolts strike down from the clouds, illuminating the city lights below. The sky is a mix of dark blues and greys, with some lighter patches where the lightning strikes.

So Will the Coming Be

Learning from past mistakes (p. 4)

Seas and storms (pp. 14-19)



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Did you miss the last issue on the church? View selections from it and download the last six BAs at www.cog7.org/BA.

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In the December issue of *Now What?*: a thief finds new life in Christ (<http://nowwhat.cog7.org>)



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Prophecy, Disaster



For a few years, we have reserved the fun
 and challenge of prophetic topics for our
 December issue. It's that time again.

On page 4, Richard Wiedenheft cautions us
 that all we think we know about the Second
 Coming may not be so. Then comes the story
 of a prodigal daughter who, faced with the
 truth of Christ's return, turned her heart toward Home (p. 9).

Bible prophecy is not mere prediction about the future. For the
 Hebrew prophets, it was even more a call to repentance based on
 current conditions.

In this issue, we include some of this "prophecy for the present."
 When hurricanes Katrina and Rita swept wreckage into Alabama,
 Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas, we invited reflections on the suffer-
 ing and loss that came full force to many citizens in those states (pp.
 15-19).

Now in October, a hurricane and floods in Central America and
 an enormous earthquake in Pakistan compete for headlines. The lat-
 est death toll in Southern Asia dwarfs that of the U.S. Gulf Coast,
 even as deaths in last December's Asian tsunami far exceeded those
 of all this year's hurricanes and earthquakes combined. Our hearts
 and hands go out to people in every place, even as we seek a Word
 from the Lord about such catastrophe.

Are hurricanes, earthquakes, and other natural disasters to be seen
 as fulfillments of prophecy? Do they serve as God's wrath and pun-
 ishment upon evil? Is it possible to discern what God is saying to the
 world through natural disasters? If so, what word should Christians be
 hearing from Katrina, Rita, Stan, earthquakes, and the tsunami?

A comforting, pastoral role is vital for those caught in tragedy, but
 it may also be important for a few among us to don the prophet's
 mantle. Prophets are not often politically correct, not friendly to the
 status quo. They are confrontational, not tactful. Bold, not bashful.
 Corrective, not calming. They prod and probe and push people to
 wake up, to make changes, and to think. In this sense, were not the
 storms themselves "prophetic"?

We present our responses — pastoral and prophetic — as a collage
 of views finding some support in Scripture, then let the reader
 decide. In the face of unspeakable tragedy for tens or hundreds of
 thousands, we speak to keep from being silent. And we urge your
 gifts to Disaster Relief (p. 28).

— Calvin Burrell

Missing the Coming

Can we avoid prophetic pitfalls that scholars of Jesus' day fell into? by Richard A. Wiedenheft

Hindsight is 20/20, but looking into the future can be risky business.

Christians see clearly how numerous prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled by Jesus in the New. Armed with this confidence, many Bible students boldly expound on prophecies of His second coming, proclaiming how and when this age will end and the next begin.

However, obvious as it is to us that Jesus fulfilled the Hebrew prophecies of Messiah, serious and respected scholars of His day, so confident in the Scriptures, failed to recognize Him as He ministered among them (John 5:39, 40). How could they have been so wrong? And what can we learn from their mistakes to avoid similar mistakes as we anticipate Christ's second coming?

Messiah long anticipated

Almost from the beginning of the world, the people of God anticipated a Messiah. In Eden God promised that the woman's Seed would deal with Satan (Genesis 3:15). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were told that all peoples would be blessed through their offspring (12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). But who would this Seed be? When would He come? How would He crush Satan and bless all nations? There was very little information to go on, but the expectation of a Messiah persisted.

In the eighth century B.C., God raised up the prophet Isaiah, who warned people of impending judgment but also

held out hope of future blessings. He told of a Branch in David's lineage who would be wise, glorious, and powerful, who would destroy the wicked and bring justice and bounty (Isaiah 4:2-6; 11:1-16). A century later, Jeremiah wrote of a king — also a son of David — who would be called "The LORD Our Righteousness" and who would bring justice, peace, and security to Israel and Judah (Jeremiah 23:4-6; 33:15-26). He foretold a new covenant under which people would have changed hearts (31:31-34).

These and many other prophecies seemed to point clearly to the restoration of Israel as a great nation under a Messiah king. But other predictions painted a different picture.

Which kind?

God told Adam and Eve that the heel of the woman's Seed would be bruised (Genesis 3:15). Isaiah prophesied a suffering Servant who would be "despised and rejected by men" (53:1-3; cf. 52:14). He would be smitten, afflicted, pierced, crushed, and wounded by God's will (53:4, 5), yet He would bring healing to broken lives, "open eyes that are blind," and "free captives from prison" (42:1-3, 7). He would "bring justice to the nations" and be a "light for the Gentiles" (42:1, 6).

Of course, we quickly think of New Testament passages that reveal how Jesus fulfilled these predictions. But try to put yourself in the shoes of the people who lived before His time. The prophecies that spoke of a wise, just, and mighty king seemed so plain. Perhaps he would be

David himself, resurrected from the dead. Surely the Messiah would restore Israel's greatness and avenge her enemies after so many centuries of oppression. Surely He would bring the nations of the world under His authority. This is the messianic vision that captured the imagination of "Bible students" in Jesus' day.

But what about the suffering, the rejection, the insults? What

about being a light to the Gentiles? These prophecies didn't seem to fit with the popular notion of a conquering king, so they got little attention. And the fact is that not Abraham, Moses, nor the great teachers of Torah — not even the prophets themselves — had clear understanding of just how God's plan would unfold *until the Messiah actually came*.

Compliance? or Choice?

The whole thrust of Jesus' message and ministry is that God wants worshipers to worship Him in spirit and in truth. He wants people who, having tasted the fruit of good and evil, choose freely to serve Him and be part of His kingdom. This is in stark contrast to the nature of political powers on earth that operate on forced compliance with rules and regulations. Human governments don't care what people are thinking on the inside; they just demand obedience. God, on the other hand, wants obedience from the heart, based on devotion, faith, respect, and love for Him.

The Old Testament sages tended to look for a son of David who would usher in a strong, powerful government that would restore them to national independence and greatness. Instead, they got a Messiah who offered a kingdom of God that transcended all human governments, requiring the surrender of human hearts, a spiritual rebirth, greatness based on service, dying to self, new life in Jesus Christ, and citizenship in a spiritual kingdom.

Consider the disparity between forced compliance and being born again by a changed heart in relationship to the Second Coming. We tend to look for a Christ who will come in power and glory and rule the nations with a rod of iron. We envision Him leading a great army, fighting physical enemies, and bringing law and order to rebellious peoples. The threat of plagues is held over the heads of those who refuse to comply.

Is this the ultimate answer to our problems? Will utopia come through force of law and threat of punishment? Or will it come through the spirit? Could we, like the Bible students of Jesus' day, be looking so intently for a physical solution when the one God has in mind is a spiritual one that changes the heart?

— Richard A. Wiedenheft

Obvious Signs? or Complete Surprise?

Some Bible students believe the Second Coming can be anticipated by careful observation. World conditions will get worse and worse, and a specific series of identifiable events will culminate in Jesus' return as He intervenes to save humanity from self-destruction.

Others believe that world history will continue on a somewhat normal track until it is suddenly interrupted by the return of Christ, which will be unexpected by all except those who are always ready (Matthew 24:42, 44, 50).

Some Christians resolve this apparent conflict by dividing the Second Coming into two phases, or events. First will come an unanticipated rapture of saints who will, without warning, be taken to heaven to be with Jesus. This will be followed by specific events, including a time of Great Tribulation, that will culminate in the glorious appearing of Jesus several years later. This view, popularized by the fictional *Left Behind* book series, is rejected by the *Bible Advocate* and by the majority of evangelical scholars.

The point, however, is that just as uncertainty existed about the nature and timing of the Messiah's first coming, so great uncertainty exists today about the exact nature and timing of the Second Coming. We would do well to learn a lesson from the first coming and embrace Jesus' statement to His disciples just before He ascended to heaven: Don't be concerned about times and dates that God has established (Acts 1:7).

— Richard A. Wiedenheft

When Messiah came

When Jesus began His public ministry, a great deal of speculation swirled about Him. Could He be the long-anticipated Messiah, or not? Most of the religious leaders soon dismissed Him (Matthew 12:23; John 7:40-52), and even His disciples had their doubts, especially when He began to speak about suffering and dying. Peter rebuked Jesus for such talk (Mark 8:31-33). The two men on the Emmaus road lamented, "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21).

After His resurrection, Jesus reminded them about what He

had earlier taught them:

"Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (vv. 44-47).

Jesus pointed out all the prophecies that people of His day had overlooked.

But the disciples still didn't get it. Moments before His

ascension into heaven, they questioned Jesus again. "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). The disciples still expected a glorious kingdom for Israel and didn't understand that the paramount problem for people was sin, not military oppression. Their greatest enemy wasn't Rome; it was the Devil and death. Their greatest need wasn't national independence but spiritual liberty through forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

Jesus didn't answer their last question, but what He did say is a most instructive statement to us in understanding the future:

"It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (vv. 7, 8).

In other words, don't worry about timelines and dates; just do what you're supposed to do!

Opened eyes

Ten days later, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the disciples finally began to see that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel in a way that went far beyond what they had expected. He was the Seed of Abraham through whom all nations would be blessed. He was the Son who would inherit David's throne forever.

To the crowds who accused the Spirit-filled apostles of being drunk, Peter said:

"No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In

the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams” (2:16, 17).

Peter then proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth as the long-awaited Son of David. Later he preached:

“Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed’” (3:24, 25).

Now the crowds could see what they hadn’t seen before: how the prophecies pointed to Jesus and were fulfilled by Him in such detail. Before, they could only see the Messiah as a conquering king. Now they saw that He was indeed a conqueror. He triumphed over sin and the Devil – humanity’s real enemies – by dying and rising again (Colossians 2:15; Ephesians 6:12). And they saw clearly how it was all foretold in Scripture.

Most people of Jesus’ day, including serious “Bible students” of that time, missed Him completely. They failed to recognize that the Messiah was both a suffering servant and a righteous king and that the messianic prophecies would encompass more than one coming. They tended to focus on their physical problems, not realizing that God is primarily concerned with spiritual matters: the reconciliation of human hearts to the Creator.

What about the future?

With the advantage of the New Testament, we take a suffering Messiah and a Second Coming for granted. But is it possible we become so focused on some scriptures about the future that we miss others? Is it possible we look for a single event when God has more in mind? Is it possible that our expectation of Jesus’ return according to one scenario means that we could be unprepared for the real thing? Many sincere, diligent students of Scripture through the centuries have looked at the prophecies to predict how and when they would come to pass, and they have been wrong. Are we so much smarter?

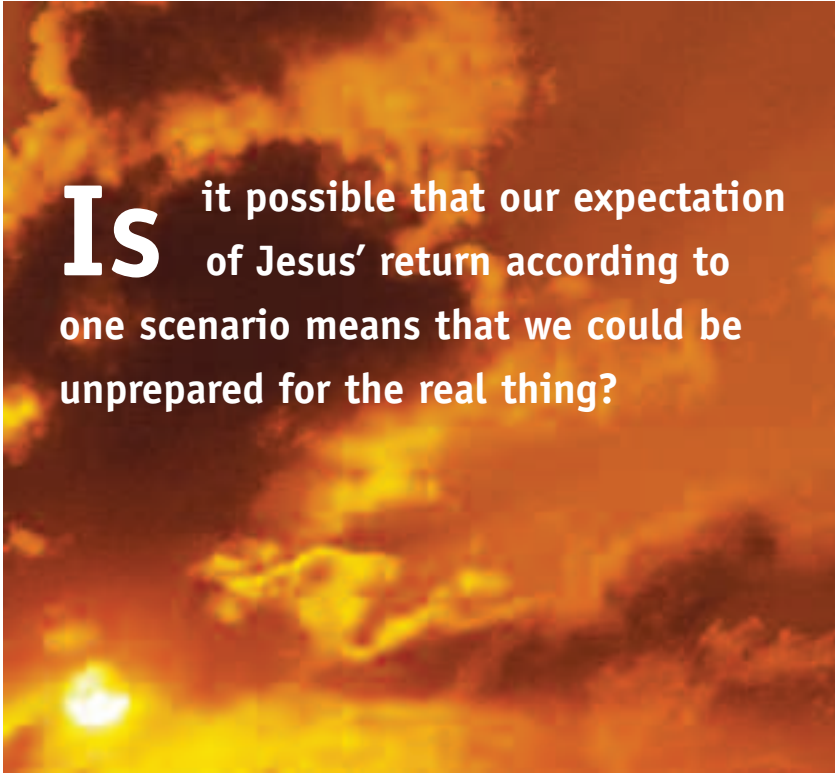
The fact is that God is in control, not feeble humans. We know only what He’s chosen to reveal in His Word – and we can easily misunderstand that.

We should approach the whole subject with a great deal of humility.

Scriptural confidence

We can be confident that Jesus is returning to the earth in power and glory. This is consistently and plainly taught throughout the New Testament by Jesus himself (Matthew 24:30), by the angels at His ascension (Acts 1:11), by the apostle Paul (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17; 1 Corinthians 15:23), and in the book of Revelation. Associated with Jesus’ return is the resurrection of the dead and a judgment (Matthew 25:31-46; 11:20-24; 13:36-43; John 5:25-30; 1 Corinthians 15:52). Peter wrote of the day of the Lord, the destruction of the heavens and earth with fire, and the promise of a “new heaven and a

continued on page 11



Is it possible that our expectation of Jesus’ return according to one scenario means that we could be unprepared for the real thing?

Questions & Answers

Please explain the meaning of 1 Corinthians 15:24-28.

This text is at the heart of Paul's marvelous resurrection chapter: the fifteenth of 1 Corinthians. In a context devoted to our "blessed hope," these verses serve to anchor that future event in time. They answer the *when* question ("When will the dead be raised?"), just as the *how* question is covered later in the chapter (vv. 35ff).

The *when* begins in verses 20-23. Here Christ is declared now risen and "firstfruits" from the dead (i.e., those who have "fallen asleep"). Just as those born in Adam will follow him in death, so every person reborn in Christ will follow Him in resurrection to life – in due time. When is the proper order for saints to be raised? Verse 23 is emphatic: "Afterward . . . at His [Christ's] coming."

"Then comes the end . . ." (v. 24a)! The words that precede and follow this potent phrase are plain and easy to outline:

- I. The end will come when, or after, Christ returns (vv. 23b, 24a).
 - A. Christ comes to put an end to all other kingdoms (v. 24c) and subdue all His enemies, including death (vv. 25, 26).
 - B. Christ delivers the perfected kingdom, now entirely under His authority, to the Father (vv. 24b, 28a, b).
- II. The end means that God will now be "all in all" (v. 28c).

Please examine this outline closely, in light of the Bible text before you. It leaves the following questions, at least, to be addressed:

1. Is there a gap between the coming of Christ (v. 23b) and "the end" (v. 24a), as suggested by the outline's first line? Christians who fail to see a millennial reign of Christ *after* His coming close the gap by teaching that the end comes immedi-

ately upon Christ's return. We take another view, that Revelation 20 and other texts seem to require a thousand years of restoration under Christ's rule on earth prior to the end and that the introductory "Then" (v. 24) is expansive enough to permit this millennium.

2. What about verse 27, an exception statement to verse 25? It protects Jesus' sovereignty over all things in the kingdom, without adding to its events. It says, in effect, "The One who puts all things under Jesus' feet is *excepted* from the all things under His feet."

3. How do we understand the saying that Jesus "delivers the kingdom to God the Father" and "will also be subject to Him . . . that God may be all in all"? Rather than contrasting the Son with the Father, verses 24 and 28 seem intended to confirm the eternal unity and supremacy of the God we first knew as Father. All authority and all things in the universe will then be under the creator God who shared them with His Son (Matt. 28:18). For another use of "all in all" in the context of resurrection, see Ephesians 1:20-23.

4. What implications does the text have for traditional teaching? First, that the resurrection of the dead is not already past, as some teach (2 Tim. 2:17, 18), but rather awaits Christ's return. Until then, the dead are "asleep" (1 Cor. 15:18-20). As long as people die, the last enemy – death – has not yet been destroyed.

The second implication is that the coming of Christ is essential to biblical faith and hope (see also 1 Thess. 4:15-18; 2 Tim. 4:1; 2). If, as tradition has it, our immortal souls remove to heaven or hell at death, then two major apostolic purposes for the coming of Christ – to raise the dead and judge the world – are lost.

– Elder Calvin Burrell

Four women dressed in orange jump suits filed into the visiting room at the county jail and sat down. A Plexiglas barrier separated them from my Bible study partner and me for our weekly study and prayer session.

Of the four inmates, Angela (not her real name) was the only one brought up in a Christian home. Her father was a pastor, her mom a devout churchgoer. Angela knew chapter and verses for the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes. She could recite the Twenty-third Psalm and the Lord's Prayer by rote. However, she had failed to live what she had learned. This night Angela stared numbly at the walls and flipped aimlessly through her Bible.

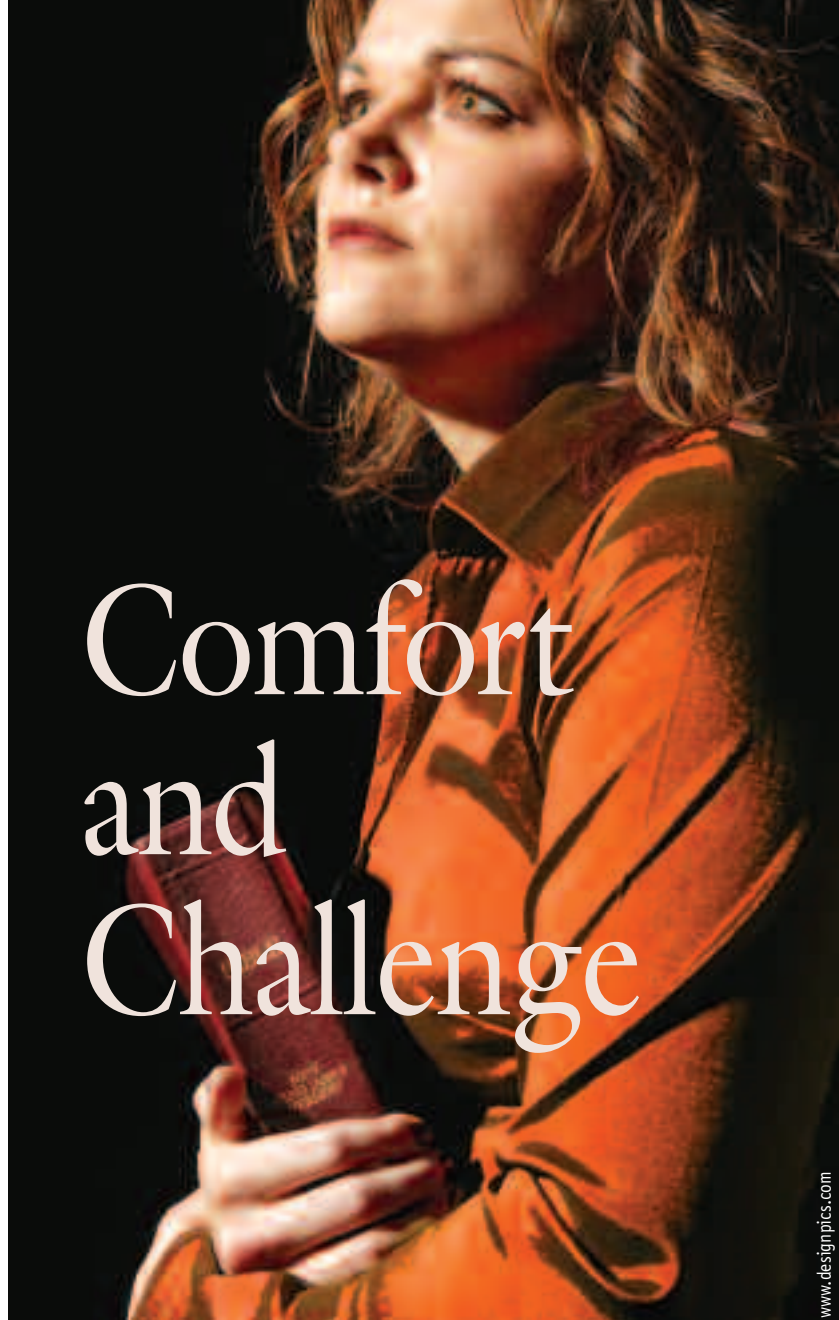
"How was your week?" I asked.

"My father died!" Angela blurted. "They'll take me to the funeral in handcuffs and chains, but they wouldn't let me see him before he died."

Angela wiped away tears. "I never got a chance to say I'm sorry . . . to say goodbye."

Our group shared with her our own experiences of grief and faith in God's ability to heal a broken heart. We talked about offering and receiving forgiveness, then turned to God in prayer, asking for His consolation in Angela's life. We read 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17:

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up togeth-



Comfort and Challenge

www.designpics.com

A prison inmate illustrates two aspects of Christ's return. **by Sheila Enstine**

er with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

"You will see your father again," I told Angela. "This is the hope of Christians everywhere: Christ's return and the resurrection of the faithful."

Although our words and the Scripture reading reassured Angela, she was faced with the knowledge that Christ desired a

sweeping transformation in her attitudes and behavior.

For two thousand years, Jesus' teachings about His second coming have both comforted and challenged Christians. Like Angela, we are comforted to know that eternal life awaits us in God's kingdom, and we are challenged to let Christ change our lives in the meantime.

Faithful and fruitful

Christian hope stands on the promise that when Christ returns, He will gather His followers to Himself. As we experience the natural and social upheavals He predicted, we know that Christ's appearing is at hand. In Matthew 24 Jesus warned that false messiahs and false prophets, wars and rumors of wars, natural calamities and social evils, a falling away of believers and a sense of dread throughout society, will precede His return. The challenge for Christians is to remain faithful and fruitful in that trying time.

Just as Jesus foretold, many committed believers today are persecuted, and many others, like Angela, have surrendered to the evil of our culture. The world seems blighted with hatred, violence, greed, addiction, immorality, and idolatry. We hear of wars and rumors of wars, and we despair of seeing peace in our time. Believers long for Christ's triumphant return and the inauguration of justice and truth on earth. In our hearts we cry out, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

Two vineyards

Christ tarries for a reason: He does not want anyone to perish. During the first light after His ascension and before the full daybreak of His return, the Lord of the harvest is working through His people for the salvation of the nations. Until He comes, we co-workers in the harvest are directed to cultivate two vineyards within Christ's kingdom.

The first is discipleship. Because Jesus vowed to prepare a place for us, we need to prepare ourselves for that holy habitation (1 John 3:3).

Angela set a good example of this. She learned to consider the time of her father's death and the subsequent months as a pruning experience. Jail provided solitude for increased Bible study and reflection on the mistakes she had made. Here Angela began to remove the unproductive behaviors of her old life and adopt new habits befitting her home with Christ.

Most Christians will not serve jail terms. However, all should participate in the inner work of plowing up the hard-packed earth of pride, clearing out

worldly distractions, and removing stony resistance to God's Word. The result of continued discipleship is a sanctified soul, equipped for the joyous new kingdom.

Second, we are called to cultivate the vineyard of evangelism. This is the work of grafting in new disciples of Jesus Christ, teaching them to abide in God's Word, and urging them to produce spiritual fruit. When the Holy Spirit indwelt the disciples at Pentecost, they received power to take the gospel "to the ends of earth" (Acts 1:8). This Spirit-inspired passion emboldened Peter when he preached to the Jerusalem pilgrims. The same Spirit compelled Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles throughout Galatia, Macedonia, and the remote edges of the Roman Empire.

Today the Holy Spirit sends Christians as ambassadors of the good news to hospitals, schools, businesses, government agencies, the media, and the ends of earth — including prisons. Again, Angela can teach us something here. While she increased Bible reading, praying, and meeting with visiting believers, Angela began to share with other women inmates her growing knowledge of Christ.

Great and dreadful day

The Bible does not tell us exactly when Christ will return, only that His return will be loud and clear. The "trumpet call of God" in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 echoes Joel 2:

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. . . . The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who



We are comforted to know that eternal life awaits us in God's kingdom, and we are challenged to let Christ change our lives in the meantime.

can endure it? (vv. 1, 11).

The trumpet call would remind Jewish Christians of the sounding of the ram's horn prior to the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:24ff). The blast announced a solemn time, when worshippers stopped to consider their sins and need of repentance.

Thus, the trumpet of atonement will announce the great and dreadful day of the Lord — great and dreadful because perfect justice and perfect mercy are the promise of Christ's kingdom on earth. His perfect justice requires the punishment of all unrepentant sinners. His perfect mercy, however, pardons all who appeal to Christ's redeeming blood. In this regard, His coming is both great and dreadful, His delay both a comfort and a challenge.

Our response

What will the Second Coming be like for you and me? If we use Christ's delay to reconcile with Him and those to whom we've been hostile, His return can be glorious. If today we submit to the Spirit's correction, obey God's Word, and love God's people, we'll rejoice in Christ's appearing. If we make disciples for Jesus, the sound of the trumpet will be exhilarating.

As Angela would tell you, our experience on that day depends on what each of us does with this day. **BA**

Sheila Estine writes from Ithaca, NY. Scripture quotations were taken from the *New International Version*.

Missing the Coming

continued from page 7

new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Peter 3:10-13).

In Revelation 20:4 John described his vision of a thousand-year period when Satan is bound and the resurrected saints live and rule with Christ. It concludes with a final judgment of Satan and all the rest of the dead (vv. 10-15). This is followed by the coming of a new heaven and new earth in which God reigns supreme, dwelling with His people in a world where "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (21:4b).

When and how?

But exactly how will all this come about? And when? Jesus' statement to His disciples before He ascended still answers these questions best, that times and dates aren't for us to know (Acts 1:7, 8). Jesus had told His disciples essentially the same thing on the Mount of Olives before His crucifixion:

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. . . . So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Matthew 24:36, 44).

Then He told them a short parable about a wise servant whose master went away. "It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns" (v. 46). The message for us is clear: Don't worry

about dates, about timelines, about end-time scenarios. Just be busy doing what you're supposed to do!

We think we know a great deal about how this age will end and what will happen thereafter. And we do. But we should learn a lesson from the scholars of Jesus' day who also thought they knew so much — and completely missed the most important Truth.

We do well to admit with Paul that there is much we don't see clearly. "For we know in part and we prophesy in part Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror . . ." (1 Corinthians 13:9, 12). When it comes to prophecy and the details of God's unfolding plan, we are looking into a hazy, imperfect mirror. We ought not to be carried away with intriguing scenarios about the fulfillment of end-time prophecies. There may be much more in those prophecies than we see. And much we think we see may not be there. A healthy dose of humility is in order.

If we know Jesus as "the way the truth and the life," we know what we need to know. In Him we are called to be busy doing the work of the Lord, to please Him in every way, to share the gospel as lights in this dark world, to shower even our enemies with His love, and to live as if every day could be the Second Coming for us. **BA**

Scripture quotations were taken from the *New International Version*.

Every journey through the Bible leads to . . .

Apocalyptic Prophecy and Revelation

Apocalyptic is a genre of Scripture associated with times of great duress. It came most often when God's people were oppressed and cried out for relief but received none, when they were tempted to despair of God's intervention on their behalf.

The book of Revelation is the Bible's most prominent apocalyptic writing, but the Old Testament contains several samples as well. In addition to Daniel 7—12, other obvious apocalyptic passages in the Hebrew Bible are Isaiah 24—27, Ezekiel 38—39, and much of Zechariah.

Consider that Isaiah wrote when the northern kingdom was destroyed by Assyrians. Ezekiel and Daniel prophesied when the Jews were in Babylonian captivity, and Zechariah while the few returnees from Babylon were rebuilding Jerusalem and being threatened for it. Revelation was written late in the first century when Christians were under the heavy hand of Rome.

Dozens of apocalypses were known to Jews and Christians from 200 B.C. to A.D. 200. First Enoch, 2 Enoch (similar to Daniel), 4 Ezra, Apocalypse of Abraham, and the Apocalypse of Baruch were part of the Pseudepigrapha, Jewish books not included in the Hebrew canon. Shepherd of Hermas, Apocalypse of James, Apocalypse of Paul, Apocalypse of Thomas, Ascension of Isaiah, and Apocalypse of Peter were written during the Christian era under a pseudonym.

Common elements in apocalyptic material are

- dramatic scenes involving beasts, mountains, rivers, stars — like something from a Star Wars movie (Dan. 8:2-14; Zech. 6:1-7).
- natural calamities that produce cosmic chaos, ushering in the day of God's judgment (Ezek. 38:19-22; Isa. 24:18-20).
- terrible crises and no apparent hope for God's people except

His promise to intervene with a new messianic age (Isa. 27:12, 13; Zech. 1:14, 15; 8:1-8; Dan. 12:2; 7:19-25).

- conviction that somehow God is still in control and will overcome all evil (Isa. 25:1; 26:1-4; Zech. 14:3-9; Mal. 3:1-4).
- encouragement and comfort for the people of God; exhortation to remain faithful and obedient (Zech. 7:9, 10; 8:16, 17).
- visions involving heavenly bodies, other-worldly scenes, angels, and other things (Ezek. 40:3, 4; Dan. 8:15-17; 10:4-19; Zech. 3:1-10).
- stylized numerical patterns, like seven seals, trumpets, etc. (Dan. 9:24-27; Revelation).

Apocalyptic should be understood by seeking its meaning to original readers. "The apocalyptic genre has been subjected to some of the most fallacious interpretations imaginable, largely because Christians are often not careful to understand it as intended and as originally heard" (D. Brent Sandy and Martin G. Abegg, Jr., *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, chapter 9. Much of the material on these pages is based on the same chapter, as well as chapter 13 of *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart).

We should not expect apocalyptic literature to give us a timeline of events, either past or future. Neither should we attempt to give specific meaning to each detail, metaphor, or figure of speech in the text. Like impres-

sionistic art, if you get too close, it is confusing or meaningless. It is better to step back and see a powerful image.

We should keep an open mind about how apocalyptic predictions will be fulfilled. Don't try to limit fulfillment to a precise, present understanding of the symbols. Rather, try to understand the primary, emotional message and appreciate the beauty and power of the imagery in which it is expressed.

Revelation's close connection with apocalyptic Scripture in the Old Testament is shown by the fact that it contains as many as 278 quotes or allusions from the books of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, Psalms, and others. This suggests that comprehension of the Bible's last book depends on a good understanding of the Old Scriptures, especially the prophets.

Some passages in Revelation are accessible to the average reader, even without an extensive knowledge. The messages to the seven churches (chs. 2, 3), for example, give instruction and warning to the church in every era. Several beatitudes, doxologies, and liturgical poems inspire the reader to praise and worship God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:3, 12-18; 4:8-11; 5:9-14; 7:9-12; 11:16-18; 14:7, 13; 15:3, 4; 16:5-7, 15; 19:9-16; 20:6; 21:3-7; 22:12-16).

The main theme of Revelation is that God's church is on a collision course with the powers of the state. Although the initial victory often goes to the latter, God is in ultimate control and Christ holds both the church and

the key to history in His hands. This book's overall message is that God will finally pour out judgment upon those who have caused the suffering and death of His faithful ones, and will bring eternal rest and victory to the faithful. Those who trust and obey Christ will ultimately be delivered and vindicated, no matter what appears to be happening on earth at present.

"What we must be careful *not* to do is to spend too much time speculating as to how any of our own contemporary events might be fitted into the pictures of the Revelation. The book was *not* intended to prophesy the existence of Red China, for example, nor to give us literal details of the conclusion of history. . . .

"Historically, the church has seen . . . a variety of world rulers as an expression of antichrist. Hitler surely fit the picture, as did Idi Amin for a generation of Ugandans. In this sense many antichrists continue to come (1 John 2:18). But what of a specific worldwide figure who will accompany the final events of the end? Does Revelation 13—14 tell us that such is to be? Our own reply is, not necessarily; however, we are open to the possibility Just as the opening word of Scripture speaks of God and creation, so the concluding word speaks of God and consummation" (Fee and Stuart, pp. 244, 245).

Approaches to Revelation

Some students primarily see the writer bringing comfort and hope to early Christians facing hostility from authorities and armies in the Mediterranean world. In this view, called **Preterism**, the beast power is Rome and its Emperor Nero, who initiated the first major persecution of Christians (A.D. 65).

Other students find Revelation's fulfillment spread from the first century until the return of Christ, and the "beast" enemy representing major foes of God's faithful, from pagan to papal Rome, to Islam, and others. This view is called **Historicism**. It embraces a somewhat more literal interpretation than Preterism.

Still others believe that the book from chapter 4 onward will be fulfilled in a climactic, seven-year period of tribulation after the rapture of the church to heaven. This is **Futurism**, the most literal of approaches to Revelation.

The viewpoint of **Idealism**, on the other hand, sees the book as an allegory of encouragement to all suffering believers at all times. Its message is that the Lamb of God is on the throne and will triumph over every foe. The idealist viewpoint sees little need to press the literal meaning or fulfillment of details in the text.

Storms on Uncertain Seas

Tempests and torments? Trust God. by **Jonah Charles**

As the tempest raged on the Sea of Galilee, our Lord Jesus lay confidently asleep in the ship. The disciples tried to steady her, but to no avail. Their strength insufficient, they turned to the Savior and cried, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38).

Embedded in this question were helplessness, hopelessness, fear, and doubt. The disciples were gripped with the terror of death.

The storms of life make many people doubt the ability and willingness of God to help. These raging storms are mirrored in the worries and anxieties of people's hearts, tossing them from one wave to the other as they grasp for help.

When the disciples remembered Who was with them and within them, they beckoned Him to their rescue. Then the Savior arose, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still." Immediately, there was a great calm (v. 39).

Then Jesus said, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" (v. 40).

Fear torments people when external storms are transplanted into their

hearts. Though the torrents and turbulence of the Galilee storm did not waken Jesus, the cry of His disciples did. When our Lord spoke peace to the troubled waters, the disciples marveled and wondered what kind of man Jesus could be that even the wind and the sea obeyed Him.

The Lord will do the same for us in the midst of our trials. Sometimes He lets us reach the point of desperation so we will recognize that He is our only hope. God has promised to finish the work He has begun in our lives (Philippians 1:6). He didn't promise smooth sailing, but He did promise safe arrival.

It is not so important what constitutes the storm that rages in your life. The Lord can calm it regardless, and He will speak peace to your heart.

Bring yourself under God's control. Hear His voice, and rest calmly in His love. Permit His power to deal with all that disturbs your peace. Keep your eyes fixed on Christ Jesus, and you, too, will enjoy His peace on uncertain seas.

BA

Jonah Charles is a CoG7 member in Rivers State, Nigeria.

A Storm Called Katrina

by Lennox Abrigo

The recent catastrophic hurricane season will certainly be a significant entry in the annals of American meteorological, economic, and political history. It will attain that distinction primarily because Hurricane Katrina created conditions that fulfilled many predictions that New Orleans would be destroyed by flood if torpedoed by a severe storm.

Unfortunately, that famous metropolis was not Katrina's only target. By the time the hurricane completed her morbid assignment, thousands of square miles of Gulf Coast were either buried under water or trashed across Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. So was the nation's confidence in economic factors to reverse escalating gas prices and in the government's readiness to promptly and effectively protect in a widespread disaster.

As photos of lost children, stranded people, and submerged churches appeared in the media, we all pondered why such bad things were happening to "good" people. Where were the promised miracles possible through the all-powerful God we pray to and worship? Does Jesus care about all of this?

Let me assure you that when tragedies assailed them,

Christians who triumph over adversity are sustained by a prior conviction of at least three facts. First, Paul's affirmation that Jesus already proved His love for humanity through His sacrifice on Calvary (Philippians 2:5-11). God's love for His children is a closed question.

Second, because we have all sinned as a result of inheriting Adam's fallen nature and death sentence, no human being is naturally good and is thus never justly entitled to acts of divine benevolence. Every blessing we receive is predicated upon God's grace and mercy and is bestowed solely at His discretion, for "Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22, 23).

Third, because Satan was cast down to earth and began his mission of stealing, killing, and destroying (John 10:10), saints and sinners alike cannot avoid trials and calamities, for they are natural perils of this sinful world. Knowing this, as much as he anticipated entering the "valley of the shadow of death," David expected his Shepherd to bring him through that perilous season (Psalm 23:4).

Thankfully, because Jesus loves us and knows that this world is unsafe, He has promised to one day eliminate tears, death, sorrow, and pain from the human experience and to destroy Satan permanently (Revelation 20:10; 21:4).

I encourage you to become confident of God's love and faithfulness, based on your own experience of His righteousness and power. Furthermore, allow the spiritual boldness of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to possess you whenever you encounter the natural perils of this sinful world, such as unfairness, loss, disappointment, or death. Remember that God promised Israel His companionship in order to preserve them through flood and fire (Isaiah 43:2).

I find one of David's testimonies pertinent in these circumstances:

You have caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; but You brought us out to rich fulfillment (Psalm 66:12). **BA**

Lennox Abrigo and his wife, Pamela, live in Germantown, MD.

Storms and Quakes: A Word from God?

How should we think and act in response to recent hurricanes along the American coast, or to other natural disasters anywhere in the world? The BA asked these ministers and counselors to offer thoughts and insights.

One hears speculation about how God may have used Hurricane Katrina to punish evil-doers in the Gulf Coast, specifically in New Orleans. But what about good people? What about Christians? If God does want to punish licentious folks, is He so limited that He can't figure out how to punish them without meting out horrendous losses to thousands who love and serve Him? And what about the fact that the same hurricane that destroyed so much on the coastal region brought life-giving rains to the



interior regions, where food for millions is produced?

God can punish whomever He wills, but the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah suggests He is capable of dealing with the wicked while preserving the righteous (2 Peter 2:9). On the other hand, the prophet Jeremiah suffered right along with the people of Jerusalem as God marched at the head of the Babylonian army, so to speak, to punish Judah. And plenty of righteous people in every age have died because of their faith.

Perhaps a better biblical parallel to Katrina is the collapse of the



tower in Siloam (Luke 13:4, 5). Jesus said that the eighteen who died there were not worse sinners than others, but “unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

Since the serpent tempted Adam and Eve in the garden, God's world has included forces of evil and destruction, both manmade and natural. To a great extent, the people of God suffer right along with everyone else. The difference is that they know God and trust Him to bring ultimate good out of evil. To wit: The ultimate disaster — the murder of the Son of God by human beings He'd created — turned out to be the means of ultimate victory over sin, death, and the Devil.

In the same way, those faithful throughout history who've died the tragic martyr's death are gaining victory over evil, a victory that will be fully revealed only when this temporary, physical world gives way to the eternal, glorious one.

Until then, we will never know precisely why God allows any natural disaster and why some suffer and others escape. But what we do know is sufficient.

For His children, God is all-powerful and all-loving. Nothing happens to them that doesn't first pass by His throne and that won't be used for our ultimate good and His glory!

— Richard A. Wiedenheft
Falls, PA

New Orleans, best known as home of the French Quarter and Mardi Gras, is only one example of major cities whose reputation has been built mostly on sin and indulgence of the flesh.

To accuse the president, FEMA, governor, mayor, and others caring for victims is to miss what has been building for centuries as the result of sin.

Look back to the terror attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., multiple hurricanes in Florida, and earthquakes in California. None of these brought the shootings, lootings, and rape reported in New Orleans. Nor was there such a wave of finger-pointing and defaming of government leaders in response to human suffering. Few seem to realize that government cannot protect its citizens from every form of emergency.

Was Katrina, then, a direct act of God's judgment? None of us knows for certain, but it seems unlikely that God would isolate one area of our country, or any other country, for judgment and allow the rest of the world to enjoy apparent protection.

Whether Katrina's victims are Christian, Muslim, or nothing — whether they live a deviant

lifestyle or a holy one — they need our love and assistance. They need to know that our confession to be Christian is not just another political label. The elderly and disabled must be cared



for long-term. Those who can work need to become productive and then be willing to give aid to others.

I am angry with nobody but Satan, who has kept generations of people bound by his chains of sin and who has, by his lies and deceptions, denied them opportunity to know God. May our love for humanity shine as never before, and may our stated desire to evangelize become fact, no longer just words.

— Elder Melvin Sweet
Stanberry, MO

Just when I think I have this big God figured out, He permits something I can't take in. Through both joys and sorrows in life, I have come to realize this single thing: He is God, and I am not. Sometimes God has to shatter some of my dreams to make room for Himself. He has already sacrificed His Son and promised me eternal life. Why isn't that enough?

Many of us feel a real need to make sense of things, to bring stability and predictability to life. We have an inherent need to feel safe. We should be able to count on our God to be consistent, shouldn't we?

God is always consistent about spiritual things. In His divine will, He is stirring our lives with the intent of leading us toward more glory — for us and for Him — than we can imagine.

Is this the end time? Of course it is. We have been living there for two millennia now. The world will continue spinning until time expires. Gravity happens, and the same nature that brings needed rain also brings tornadoes and hurricanes. We need to focus on the Lord and His will for our lives today, rather than try to decide if God is punishing us for something bad that happens. The U.S.,

Israel, Iraq – all will unfold according to God’s plan to redeem the world. I’m thankful God is letting me be a part of it!

– *Dave Listul*
Jamestown, ND

Katrina was not God’s judgment upon the Gulf Coast. It surely is a sinful place – one of the nation’s gambling and pleasure meccas. But in spite of its wickedness, I don’t believe that God deliberately sent Katrina as a display of His wrathful judgment upon the area.

In Matthew 24 Jesus indicated that both natural and manmade disasters would occur frequently between His two advents. He described these catastrophes as regular happenings, not judgments (v. 6). Jesus prefaced this discussion with “Watch out that no one deceives you” (v. 4, NIV), thus warning against false Christs who would point to such upheavals as validating their claim that the end had come. Jesus did not make these occurrences a sign of His return.

By what criterion can we judge between a natural disaster and God’s judgment? Most such judgments seem to be made whimsically, for sensational effects. I know of no scriptural standard by which hurricanes, tsunamis, tornadoes, and earthquakes can truly be measured as God’s judgments, rather than as natural events.

The forecast of Scripture is that God will pour out His judg-

ment upon the world at the end of this age. In describing judgment, Peter wrote:

Long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (2 Peter 3:5-7, NIV).

God’s patience leads to the salvation of humanity (v. 9).

– *Robert Coulter*
Mentone, AL

In insurance policies, a clause often excludes coverage for “an act of God.” When people are hurt, property destroyed, and extreme damage experienced, people turn their attention to God, saying either that God’s wrath has been released or that God is negligent in caring for His creation.



While the minds of people were turned to the Katrina tragedy, the assurances of Jesus Christ seemed distant – even for Christians. Though we have doubts about the viability of this world and the security of believers, the principles of Scripture remain true even in the face of disaster.

God’s Word says the result of sin is death and destruction. Perhaps, then, in a world gone horribly awry, we should not be amazed at the devastating consequences of sin in such death and destruction.

But the grace of God seems limitless for those willing to turn from their wickedness and seek His forgiveness. True Christians stand as salt and light, proclaiming the only hope available for humanity: the gospel of Jesus Christ. Brothers and sisters, we are a called-out people, “created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Ephesians 2:10).

For the faithful in Christ, God has provided a message: Regardless of unpleasant circumstances, hold fast your profession of faith and good works, continue to share the gospel, and you will receive life eternal with abundant rewards.

– *Chip Hinds*
Wister, OK

Some see God’s punishment in all of this, even connecting it to the United States’ urging of Israel to withdraw from the Gaza Strip. To blame natural

catastrophes on the Gulf Coast with events in Israel is a stretch. The message to us is the same as it was to Israel and to everyone else: Repent!

Even true repentance, however, does not assure that we will escape natural catastrophes or persecution in this life. Not all disasters are God's direct response to sin. We are not promised peace and security in this world. Many Christians who did their best to lead righteous lives suffered the disaster of severe persecution and martyrdom.

Disasters and trials remind us to examine ourselves and look for areas that need change. It is not helpful or scriptural to attribute pain, loss, disasters, and other things to specific events unless we can make a direct relationship. The bigger questions are how we can help the hurting in a compassionate way and what we can learn from the event, using objective facts, sound judgment, and doctrine.

— Dr. James DeFrancisco
Mishawaka, IN

Are hurricanes the judgment of God or "mother nature" just taking her natural course? Are they examples of rain on the just and the unjust, or was God punishing cities in which He couldn't even find ten righteous people? Shall I tell how I really see the situation, or give a socially correct analysis?

I believe God has a direct hand in these storms and that they're related to natural disasters predicted for the end times. It isn't

popular to say Sodom and Gomorrah perished because of wickedness, that a main problem was homosexuality, and that God destroyed them for it. But when the hour of final judg-



ment comes, will people still deny that God actually hates sinfulness?

We ought at least to ask whether we can learn lessons about the direction of our country by such events.

— Roy A. Marrs
Lodi, CA

As a volunteer chaplain at a shelter for hurricane evacuees, I asked an elderly couple sitting on milk crates if I could help. The lady asked why this had happened. I had no immediate answer but tried to reassure her that God had not forsaken her. After I helped in a few small ways, she and her husband called me an angel.

For many people, the language for the first few days was tears — the anxiety of not knowing why and what their future would be. A man from New Orleans was trying to refocus his life in light



of these events, trying to see where God and hope would fit. Others didn't want to talk about personal struggles, but I could see the uncertainty in their eyes. A woman in her forties said, "Jesus' teachings are coming through in the care and attention of disaster volunteers. Maybe this happened to bring me back to my spiritual roots."

Many people had an intellectual knowledge of Jesus and salvation but needed a stronger connection at this point in their lives. I do not know what this storm had to do with judgment, but it gave me an opportunity to share Jesus and His love.

— Pastor Wayne Hrenyk
San Antonio, TX

Quality and Quantity of Life

by Graham Hodge

Studies have confirmed that birthdays are good for your health: Those who have the most birthdays live longest!

It's no joke that all of us want a long, happy, and healthy life for ourselves. That is God's desire for us as well.

In the beginning, it appears that God designed man to live forever. Even after the Fall, with the effects of sin taking its toll, people lived to great ages. Adam died at 930 years; Enosh, at 905 years; and Methuselah, oldest of them all, at the ripe age of 969 (Genesis 5). By the time of King David, God had allotted threescore years and ten — maybe more for the strong (Psalm 90:10).

During the Roman Empire, life expectancy was a brief 22 years. In England, it had risen to about 33 years in Middle Ages and 43 years by 1850. In the early 1900s, it ranged from 35 to 55. Today life expectancy is about 75 years in many countries and continues to improve. Much of this is due to progress in societal, medical, and personal hygiene.

We should expect average

life expectancy to be greater still. Sadly, in spite of wonder drugs (or perhaps even *because* of them), we face threats to our health through heart disease, many forms of cancer, stroke, multiple sclerosis, motor neuron disease, and a host of other problems.

Previously, I have written here that we reduce such dangers through a diet rich in raw fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and seeds. The avoidance of tobacco, drugs, chemical additives, refined sugars, and hyper-processed food — combined with lots of fresh air, clean water, outdoor exercise, and moderate sunshine — will produce even more benefits.

The Bible and health

As followers of the Lord Jesus and students of His Word, we have more help available on this topic in the Bible, something that most unbelievers know nothing of. Countless pointers to God's way of health are hidden, and not so hidden, within these amazing pages.

God's Word shows us that He desires His people to be both healthy and happy — supremely blest! For example:

- Health advantages may be procured, and danger avoided,

by respecting the biblical separation between clean and unclean meats, as the Church of God has long known.

- Prolonged breastfeeding among the Israelites is seen as a factor in reduced breast cancer, and circumcision may reduce the incidence of penile cancer.

- According to recent studies, wine in small, medical amounts can help with stomach ailments, heart disease, and even cancer (1 Timothy 5:23). Of course, overusing strong drink can have a highly negative effect on our health as well.

- Researchers know that a happy disposition with plenty of laughter plays a major role in our health. "A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones" (Proverbs 17:22) is one of the greatest health tips of all time!

Faith and health

People who practice faith are healthier than people who don't.

A study of 1,077 students by Professor W. Oleckno and Michael J. Blacconiere of Chicago was published in 1991. They found that frequency of church attendance and strength of religious commitment correlated positively with measures of



PhotoDisc

wellness, such as fewer illnesses and less use of drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes.

Reader's Digest says, "Growing evidence links belief in God to better physical health. In 22 studies, frequent churchgoers had lower rates of a variety of illness" (Browder, 1995). The article "Your Mind's Healing Power" (*Reader's Digest*, November 1989) referred to studies that showed that

- socially active people tend to live longer than less active, separated, widowed, and single people.
- confiding in others has long-term psychological and physical benefits. It is well known that "A problem shared is a problem halved."

These findings harmonize with the Bible, which teaches us to treat others as family and attend meetings (Hebrews 10:24, 25). Scripture also says, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4) and "Confess your trespasses to one another,

and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16).

The church has always provided opportunity for wholesome physical embrace among brethren and friends. "Greet one another with a holy kiss," wrote the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 13:12). A hug or caring touch reduces depression, raises hemoglobin level, boosts the immune system, improves sleep, gives a sense of elation, and speeds recovery to the sick or injured. God has provided all this for us in establishing church fellowship. Space does not allow further look at the health benefits of music, singing songs and psalms, prayer, and a host of other church activities.

Anxiety and stress

Think of the importance of our minds in overall health. Jesus is the world's best psychiatrist. He counseled: "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the

day is its own trouble" (Matthew 6:34).

Psychological research has shown that chronic worriers not only imagine lots of gloomy outcomes compared to non-worriers but also tend to think their imaginary futures will happen. This impacts their health enormously. In *The Social Psychology of Industry* (1954), J. A. C. Brown listed about 20 illnesses linked to emotional stress and anxiety, including hypertension, duodenal and gastric ulcer, angina pectoris, asthma, migraines, diabetes, skin diseases, and lumbago.

As Christians, we learn to "Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you" (Psalm 55:22) and "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).

God has truly provided us the opportunity for abundant life in so many ways, including the physical. What a great Healer and Helper we serve!



“Where Are Our Names?”

Make sure you're listed where it counts most.
by **Lowell F. Padgett**

Skjold Photographs

The calendar read December 24, 2002. The clock indicated a few minutes past 10:00 a.m. Our home phone rang; it was the oncologist at the hospital where my wife was being treated for acute leukemia. The vicious disease had been discovered in Dorothy on Thanksgiving Eve, just one month earlier.

The doctor bore heart-rending news: Dorothy's white blood cell count had escalated severely. She might last no more than 48 hours. With my world flung upside down, I quickly contacted each of our children with the horrid update.

The farthest away was in Colorado. Say what you may about airlines, they came through and soon placed Walter and his family on a direct flight to Dulles Airport, about 16 miles from our Virginia home. And this was holiday time, when travel is generally booked solid.

I hurried to the hospital. I cannot recall what Dorothy and I said to each other. Each day of her prolonged stay, I would read aloud four chapters in the Bible. This day the reading began with Romans 5:1. It was hard to continue through a sea of tears.

Finally reaching Romans 8:1, I read, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus . . ." — and could read no further. After several attempts to complete the last chapter, I laid the Bible aside. My reading to Dorothy had finished with a vital thought: "no condemnation."

Death and design

Walter and his family walked into Dorothy's hospital room around 8:00 p.m. Their two children, Christian (9) and Chloe (7), ran to her bed, hugging her and talking. Young as they were, the children knew about life and death, of Jesus' second coming and the resurrection, and of being saved and secure in Jesus.

Dorothy passed away six hours later. She was 77.

After the funeral and 1,001 things taken care of, I turned my attention to the wording and design of an appropriate gravestone. I finally settled on

Dorothy L. Padgett
Oct. 3, 1925 – Dec. 25,
2002

Precious wife of Lowell F.
Padgett and loving
mother of John,
Deborah, Wayne,
David, Barbara, Amy,
Walter, Wesley, Samuel

Believing that a gravestone should carry a true testimony, I then had a line from that sweet song engraved:

My hope is built on nothing less

Than Jesus' blood and
righteousness.

Powerful question

Before the local engravers began their work and set the stone, they presented me with a computer-generated drawing of the proposed headstone. They also provided several smaller drawings for distribution to the children.

Several days after mailing the drawings, I called Walter and asked about the gravestone design. "We like it fine, Dad," Walter replied, "but Christian and Chloe asked, 'Papa, where are our names?'"

Their question hit my heart with powerful force. Those sweet children also wanted their names on Grandma's gravestone. They dearly loved Grandma Dorothy, too.

"Papa, where are our names?" I struggled with that

question, and then I knew what to do. I asked Kline Memorials to create an oversized footstone that would read

Dorothy L. Padgett
Grandmother of Christian,
Chloe, Eric, Margot,
Marissa

Kline's told me they had never before created such a stone. They liked it.

Treasure and lessons

During the months that followed, I thought often of our grandchildren's sweet question. There is treasure in it and lessons to be learned.

The most important lesson I have learned is the question itself: "Where are our names?" Social Security, credit cards, auto registration — the list of places that must record our names seems endless. But what really matters is that our names, by the grace of God, can be recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Is your name registered in God's heaven, dear reader? It can be done by receiving the free grace of God's love as expressed in Jesus Christ. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12).

BA

Lowell F. Padgett is a member living in Manassas, VA.

My Dwelling Place

Lord, what will my
mansion be like?
A grand, resplendent castle?
Or a dignified, stately manor?

I'd like to imagine
that the dwelling place
You're preparing for me
will be like that sweet,
cozy, peaceful home
I drive by each day
and gaze at so longingly.

I'd like to imagine
sitting down with You, Lord,
in my front room,
Visiting,
Chatting like long-lost friends,
Resting in Your warm embrace,
Basking in Your holy, eternal,
Joy-filled presence
Where my soul will never again
Know pain or sorrow.

Jennifer Anne F. Messing

Mail Bag



Catholics and sex

The Catholic Church has never taught that intercourse between husband and wife is a sin of any kind, as Brian Knowles claimed ("What's So Bad About Sex?" June, '05, p. 8). I'm writing to ask him to quote an official Church document to that effect or apologize for his mistake. . . .

For an accurate idea of what the Church actually teaches about sex and marriage (or any other topic), why not . . . read what she actually says. It's available free on the Web: [Papal] Encyclicals Online [www.papalencyclicals.net].

R. O.
Pearl City, IL

Reply from Brian Knowles:
Catholic theology has been in development for nearly two millennia. In early post-apostolic times, a break came between the Jewish way of looking at things and the approach of Greek and Latin Fathers.

The church Fathers adopted a platonic [dualistic] anthropology rather than the earlier Jewish one . . . with implications for human sexuality: ". . . Greek thought commonly viewed the body as inferior to the soul. They were constantly at

war with each other. The body was abhorrent, corruptible, and the source of sin. Hence, once Gentiles replaced the original Jewish leadership of the Church, marriage and the family began to be viewed negatively or with suspicion. Marriage came to be seen as an inferior way of life, for it was a concession to the physical impulses" (Our Father Abraham, by Marvin R. Wilson, pp. 171-172).

Wilson then quotes several influential figures to show how this dualistic approach began to influence Catholic theology: "Jerome (5th century), wrote: 'He who loves his own wife too ardently is an adulterer.' Augustine (also 5th century) said that the Hebrew patriarchs would have preferred to fulfill God's command to "be fruitful and multiply" without indulging in intercourse. But since this was obviously impossible, Augustine suggested that they must have had sexual union with their wives only reluctantly and out of duty" (Ibid.). "In a similar vein, Thomas Aquinas (13th century) taught that 'every carnal act done in such a way that generation cannot follow is a vice against nature and a sin ranking in gravity to homicide'" (Ibid.).

Generally speaking, Augustine and Aquinas were the two greats whose thought permeated the doctrine of the Church from their times forward. [In modern times, statements by the Pope and other Catholic authorities offer much the same approach.] Put simply, the Roman Catholic Church appears to teach that sexual relations between married people for the purpose of procreation is acceptable, but that sex between married people arising

from simple desire and sexual energy without the possibility of procreation is not.

Note: Read the full texts of R. O.'s letter and Brian Knowles' reply at www.cog7.org/BA.

Refocus

Regarding "Confessions of a Sin Junkie" (September '05, p. 4) . . . too much emphasis on "sin" causes low self-esteem. We are made in God's image and He said we are very good if we obey and try to do His will each day. We need to focus on God's love, forgiveness, repentance, etc. Thanks for letting me vent.

R. M.
Colton, OH

Origins and time

I agree with you ("Q & A," September '05, p. 7) and the early church Fathers that Jesus is eternal like the Father — had no beginning and has no end. [However,] since Jesus, as partly human, did not require a spiritual rebirth, I feel He was begotten when He was born. The same Greek word is translated both as "born" and as "begotten." One is born of a woman and begotten by a male. But a father does not beget a child until he gets a child.

Relative to time ("A Matter of Time," p. 22), I also feel that Jesus ate His Last Supper on a Tuesday evening, the start of Abib 14, in A.D. 30. The Karaite Jews start Abib 1 at a new moon when the barley is sufficient for a wave sheaf offering.

B. R.
Reseda, CA

**There is a wide horizon there;
I'm sure of that —
A place where heaven meets earth,
Where God meets man.**

**I just can't see
A sign of where it is
Or what is in between
Where I am and the line
Where He is.
Mountains? Demons? Depths?
Or nothing?
Am I already there?**

**O, Son, come quickly;
Burn off this all-enclosing fog
That holds me lost,
Not knowing where to turn,
To reach, to move.
I cannot find You.
Come to me!**

Edith E. Cutting

CoG7 in Action



What's new with . . .

Publications

- Free Literature Fund
Sabbath: December 31

Spring Vale Academy

- Openings for second semester, January 8, 9, 2006;
989-725-2391

MTS

- Summer Session,
June 12-22, Denver, CO

NFYC

- Registration for 2006,
p. 28

NAWM

- National retreat in
Springfield, MO,
April 14-16

A 'World of Thanks' from G. C. Missions Ministries



Bill Hicks, Director

When we sow gospel seeds around the world in different ways, it's easy to get overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the task. We take this opportunity to reflect on God's goodness to us and to consider your wise investment in the work of the Great Commission through these ministries. Our heavenly Father, working through His children, reaches worldwide to share the good news of humanity's only sure hope, Jesus Christ. Take a moment to read about the opportunities before us and consider how *you* can partner with us to go into all the world. Your special offerings to missions make this possible.

Church Planting - establishing new churches in the U.S. and Canada through an upcoming "Missionaries to America" initiative

Home Missions - encouraging growth within the local church through evangelism and training resources

Missions Abroad - supporting foreign missions on every inhabited continent; helping you and your congregation work together to bless those in need

Disaster Relief - responding to those affected by natural and manmade disasters when — not if — they strike.

Managed Project Funds: "Christ is Coming!" With 400 associates donating \$20 per month, we support workers in 14 countries. We're seeking 4,600 more associates to help us reach out to many more waiting countries.

Change for Your World. This annual offering of your pocket change helps the International Ministerial Congress change your world. Response is growing. We hope many more of you will place your daily change in a jug, box, or drawer and send it every summer to support our growing church in other countries through the IMC.

To our Father in heaven, to our Lord Jesus Christ, and to those of you inspired by the Holy Spirit to faithfully support these ministries, we extend a world of thanks as we close another year and pray for His continued blessings throughout the coming year.

African Mission

by Robert Crawford

I express sincere gratitude to Jesus for His care and protection during my two-month mission trip to eastern and central Africa July 8 - September 6. I also thank Missions Abroad Director Bill Hicks for [selecting me] to serve the Church in Africa.

July 8-10, D. R. Congo.

Seminars were held with pastors and leaders of 22 groups, dealing with pastoral ethics, tithing, leadership, and Sabbath observance. Alain Zibondo, leader of the church conference, received a bicycle, and six persons were baptized.

July 11-18, Zambia. John Njogu and I arrived in Lusaka to attend the annual conference and assist its administration, directed by Pastor George Ntambo and his board. Five bicycles were given to ease the burden of walking several miles in missionary work. The Solwezi church rejoiced when they received 40 zinc sheets to replace their grass roof. The conference ended with 48 persons being baptized.

July 19-August 8, Kenya. Fifty leaders of East and Central Africa gathered for training at Kerichio Valley Hotel, with Kenya, Zambia, Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Democratic Republic of the Congo represented. With enthusiasm, they looked forward to building on knowledge gained from the previous year's leadership training.

This year Deacon Courtney Johnson from the Gloucester, England, church taught the importance of financial integrity and how to keep accurate records. Sister Sandra Smith, wife of the British Conference chairman, taught on Bible roles for women and how they can help in the Church. My son, Adrian, also attended.

In a moving ceremony witnessed by many, participants received certificates and heard Deacon Johnson's encouragement to continue their pursuit of knowledge and their quest to be leaders whose lives are hallmarks of honesty, integrity, and accountability — for the glory of Christ. At this ceremony, the Kenyan Conference received 24 bicycles and Tanzania, four.

We visited the land of the Masai and the Obuya church in South Nyazana. This church has 42 orphans. Most of their parents have died from AIDS, and some members are HIV positive. We assisted the women's ministry with cash and other things to care for these children.

In Keore Gucha District and Nakuru church our seminars dealt with cultural issues. With men and women present, John

Njogu and I sought to encourage the Church and correct problems relating to family life.

In Chesoen Bomet District we were greeted by about 300 brethren and focused on teaching for two nights. Deacon Johnson taught the youths, while I chose topics of love, sex, marriage, and God's expectation of the Christian family.

August 27-30, Burundi. After meeting with the church board to sort issues, we were satisfied with the growth potential in Burundi, now with three churches. Eight persons were baptized; leaders were taught about baptism and commissioned to carry the gospel. Three pastors were ordained in a visit to the Magena church.

August 31-September 3, Rwanda. We visited three of Rwanda's 22 churches in the districts of Gitamara and Mutuma. Despite extreme poverty and painful memories of the recent genocide, the leadership is committed!

In spite of difficulties, the Church in Kenya and nearby countries continues to grow. A wind of change is blowing, and I feel God will move mightily among His people.



Delegates who attended training in Kenya

Missions News

Missions Director Bill Hicks and his wife, Deborah, were received at Lisbon Airport by Vitor Quinta and hosted by Drs. Paulo and Louisa Coelho of the Alliance of the Churches of God Seventh Day in Portugal. The Church there is seeking innovative ways to reach those being called to Christ. Europe, like the U.S., is gripped by materialistic obsession, creating a difficult field for missions. The competition of daily interests and provision for perceived needs leaves little time for many people to choose spiritual things. Pray for the Father's richest blessings



Pastors in Portugal met with Bill Hicks to plan penetration of their modern society with the gospel.

upon our brethren in Portugal, who are committed to reaching new fields for God's glory in spite of the difficulties.

Helping Victims

How can you share hope with victims of natural and human disasters? Give *When the Bottom Falls Out*, a Light for Life tract that separates truth from fiction on the subject of suffering. Quantities of 25 and fewer are free at bap.orders@cog7.org.

If you haven't contributed to hurricane relief, please send gifts to Disaster Relief Fund, P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233.

Charitable Giving for '05

As the year end approaches, why not review your giving and consider additional gifts you may wish to make before December 31? Tax deductions are not the best motive for giving, but they can make larger gifts possible. To learn more, write our Office of Planned Giving, P. O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233.

Hispanic Women's Retreat

Nearly 300 women attended the eighteenth annual Hispanic Women's Retreat in Dallas,

where a mechanical bull, milking cows, and calf-roping were featured in a Texas Night celebration Sunday, September 4. A skit on the "Rise and Shine" theme ended with the women discovering a candle under their seats and lighting them one at a time.

Katrina Relief

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the U.S. Gulf Coast, bringing one of America's worst natural disasters. Compounding this tragedy, New Orleans experienced catastrophic flooding. Many of us watched in horror as people clutched to each other, trying to survive.

I felt compelled to do something but had no idea what. Calling my pastor to see what our church was doing, I learned that the Conference would donate to the Red Cross. I did the same, yet my heart still ached as I watched the news. I had to do more.

Hearing that families had been relocated from New Orleans to my neighborhood, I purchased supplies for them. I



NFYC Registration for '06

To receive a personalized NFYC card, discounts on youth events, and subscriptions to *Youth Reach* and *Youth Flash*, youth should be registered with the National FYC each new year. Youth workers/sponsors will also receive benefits. Forms are available online at <http://fyc.cog7.org> or in the 2006 Gimme Five packets. Let's stand together for God and be a part of something bigger than ourselves!

STATEMENT

Of the ownership, management, and circulation (required by the Act of Congress of August 12, 1970; Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code) of the BIBLE ADVOCATE, published eight times per year at Broomfield, Colorado for September 30, 2005.

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found a church collecting goods for Mississippi and gave to that effort also.

The next day I asked God why I still felt so helpless and dissatisfied. He allowed me to understand that I needed to be onsite with hurting families where I could offer an ear, a hug, a prayer, a hammer, and help in cleaning up. Seeing faces of discouragement and of appreciation would put me in better position to be the "salt of the earth" the Bible speaks of.

After discussing with Pastor Haynes the idea of taking supplies to the region, I set to work. I went online and found a list of Alabama shelters and agencies seeking assistance. I found the number of a Baptist woman in Mobile who was spearheading relief for smaller towns like Pass Christian, Waveland, Ovet, and Lucedale, Mississippi.

I sought donations toward supplies for the effort. Once people knew what we were doing, donations came from churches in Florida, Maryland, New York, and other areas. My local barber donated funds, and the Treasure Coast church gathered a Sabbath offering before we left.

With these we purchased \$3,850 of supplies. Sister Davis in Mobile kept us informed how to meet specific needs. Canned foods, brooms, bug spray, and other products went into the truck, with 300 gallons of water and 300 gallons of bleach.

Brothers David Palmer, Nathaniel Haynes, and I arrived



in Alabama on September 19, made introductions, and unloaded. The next morning we met Linda from the Catholic church across the street, leading a group of Baptist, Catholic, Protestant, and seventh-day volunteers to Bayou La Batre, Alabama, a small town hard hit by Katrina. There a local brother told how bad the storm was for them. Streets were 6-8 feet under water, close to 18 feet

near the bay. Virtually every house was covered; 80 percent needed to be razed and rebuilt. Most contents were piled in streets for trash pick-up, with salvageable clothing hung out to dry.

Various beliefs working together to help neighbors was wonderful to experience. I thank God for placing

this mission on my heart.

— Jeff Odoms, Treasure Coast CoG7, Port St. Lucie, FL, an area hit by two hurricanes in 2004

Note: Disaster Relief Fund has underwritten \$5,000 toward the next mission of mercy by these brethren. Thanks to all who support DRF in this and other catastrophes. — Bill Hicks, Director, G. C. Missions Ministries.

Calendar of Events

December 15 - due date for ministerial applications, license or credential; call 303-452-7973 for an application form.

December 27-31 - Southeastern Family Retreat, near Hendersonville, NC. Training track for Sabbath School teachers, with MTS credit available. To register, contact Sandy Jones, 919-302-8017 or syjones@yahoo.com. For MTS info, contact Jeff Endecott, 252-258-7646 or pastorjeff60@msn.com.

December 29 - January 1 - SW District Winter Youth Retreat, Salvation Army Camp, Midlothian, TX; jrande@houston.rr.com or 281-379-3964

January 8, 9 - second semester at Spring Vale Academy, Owosso, MI. To learn more, call 989-725-2391 or visit <http://sva.cog7.org/>.

January 9 - Winter-spring term of the LITES program begins. Visit <http://lites.cog7.org> or contact LITES Ministries, P. O. Box 172, Stanberry, MO 64489; 660-783-9544 or lites@cog7.org.

January 22-24 - Annual G. C. leaders meeting in Denver, CO

June 12-22 - MTS Summer Session in Denver, CO; 303-452-7973 or training@cog7.org

International Tour

Guatemala

As a neighbor of the Mexican Republic, Guatemala was visited in 1952 by a member of the Church of God (Seventh Day) from Mexico City. Guided by the Holy Spirit, he exercised his gift as an evangelist, thereby arousing the interest of Carlos Larios and Job Leiva González, two Guatemalans who became proclaimers of truth.

The Larios family held Bible studies, inviting friends and family to hear the Word. To seek help for the Guatemalan work, Job Leiva traveled to Mexico and asked to be baptized there on March 22, 1953. After that, help from Mexican brethren was constant. The Larioses achieved their next objective when a young man, José Antonio Vega Serafin, traveled from Mexico (at his own expense) to join the work in Guatemala. On May 14, 1955, Brother Vega began service as pastor with twelve persons attending, a relationship that would continue for many years.

Growth and expansion

That missionary spirit of the new Church resulted in growth not only here but also in El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Belize. For some years Guatemala worked as a sub-district with Mexico. Then the need arose for an administrative system called the Central American Council. Later, the Church in each country became competent to administer itself.

This is the way Guatemala also labored in the mission field of Central America. We proclaim our gratitude to the Most High for the privilege to work anywhere He asks. Each member must be a bearer of the message of salvation in Christ Jesus.

The Church in Guatemala is a founding member of the International Ministerial Congress, thus maintaining doctrinal unity and collaborating in gospel work for the entire world. If a group of believers in the faith of Jesus Christ has yet to affiliate, we ask them to do so for fellowship and unity in the Lord.



Administration, membership

The Church's National Council is composed of 95 ministers and meets each year. The central administration — seven ministers and a superintendent — is in charge of the national work.

We have 11,500 baptized members in 175 churches, representing all 22 regions of this republic. Each church has its own pastor, though the majority work as laymen. Fifteen are full-time.

Missionary spirit

For growth and progress, we use the dynamics of seminars, workshops, youth rallies, women's retreats, and pastors conferences in which over 400 pastors, ministers, and workers come each year to receive training, guidance, and motivation. We believe that education, unity, and professionalism among our pastors is important to effectively answer God's call.

A missionary spirit has moved the Church and allowed the work in Guatemala to prosper. We must also emphasize the help that "Cristo Viene" has been in spreading the Word, since it has allowed us to consecrate three full-time evangelists and has resulted in 25 souls turning to Jesus Christ through baptism. This is a product of the Church's united effort around the world.

Offices: 17 Ave. "A" 1-81 zone 4 de México, Colonia Villas del Rosario, Guatemala, C. A. E-mail: igledios@yahoo.es.

— Miguel Josafat Santa Cruz Ramírez
President



The Issachar Forum

A highlight of the 2005 convention was the official launch of the General Conference's vision community, called the Issachar Forum. This community is made up of individuals who have embraced the vision of a vibrant twenty-first century Church of God (Seventh Day) and are willing to give themselves sacrificially to make it happen.

I spoke of the Issachar Forum at the conclusion of my plenary presentation, "Church at the Crossroads of Significance." Maslow's list of psychological needs includes significance, a basic human need. We all want to feel important, to believe that our lives have purpose and meaning and that it matters that we are alive.

What is true of us individually is also true of us corporately, as the body of Christ. As members of the church, we want to believe that the church we love is making a difference in the world. We desire to make our ministry the best it can be. We want to give our efforts and resources to something that will outlive us and become a legacy for future generations. This, I suggest, is the quest for significance.

CoG7 stands at the crossroads of significance. Organizations that achieve significance share some things in common: a compelling vision, a great team, and a high level of commitment from those who comprise that movement. Our church has a great vision, but we are small with limited resources and with key team players in various areas of the U.S. and Canada. Therefore, the creation of a vision community attempts to build a great team and secure a high level of commitment to make the vision a reality.

Why Issachar Forum? The name comes from 1 Chronicles 12:32, where the author paused to reflect on a trait unique to one of the tribes of Israel, Issachar. It is the special quality of true visionaries: "The sons of Issachar . . . understood their times and knew what Israel should do" (paraphrased). Bible scholars differ as to the meaning of this statement. Some believe it refers to magical powers that the sons of Issachar used to guide Israeli soldiers in times of war. Others read this as reference to their visionary spirit, their ability to understand their times and how they should live in light of those times. I choose to believe the latter interpretation and therefore offer the name Issachar Forum for CoG7's vision community.

The following five terms describe the general approach that members of this forum will take in fulfilling the vision: **critical mass** (bringing together the right people with the right resources at the right time and in the right place); **catalysts** (influencing the vision through creativity, innovation, and new insight); **communication** (serving as spokespersons for the vision); **collaboration** (becoming co-workers in a joint effort); and **contribution** (providing financial support for the vision through personal giving and fundraising).

The enthusiastic response of convention attendees to the Issachar Forum was encouraging. But there's room for many more volunteers, and that could include you. Visit the Issachar Forum page on our Web site (www.cog7.org) or contact us at issacharforum@cog7.org.

As I close, the words of William Merrill's song come to mind, which I've modified: "Rise up, O Church of God!/Have done with lesser things;/Give heart and mind and soul and strength/To serve the King of kings. Rise up, O sons of God!/The Church for you doth wait,/Her strength unequal to her task;/Rise up, and make her great!" May many sons and daughters of Issachar rise to this occasion and make CoG7 great, not in terms of today's success-driven church culture but in terms of making an eternal difference in the twenty-first century.

— Whaid Guscott Rose
General Conference President



**G. C. Missions Ministries work for us
around the corner and around the world
to take the good news of Jesus and His love.**

- Missions Abroad delivered 28 bicycles for evangelists in Africa (see p. 27).

“The Water of Life is free; the bucket that carries it is costly.” —
Anonymous

- Disaster Relief sent thousands of dollars for storm relief in North and Central America (see p. 28).

“Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.” — Jesus Christ