



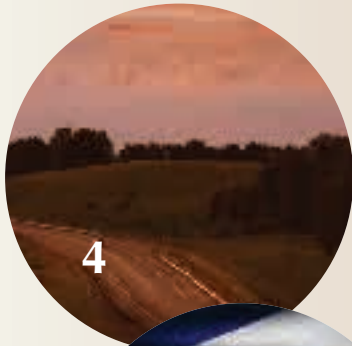
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Trade

Hearts Fail for Fear

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- End-time scriptures (p. 10)
- Fasting from ministry (p. 22)

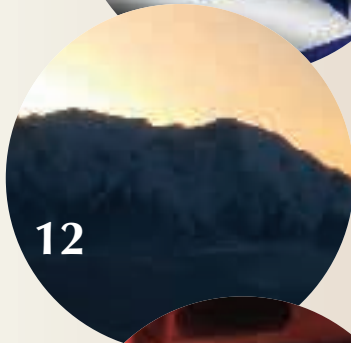




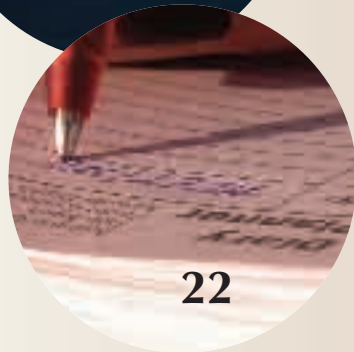
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Miss the last issue on freedom from sin? View it and the current issue, plus download the last eight BA's, at www.cog7.org/BA.

Coming in the January-February BA: fresh encounter with the Bible

In the December issue of *Now What?*: one man's deliverance from humanism (<http://nowwhat.cog7.org>)

 When you see this symbol, visit www.cog7.org/BA for expanded material.



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Beauty Beheld



I grew up loving trains. My earliest boyhood
 ambition was to be a railroad engineer.
 Writing this, I'm snaking across Iowa in the
 vista-dome car of Amtrak's California Zephyr,
 headed from Chicago toward home. With a
 harvest moon lighting America's breadbasket
 along these rails, with an oatmeal raisin cookie
 and milk to consume, and with my destination fixed at twelve hours
 ahead, I well enjoy this not-so-silky ride.

Behind, I leave Gull Lake, Michigan — charming and idyllic, ringed
 with modern-yet-unpretentious clapboard homes for our ministers'
 lodging comfort and two larger houses for meals, worship, and the
 work of the ministerial council (more on p. 28).

This week was, for my colleagues and me, little short of utopian — a
 rare enchantment shared under heaven's smile. Changing colors, sunny
 days, and moon-shimmers in a lovely lake contributed to this October
 delight. These silvery surroundings served to nurture the golden friend-
 ships we celebrated there.

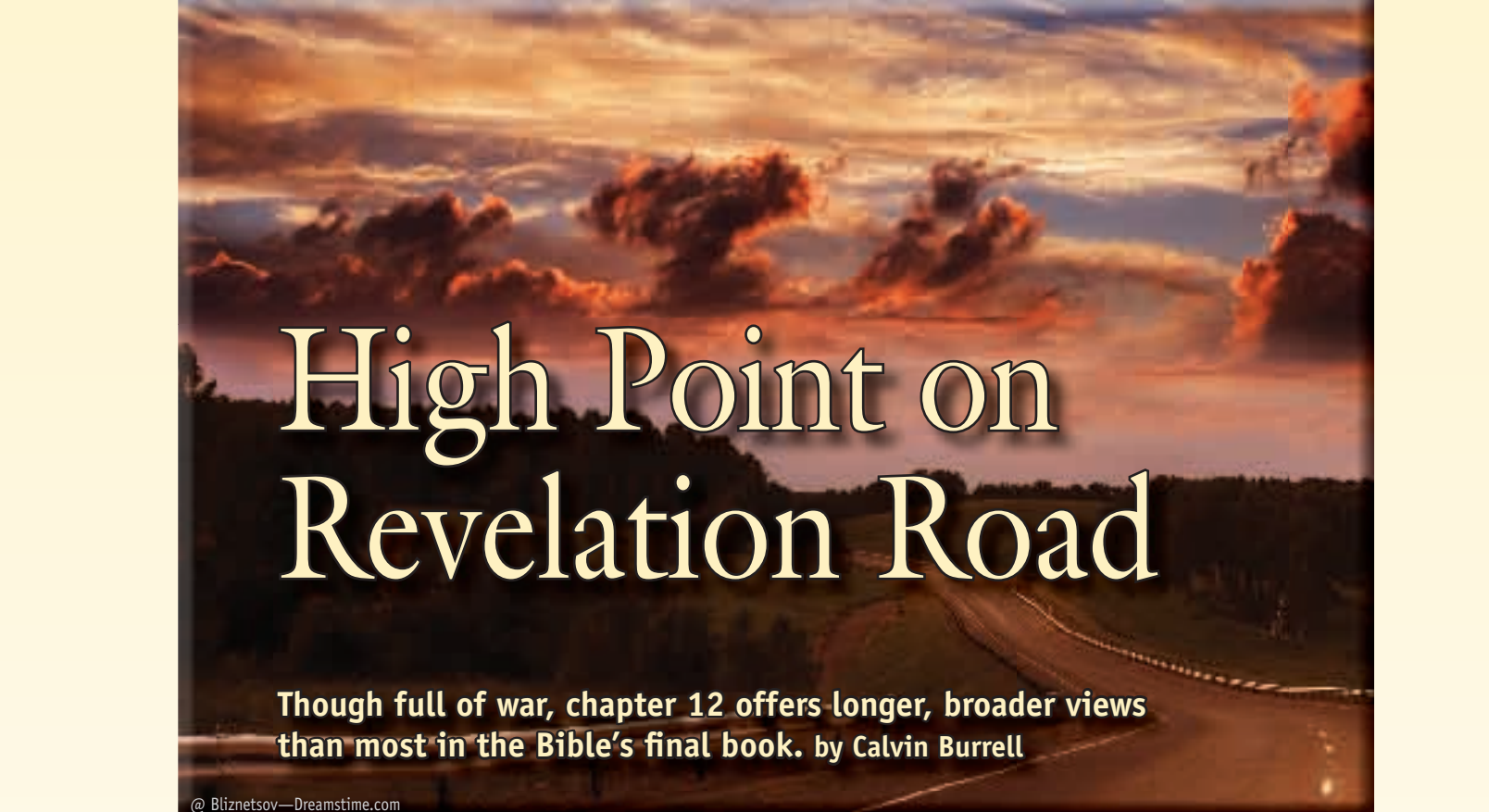
The surreal setting of Gull Lake meant that the harsh realities of
 world news in early October fell lightly upon us. Though we heard of
 the rock-bottoming stock market and the nation's angst, hardly a word
 was said of it — publicly. For six superb days and nights, the NAMC
 event transformed the world's financial turmoil, political tumult, and
 collective ugliness into small concern. Thus was heeded the apostolic
 advice to fill our minds with things lovely and of good report.

Ahead, I de-train at Denver's Union Station and head directly to the
 BA office, to our December issue with its prophetic themes, and to our
 crew's plans to streamline the magazine in 2009. Engines are switching
 on our *Youth Reach* track. Toot your whistle to get teens looking out
 for the cars, please. All aboard!

Changes in the assignment of your editor are ahead as well. Near-
 ing optimum age for Social Security, I've asked for relief from my ad-
 ministrative duties with Ministries Training System by next summer (p.
 26). This will allow for a fresh hand at the MTS helm and provide me
 flextime for other life-goals long sidetracked. This is not retirement; I'll
 continue these editing-writing duties and assist with MTS instructional
 work as needed.

With our ultimate home secured by the gospel, let us enjoy the jour-
 ney, bumpy though it is. See and share all the beauty you can along
 the way. Thank God for radiance beheld — and expected. And thank
 you for inviting us into your home this year, via the BA.

— Calvin Burrell



High Point on Revelation Road

Though full of war, chapter 12 offers longer, broader views than most in the Bible's final book. by Calvin Burrell

@ Bliznetsov—Dreamstime.com

The book of Revelation, its students agree, ranks among the most strenuous stretches of highway along the Bible's Route 66.

Not that there aren't some straightaways on this Revelation road. The first chapter, for example, offers a very readable introduction (vv. 1-11), then a glimpse of the glorified Christ as John saw Him in vision (vv. 12-20). This reminds us that the whole book, in fact, has the primary purpose of turning our eyes upon Jesus, the Alpha and Omega who is, and was, and is to come – the Almighty (v. 9).

We keep the pace through the landscape of chapters 2 and 3, the Spirit's letters to first century churches in Asia Minor. All seven letters contain words to be heard and heeded by today's church, words that can be grasped with a little effort. The same is true of the clear-channel vision of God's throne and the Lamb who shares it – chapters 4 and 5.

Travel on Revelation Road requires more effort as we move past chapter 5 into the opening of the seven seals. Here the language turns dense with horses and horsemen; cryptic angelic messages; undecipherable numbers, symbols, and beasts leading up to the puzzling seven last plagues.

Mystery messages dominate the book's midsection nearly non-stop, until we arrive at the last three chapters where we may again navigate with confidence. Christ returns late in chapter 19, with His millennial reign and final judgment at the great white throne (ch. 20) close in tow.

Then the breathtaking climax of the ages: the Holy City descends, God himself dwells with His people, and the eternal kingdom of God triumphs at last (chs. 21, 22)! The advance scenery of paradise regained in this section is well worth one over-used word: AWESOME.

If you're stymied in steering

through Revelation, try starting with each end before moving toward the middle with its foggy lowlands. Anchored at its alpha and omega, your apocalyptic study can be enlightened in the most lucid of its central regions.

Three battles

Chapter 12 mirrors the agonies and ecstasies found throughout the book. It speaks constantly of war, fighting, conflict, and pain – the great controversy of the ages that always envelops us, choose it or not. With our beam of understanding fixed at both ends of Revelation, we can lift it to the peak at midbook, shedding ever more light along dark stretches of the roadway between.

Three battles of concern to Christians are covered in Revelation 12.

1 Once there was war in heaven (v. 7ff).

In a place we cannot pinpoint and at a time we cannot date, our Father God (Lord of heaven's armies) and His chief angel, Michael, met the enemy (Satan and his angels) and won a mighty victory. Result? Not even the smallest spot in heaven remained for the evil one, the dragon-like devil.

The outcome of this celestial war means that the control room of the universe has been secured for grace, for truth, for peace, and for righteousness. Jehovah God reigns as the only blessed sovereign of all things! Everything that opposes His divine perfections has been forever dethroned and dispatched from heaven.

"Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time" (v. 12).

2 Then there was war on earth (vv. 4b, 5, 13ff).

The dragon that challenged the Father's angel armies above now turned his angry attentions against the Son who would be born below. Decreeing the death of all Bethlehem's infants, he tried to end the earthly life of Jesus at the start. His precious prey eluded him, but the dragon didn't give up.

The battle against the Christ reached full pitch in a Judean desert. Here Satan thrice enticed the Son and failed, failed, failed. Three years later in a Jerusalem garden and before a Jewish council, the enemy was again rebuffed by our Lord's silence and with

His agonized prayer: "Father, Your will be done."

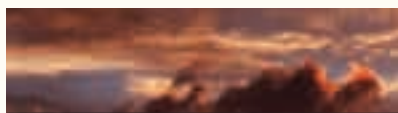
Then came the hottest point of the war. After six excruciating hours on a Roman cross, Jesus cried desperately and triumphantly, "It is finished!" His personal half of the battle was done, and the resurrection that followed confirmed Him the victor. Christ destroyed the Devil and his works, other scriptures tell us, and scattered all the powers of evil in the winning.

And her Child was caught up to God and His throne (v. 5b).

Read it again: The Father and His angels fought and won in heaven, and the Son has gotten the victory here on earth. One more phase of the struggle remains. Just as there was war in heaven and war in the Holy Land, so . . .

3 Now there is war in our hearts (vv. 6, 17).

The same old dragon with his fiery evil tricks (vv. 4, 9, 10, 12, 13) still goes about as a wounded lion, making war on the church and seeking her sheep for supper. Now the church bears the heat and sting of this epic battle, and God-armored Christians are manning all the lines.



**Be not afraid,
Oh church,
for the battle is
the Lord's.**

This war rages on many fronts: the lust of the eyes and of the flesh; sport and shopping; entertainment and amusement; Hollywood and Wall Street; the stuff of materialism; abuse, addiction, and perversion; false philosophies of men and science; the lies we tell ourselves; and the pride of life. Each hot spot amounts to a skirmish for our heart's first love and for our time, talent, and treasure.

The conflict over our future is more intense today than ever. A generation ago, we hardly imagined the assaults that would be hurled against the people of Christ in the early years of this millennium. Now if we don't see the imminent danger to our families, our churches, and our own souls, the enemy has us right where he wants us!

And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (v. 17).

Victory ahead

Be not afraid, oh church, for the battle is the Lord's. He who won the war in heaven, He who won the war on earth, is winning the war in our hearts by His Holy Spirit!

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony (v. 11).

The triumph of God and His holy angels in heaven has spilled over into the earth through the victory of His Son. And the war's final outcome is not in doubt. *God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly* (Romans 16:20).

Even so, come Lord Jesus! **BA**

Questions & Answers

Q What are the meanings of *sheol*, *gehenna*, *hades*, and *Tartarus*?

A Each is a Hebrew or Greek word that was translated “hell” in the King James Version (KJV). Unhappily this can mislead readers about the place of final punishment.

Sheol is the common Hebrew word for *grave*, or the realm of the dead, and *hades* is its exact equivalent in Greek. Most modern versions retain the word *hades* or another with “grave” meaning, rather than with a word like *hell* that implies eternal fire.

Hades is found ten times in the New Testament, and KJV translates “hell” every time. But neither *sheol* nor *hades* has strong connection to the destruction of the wicked. Their end, according to Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15, is in a lake of fire. Revelation 20:14, in fact, says that *hades* itself will be cast into that lake of fire. This makes sense if we assign *hades* its true meaning of death and the grave, but not if it means hell-fire, as often thought.

Jesus went to hell, according to Acts 2:31 (KJV). Everything in this chapter and elsewhere leads us to conclude that *hades* here means that Christ was merely in the tomb awaiting His resurrection, nowhere else.

The word *gehenna* occurs twelve times in the New Testament; each time the KJV translates “hell.” While *gehenna* offers a preview of future destruction for the wicked, it does not mean “hell” as that word is usually understood.

Gehenna was the first century name for the Valley of Hinnom, or Tophet, in Jerusalem — the city dump where garbage of all kinds was thrown for burning or to rot and be consumed. The fires of *gehenna* were never extinguished, and items deposited there were soon devoured by the flames or the ever-present worms. Well aware of this local

landmark, Jesus used *gehenna* to represent the fate of those who face fiery judgment at last (Rev. 20:11-15).

Tartarus is found only once in the Bible, in 2 Peter 2:4. The meaning is near to that of *sheol* and *hades*. In the dark pit of *Tartarus* the angels that sinned await their eternal fate. *Tartarus* (or “hell,” as often translated) can hardly be a place of fiery, eternal torment, since this verse goes on to say that these angels are in darkness and awaiting judgment, not experiencing it.

The meaning and usage of these four Bible words suggests that traditional Christian concepts of hell are largely mythical and in need of revision.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Who are the spirits in prison that Jesus preached to in 1 Peter 3:18-20? When and where was this?

This is a difficult and debated text. Some believe it implies that Jesus visited the realm of dead souls, *hades*, during His entombment, declaring there His victory over Satan and leading the saints of old in triumphant procession from *hades* to heaven.

There is scant support for this scenario here or elsewhere in the Word. Rather we believe the Bible teaches that the dead sleep unconsciously in their graves, awaiting resurrection. This was true both of David and Jesus, according to Acts 2:22-32.

When and where did the actions in 1 Peter 3:18-20 happen? In the days of Noah, as the text declares (v. 20), the Spirit of Christ preached through Noah (2 Peter 2:5) to lost souls chained by sin, before the Flood (1 Peter 1:10-12). This explanation has the advantage of being more biblically direct than the alternative, and less speculative.

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Israel in Bible Prophecy

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Wesley Walker of Ft. Smith, Arkansas, has served CoG7 as a pastor and in other capacities for more than forty years. He recently published his first book, *Answers to Bible Questions*. Elder Walker's answers here reflect the Church's historic views on Israel.

BA: What's the big picture of land ownership in the Middle East, as you see it?

The present problems there began with Abraham. In Genesis 12 God speaks to Abraham and tells him to leave his father's house and go into a land that He would show him. Abraham obeyed and left his homeland. Then God gives Abraham the boundaries of his inheritance in Genesis 15:18. Check a Bible map; you will notice the river of Egypt is to the south of Israel and the Euphrates River is to the north. The great sea would be the western border. We do not know exactly how far east it extended, but it may have been into modern Jordan and Syria,

east of the river Jordan.

For more than sixty years now Israel has been in the news because of land disputes between her and her Arab neighbors, especially the Palestinians. This conflict will continue until true ownership of the land is established.

BA: Abraham is the father of Arab peoples too. Shouldn't they also get the land?

Abraham had a son named Isaac and an older son named Ishmael. Normally the older child received the first inheritance, but it was not to be in this case, for God said, "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac . . ." (Genesis 17:21). So Isaac and his descendents were to receive the inheritance God promised to Abraham.

Isaac then marries, and twin sons are born to his wife. Look closely at what God says to Rebekah regarding Jacob and Esau: "Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall

be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger" (25:23).

Jacob and his descendants have a long history. His name was changed to Israel, and his twelve sons became Israel's tribes. Ishmael (son of Abraham's handmaid) and Esau (Isaac's twin) became father to the Arabic nations. Though both were firstborns, neither was included in the Abrahamic covenant concerning the Promised Land. How we may think or feel about this has nothing to do with the plan of God being worked out here.

BA: For nearly three thousand years now (since Abraham) the Israelites have been out of the land more than they've been in it. Why is that?

The land promise was not conditional, but living in it was. God told them that only if they obeyed and served Him faithfully (Deuteronomy 28) would they dwell in it. Looking back, we see that they lost this privilege more than once.



Wesley and Darlene Walker

The last dispersion came in AD 70, fulfilling prophecies of Ezekiel and Christ. When God would take their rebellion no longer, He scattered them into all the world as He said: "Then they shall know that I am the LORD, when I scatter them among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries" (Ezekiel 12:15; Luke 21:20-24). There is hardly a country in the world where some Jews are not found.

Although God scattered the Jews because of their disobedience, He spoke a word that showed His mercy and kindness even during their captivity: "Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come" (Ezekiel 11:16, KJV). Thus Paul was able to write with conviction, "I say then, Hath God

cast away his people? God forbid . . . God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew" (Romans 11:1, 2, KJV).

Yes, the Jews have suffered severely, even unbearably at times. But God has protected them and not allowed them to lose their identity.

BA: What prophecies were fulfilled for Israel in the past century?

The Zionist movement began in 1897, and a few Jews went home. In 1922, when the League of Nations approved a British mandate over Palestine, the British government appointed a Zionist board, and more went home. By the end of World War II and the Jewish Holocaust, six hundred thousand more Jews had returned to their homeland. Today, again, Israel is alive in her own land, with these prophecies fulfilled: Isaiah 11:11, 12; Jeremiah 31:7-12; 32:37-44; and Ezekiel 36:6, 7, 21-24; 37:21-28.

The most convincing prophecy of Israel's ultimate return may be in Amos 9:14, 15. Through the prophet, God spoke a permanent presence of His people in the land of Israel. They would build, plant, eat, and no one would uproot them again! I believe this has happened in my lifetime.

BA: If the return of the Jews to Israel is God's will, why all the present problems there?

Just as Israel had to drive out their enemies before they could occupy the land the first time, they are having to do it again. God gave it to Abraham and his descendants, but the Arabs have never recognized that agreement, nor Israel as a nation. Their hatred for Israel did not begin when Israel became a nation in 1948; it existed long before that (Genesis 27:41; 28:8, 9). God is using this hatred to destroy the Arabs (Ezekiel 35:2-5; Genesis 36:8, 9). Now you see why God is destroying Mount Seir: because of their hatred of Israel. We understand their hatred over the inheritance of the land. But it belongs to Israel because of the covenant of the Lord with Abraham. No one can change that.

Israel has not yet gotten all the land that was promised to Abraham, but she will. She did not get it all at once in the beginning, nor is she getting it all at once today. But little by little, Israel will, and there will be more violent events before she does.

BA: What do you see regarding the future conversion of Jews to Christ? Does the Bible speak of this?

Let me list several verses that teach this hope for our Jewish friends: Jeremiah 23:5, 6; 32:31-34; Ezekiel 36:24; Hosea 6:1, 2; Zechariah 13:1; and Romans 11:1, 2, 13, 23-27.

Until now, the Jews have not served God, nor do they recognize Jesus as their Messiah or the world's Savior. So these verses have not been fulfilled. Yet God said that He was going to do all the above. So Israel will have a future relationship with God. Let us believe and accept God's plan. **BA**



Read a full-length article by Elder Walker on this topic at www.cog7.org/BA.

It's the most balanced and realistic expectation you could ever have: a hope and yearning for the return of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

In signing off the epic last book of the Bible, Jesus said, "Surely I am coming quickly," and the aging John accordingly responded, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

As long as I can remember, whenever I've looked up to the skies, pondering the stars at night or wondering at the cloud shapes and hues by day, my thoughts drifted to the Lord's return.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus' followers stood there looking into the sky as He ascended. Two angels appeared to tell them that Jesus would return in the same way they had seen Him go.

Over the ages, prognostications of the future have gone beyond what the Scriptures say. Jesus explained that no one could know the day or the hour of His return. Still today numerous would-be prophets peddle dates and times for that event.

Prediction addiction and spurious speculation often result in subverting relationships with the Lord. Focus on end-time events can mean neglect of weightier matters: justice, mercy, and faith.

From what we understand, Jesus was born at a time of heightened Messianic expectation. A remarkable example of this was when the baby Jesus was taken to the temple.

Simeon was there that day. Luke tells us that he was a righteous man who was waiting for the Consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25). The Holy Spirit had told Simeon that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. When he saw the baby

EXPECTING THE MESSIAH

by John Klassek

Jesus, he knew the wait was over. Holding the Messiah in his arms, Simeon blessed God:

"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel" (vv. 29-32).

Perhaps this was something Simeon had wondered about for many years.

We also know that wise men traveled from afar to see young Jesus after seeing a star in the eastern sky. They too were familiar with prophecies that related to the Messiah's coming. In fact, the Bible notes that Enoch, seven generations from Adam, spoke of the Lord's coming (Jude 1:14).

Today we are privy both to the prophecies of old and to Jesus' own words. "I am coming quickly," He said. Various stories of Jesus echoed that promise. For example, Jesus began a parable with, "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for

himself a kingdom and to return" (Luke 19:12).

Jesus wants us to wait and be expectant, no matter where we are in history. Our thoughts and affections are to be Christ-ward. He wants us to love Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. And He wants us to be about His work daily, sharing the good news and doing good for others.

The Lord taught us to pray "Your kingdom come." So don't apologize for asking, in a child-like manner, "Are we there yet?" Sadly, too many people take no thought of the Lord, let alone of His return. Hence they are less likely to recognize Him when He comes.

Live expectantly. Be ready. Let your faith be unfading. Enjoy each day as another yet closer to His return. **BA**

John Klassek, a photographer, lives near Perth, Western Australia, where he produces inspirational videos for online use (www.MessageWeek.com).

To the End of the Age

A veteran preacher has been preaching prophecy. Here's his big outline.

by Ken Lawson

Foundation: Jesus

- Coming of Messiah — His life, teaching, death, resurrection, ascension, and promise to return
- Outpouring of Holy Spirit

Fulfillments: complete

- Gospel to the Jews, then Gentiles
- Punishment of Jerusalem, Jews (AD 70)
- Fall of Rome (AD 476)
- Dark ages - rule of Roman system (Daniel 7:23-27)
- Earth opens up to protect the church in wilderness (Revelation 12:13-16)
- Industrial and inventive revolution (Daniel 12:4)
- Jews return; persecuted in the Holocaust; more return (Jeremiah 30:7)
- Israel becomes a nation (Jeremiah 30:3, 24; Amos 9:14, 15; Psalm 102:16)

Fulfillments: current and ongoing

- Increase of end-time symptoms (Matthew 24:4-14; Luke 21:7-12)
- Satan makes war with God's people (Revelation 12:17; 1 Peter 5:6-10)
- Nations line up for Armageddon (Revelation 16:13-14)

- Great cry for peace and safety (1 Thessalonians 5:1-4; Ezekiel 38:8, 11)
- Immorality, rebellion reach epidemic stages (Luke 17:24-32; 2 Timothy 3:1)

Fulfillments: future

- Armageddon breaks out (Ezekiel 38:8-12, 16; Zechariah 14:2, 3)
- Battle spreads around the earth (Ezekiel 39:6; Revelation 16: 19, 20; Zechariah 14:12, 13)
- Jesus returns! (Revelation 19:11-16)
- First resurrection occurs as He appears (Revelation 20:4-6; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 15:23)
- Saints rise in the air to meet Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:17)
- Saints return with Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:17; Revelation 5:10)
- Jesus stands on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4)

Kingdom of Christ: future

- The Lord goes out to battle (Zechariah 14:3, 14; Ezekiel 28:21; John 18:36)
- Satan bound (Revelation 20:1-3)
- Cleanup of the earth begins (Ezekiel 39:8, 12)
- Law of the Lord goes forth (Isaiah 2:3)

- 1,000 years of renewal, restoration, restitution (Acts 3:22; Isaiah 11:6-9; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Matthew 19:28)
- Satan loosed; leads the wicked against Jerusalem; fire destroys them (Revelation 20:7-9)
- Great white throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15)
- Satan cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10)
- Second resurrection takes place (Revelation 20:5, 12, 13)
- Wicked are cast into lake of fire; death ended forever (Revelation 20:14; 21:4; 1 Corinthians 15:25, 26)

Eternity!

- Perfected earth is turned over by Jesus to His Father (1 Corinthians 15:28)
- Holy City, New Jerusalem, descends from heaven (Revelation 21:2)
- God and His Son dwell with immortal saints and angels (Revelation 21:3)
- Forever with the Lord! (Revelation 21:6,7; John 14:1-3) **BA**

Ken Lawson pastors the church in Redmond, OR.

Afterlife

by Joe Corrales

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**“And though after my skin worms destroy this body,
yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:26, KJV).**

The pyramids of Egypt, among the world’s most famous structures, served as burial chambers for the ancient pharaohs. Archaeologists report that preparation for death was important right across Egyptian society, not just for those at the top.

For the Egyptians, the path to eternal life was full of dangers, demons, and false trails. One must be well prepared. Their Book of the Dead provided instructions, tips, and incantations for souls on their journey through the underworld. The book was often included in coffins and tombs, or the complete scrolls might be placed in the tomb.

The last ordeal on the path to eternity was the weighing of the deceased’s heart to determine his fitness for joining the land of the gods. Applicants who passed this test were welcomed by Osiris, the god-king of the afterworld. A “too-heavy” heart weighed down with evil was devoured by a monster and its spirit banished into darkness.

In ancient Egypt only the rich had much hope for an afterlife; the poor lived in hopelessness. The best they could hope for in the next life was to continue as slaves of some well-to-do Egyptian who managed to navigate through the future, murky unknown.

Christian faith sees death differently. The path to eternal life is not laden with danger but has been made simple and open by Jesus. While our hearts may be weighed down with worries from time to time, the degree of evil within is overcome by the presence of One who forgives all our sin and welcomes us into His presence.

We too have a book that prepares us for the afterlife. Unlike the Egyptian’s Book of the Dead, our Book of Life prepares us to live victoriously now and for the life to come. The resurrection to life is available not only for the rich and the famous, but for all of us who are in Christ, by faith. **BA**

The Inner Man

**The outer man will perish,
though the inner man
grows strong.**

**While the outer man is dying,
The inner man lives on.**

**Our attention is the mirror,
the lines that crease our face.
Shouldn’t we put more focus
on the man God came to save?**

**The outer man is brimming
with the food on which he feeds.
But the inner man grows hungry
for the Word of God he needs.**

**One spends his day in mourning
for the years that slip away.
The other dwells on the promise
of the life we’ll have someday.**

**Let’s refuse the man that’s fading,
for he’s full of sin and pride.
Let us tap into the power
of the inner man inside.**

Joe Corrales, a bi-vocational pastor of Heart of Worship congregation in San Antonio, TX, also teaches computer science at Palo Alto College.

Purpose-Driven God

Covenant, Sabbath, and consummation play their part in our Creator's eternal intent. by Delvin L. O'Banion, with Ray L. Straub

@ Ichtor—Dreamstime.com

Admiral Horatio Nelson's forces were being bombarded during the 1801 Battle of Copenhagen. Sensing futility, his commander issued a signal ordering him to retreat.

Determined to continue, Nelson peered through a telescope and *truthfully* declared he could see no signal. His officers insisted he was wrong. Nelson had deliberately held the telescope to his eye that had lost sight years earlier. "I have only one eye," he declared. "I have a right to be blind sometimes! . . . I really do not see the signal!"*

While blindness supported Admiral Nelson's determination, seeing and perceiving are almost

* Robert Southey, *Life of Nelson*, p. 101

uniformly advantageous. This is especially true when it comes to understanding God's eternal purpose: "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Purpose is the reason something is done or for which something exists. It implies resolve and determination. In considering God's purpose, we tap into His objective. Exploring this fascinating subject will take us to textual sources that reveal God's plan, affirm Sabbath observance as a perpetual indicator of its fulfillment, and note our membership in a covenant designed by the Creator.

God's plan

In simple language, God's purpose was to select a covenant people He would call, justify, and glorify (vv. 29, 30). This was to be accomplished, we read, by His beloved Son, who brought reconciliation through His sacrificial death, loving and eventually lifting this covenant family to heavenly realms (Ephesians 1, 2). While these lofty expressions are slight on detail, the language is more than adequate to excite and exhilarate those who have chosen to love and serve Him.

God's purpose exists aside from any human capacities. It was formed before humans were created. He always intended to extend His love, mercy, and grace. He anticipated that these

virtues would be reflected in holy lives (Ephesians 1:4, 11; 2 Timothy 1:9).

In his elaborate writings titled *Politics*, Aristotle (384-322 BC) observed, “Nature does nothing without purpose or uselessly.” This is a bold conclusion based on empirical evidence — what we experience. In contrast to nature’s proof, we have the awesome assurance that God’s infinite, cosmic purpose was formed before time and matter existed.

Sabbath affirmation

Implementation of God’s purpose began with the Creation event. After six days God declared that what He spoke into existence was, as Americans say, “So far, so good.” Then because God had completed His work, He rested on the seventh day and made it holy. It appears that Genesis 2:1-3 would have fit well at the end of chapter 1. To casual readers, this might have tied the Sabbath more securely to Creation.

There is no biblical account of humans observing the seventh day until the children of Israel left Egypt. Liberated and on their wilderness journey, they received the manna God dropped from the sky daily, but there was double provision on the sixth day and none to collect on the Sabbath. In the Exodus version of the Ten Commandments, the Israelites were reminded that God rested on the seventh day of Creation week and asked the wandering Israelites to do the same. In the Deuteronomy version they were reminded that they were slaves in Egypt (where a rest day was probably disallowed), were delivered, and so must set aside

Sabbath for rest. The Creator had replaced Pharaoh as king, and the rest day was restored to honor His relationship with a covenant people.

The Scriptures are replete with reminders that we worship a God who created. Sabbath observance honors both God’s creative accomplishment and the continuing fulfillment of His redemptive purpose. This is illustrated in the intellectual book of Hebrews, which explains old covenant symbolism with keen insight.

Hebrews was written to a Christian community who apparently considered returning to Judaism. Early on, the dominant theme is “Jesus is superior” — to the angels (ch. 1) and to Moses (ch. 3). Chapter 4 deals less with personalities but rather cites the Sabbath on which God rested as a prototype of future rest. Verse 3 assures that believers continue to enter that rest. This reference to “Sabbath rest,” not given by Joshua, remains for a covenant people who claim it by faith (vv. 8, 9).

There is intentional ambiguity here. Believers enter this rest now by faith (Matthew 11:28; Jeremiah 6:16). But a future rest

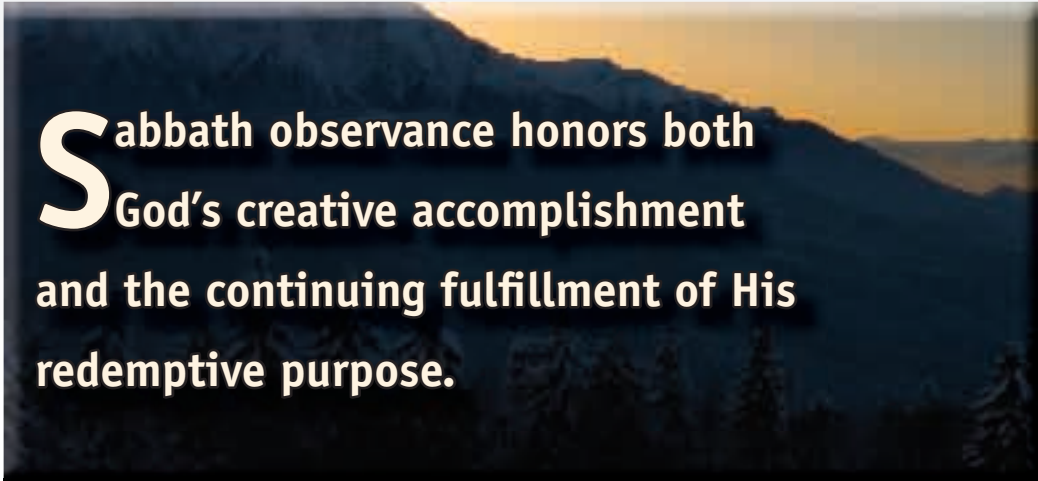
is also available to those who “obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus” (Revelation 14:12). Reference to Sabbath rest, then, allows inclusion of all three rests: weekly Sabbath, rest for the soul, and future bliss. All are part of God’s plan.

Covenant community

Following Creation, God continued implementing His plans by forming a covenant community. As legal agreements between two parties, some covenants are called “royal grants” and have the nature of a will and testament. The more substantial role is borne by the major party, usually identified at the start: “I am God Almighty” (Genesis 17:1; the minor party in this case was Abraham and his descendants). These covenants are promissory and unconditional.

Binding agreements of this nature were made with Noah (no more destruction of the earth by water), with Abraham (he would father a great nation and all other nations would be blessed in him), and with David (he would occupy an everlasting throne).

A second covenant form is



Sabbath observance honors both
God’s creative accomplishment
and the continuing fulfillment of His
redemptive purpose.

sometimes called a *suzerainty-vassal* covenant. The suzerain's (or overlord's) relation to his vassal (or servant) is maintained through a series of laws. Obedience is rewarded and rebellion is punished. In contrast to a royal grant covenant, heavier responsibility of this latter covenant is accepted by the party of the second part: God's people. The Mosaic covenant was accepted by Israel at Mount Sinai with an extraordinary solemnity and remarkable intensity, described in Exodus 19.

True to form, the suzerainty-vassal covenant identified the major party: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Exodus 20:2). This introduction not only served as preamble to a covenant but also confirmed that Israel remained under the umbrella of the royal grant covenant made to Abraham. "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country . . . and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years" (Genesis 15:13). The Exodus demonstrated God's faithfulness to His covenants and the continuing fulfillment of His purpose.

Fulfillment of times

God's purpose included a time for transition from the Mosaic (old) covenant given on Sinai. Under it, humans demonstrated futility, attempting to achieve a quality of righteousness that met God's requirements. Habitual transgression prevented justification. The gap was bridged when He sent His Son to bring the two covenant parties together.

And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment — to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (Ephesians 1:9, 10; see also Romans 5:6).

Under Christ, God's covenant community continues to occupy what He created (Galatians 3:29). In the Christian era, instead of occupying a specific territory, God's chosen are the "salt of the earth" and a "city on a hill" to bring light and influence to every community. They struggle to be pure in heart, produce the fruit of the Spirit, take on the divine nature, live and die for others, stay true to their

faith, and look forward to future glories.

Whatever interpretation we may assign to the complex symbolism contained in Revelation, there is no doubt about its description of an eventual euphoria when God comes down to dwell among us: "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" (Revelation 19:9).

Purple patch

Horace, a Roman lyric poet who died less than five years before Jesus' birth, wrote, "Often a purple patch or two is tacked on to a serious work of high promise, to give an effect of colour." *Purple patch* is an idiomatic expression that suggests something unusually successful and/or ornate. Understanding God's purpose is our "purple patch."

God had a purpose in mind from eternity past. The part of it made available for our comprehension began with Creation, was developed through covenants (both unchangeable promises from God and law-based, conditional agreements), and will end in glorification — God among us, tangible and majestic. How inspiring it is to comprehend, even if partially, the eternal purpose of God! **BA**

In the Christian era, instead of occupying a specific territory, God's chosen are the "salt of the earth" and a "city on a hill" to bring light and influence to every community.

Pastor Delvin O'Banion of Colorado and wordsmith **Ray Straub** of Oregon, who share roots in the Church's history and ministry, recently collaborated to produce this witness to their abiding love for God's Word. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.

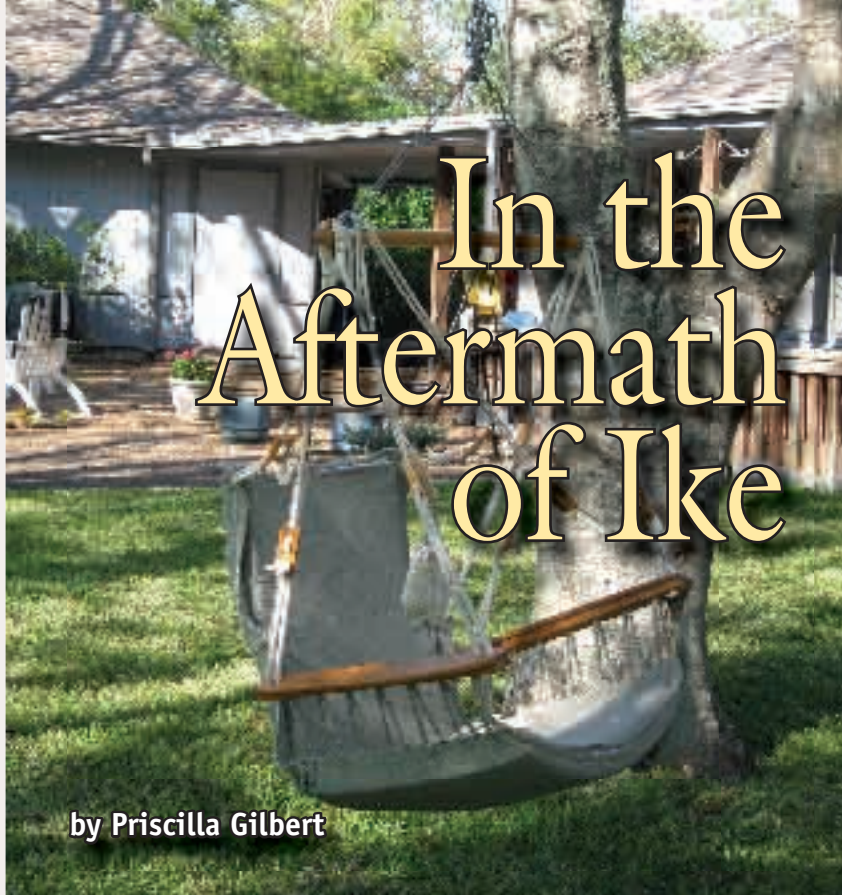
By candlelight, I write from my laptop with one precious hour left on the battery. My husband encourages me to hook the laptop to our generator, but I don't want to use that power resource now. He thinks I'm working on my class assignments, but how can I concentrate on anything else when so much is falling apart?

What's troubling me can be summed up in a word: *uncertainty*. We're uncertain when the power will return and other "essential" resources will be available. We're uncertain what damages insurance will pay, when schools will resume and grocery stores reopen at capacity. And when, if ever, will we again walk and play on the beaches of Galveston?

I've been in the area one full day since Hurricane Ike, and I'm already fighting depression. I want to cry but fear I'll never stop if I start. I want to pray, but I'm hindered. I want to read my Bible, but I only touch the cover and glance at it. Again I feel I'm at a crossroads. The awesome power of God's nature has forced me to reevaluate how I approach the throne. *His* might has humbled us all.

We can praise the Lord that not a single grand oak, tall cedar, or majestic pecan fell on any home in our neighborhood. One subdivision over, it seems as if trees fell on every house. Was this destruction random? Before the storm, my neighbor prayed, "Lord, You can take any tree, except please save the one with the swing in it." Today his tree with the swing is the only one standing!

I took a box of trash bags to a friend, along with milk, bread,



and eggs. Her face showed exhaustion. I'm angry that she didn't evacuate with her two children — before the storm. Now she's managed five days without power. I'll go again today, be more gracious, and give her a chance to talk.

Hurricane Ike affected an area from Galveston to Houston to Conroe and beyond. Hundreds of CoG7 members were hit, and I wish we all had a way to connect. Today we go to Baytown for a generator that relief workers brought from a Michigan SDA church. It will be heartbreaking to see the destruction on the strong side of the storm, but we hope to check on our brethren there.

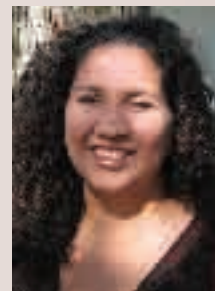
Last night Bill's co-workers dropped by to check on us and bring us MRE's (Meals-Ready-to-Eat) and ice, not knowing we had brought food and chests of ice from Austin. Instead they stayed for a pleasant outdoor meal of

grilled burgers and pinto beans.

I will close before my battery expires. I can re-power at the public library, which has power, Internet — and crowds. I've been thinking about scriptures for tough times: "Be anxious for nothing . . . For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power . . . Let not your heart be troubled . . . The Lord is my shepherd . . ." and many others. The uncertainty of these days would drive me mad were it not for what I know in my heart: God's care and comfort are ever sure. Of that, we can be certain.

BA

Priscilla, Bill, and their five children live in Friendswood, TX, and attend CoG7 in Galena Park.



The Journey Continues

by Whaid Rose

Our church's journey since 1858 is a testimony to God's faithfulness. I am humbled to be among its leaders and grateful for the opportunity to serve in this way.

In the winter of 1998, just months into my presidential tenure, I first shared my vision for a vibrant Church of God (Seventh Day) with others in leadership. The core components of that vision are captured by ten descriptive phrases. Let me remind you of them again here.

Christ-centered. The Church is decidedly and unapologetically Christ-centered because Scripture declares Jesus to be the head of the church. Its purpose and mission should be defined and driven by our love and devotion to Him.

Evangelical. Though this word is a problem for some, its inclusion in our vision underscores an approach to Christian faith that maintains our distinctions, without exclusivity. *Evangelical* recognizes that God's kingdom is much more than one denomination and that those committed to Christ and the Scriptures are not our enemies, despite the differing points of doctrine.

Sabbath-observing. We affirm our long tradition in this matter and our conviction that the Sabbath is not incompatible with new covenant faith. The task before us is to point a weary world

to God's gift of physical rest each seventh day and to spiritual rest in Christ, whom the Sabbath signifies.

Spirit-filled (or -formed). The Holy Spirit is Christ's presence in the lives of believers and through the church. Only by relying without reserve on the Spirit's power, our efforts can be successful and bear fruit of eternal value.

Bible-based. In this time of biblical illiteracy and disinterest in scriptural authority, our commitment to being Bible-based is crucial. This has been a core value of CoG7 for 150 years now, motivated by Gilbert Cranmer's conviction about the Bible's authority and sufficiency.

The five points above describe who we are as a church, while the next five describe what we do — our overarching ministry goals.

Passionate in Worship. We believe that worship should be the Church's priority, through which we reach upward with love for God.

Strong in Fellowship. Through fellowship, we reach inward by loving others within the body of Christ, and we receive love from them in authentic relationship.

Committed to Discipleship. We desire to be intentional in cultivating a new generation of spiritual sons and daughters, and we believe that the hard work of spiritual formation is essential to this goal. Through discipleship, we reach further within.

Aggressive in Witness. Our commitment to Christ and the gospel compels us to reach out to others as evangelism becomes a way of life.

Compassionate in Service. The life and ministry of Jesus should define the purpose and mission of the Church. As He was a servant, so must we be. Reaching all around, we will meet the needs of the poor and oppressed.

Some of these statements may describe what we have always been, while others describe the church we strive to become. All of them are now owned by the Church's top leadership and are slowly and steadily being embraced by members as part of our core values and corporate identity.

We face the future better by knowing where we've been. Our church's journey has been impacted by ideas and attitudes embraced by early pioneers. Looking back, we have learned these lessons:

- If Christ does not have His rightful place in the Church, nothing else will be in the right place. We find our true identity, not in being different from other Christians but in Christ alone.
- The Church has made considerable progress in doctrinal and theological development over the past six decades, for which it is to be commended. Our ongoing struggle to grow in grace and knowledge reminds us

that a strong Bible commitment must translate into development of a clear theological construct based on sound hermeneutics, and it leads to greater emphasis on Christian education and ministerial development.

- When it comes to organization, balance is paramount. A hierarchy with full centralization may not be best, but independence and local autonomy are the opposite extremes. Membership and spiritual accountability really do matter. Individual rights in the church ought to take a back seat to what strengthens others and builds up Christ's body.



Speaking of balance, I sometimes think we're slipping too far from some subjects that marked our beginnings and were emphasized in our first hundred years. In our more recent efforts to grasp Christ's place in the Godhead and to define the gospel of God's grace, we seem to have lost out on end-time prophecy — the specialty of an earlier generation.

The whole counsel of God does include prophetic issues, and they can be taught without "the sky is falling" tactics. Formation of the European alliance, the global energy crisis, conflicts in the Middle East, and the axis of evil (terrorism) all suggest that the prophetic clock is ticking.

Our church should be speaking to these issues.

To our credit, this church predicted the regathering of national Israel, based on Bible prophecy, long before it happened. Current national and global events prompt the question: Are these matters addressed in God's prophetic Word? I pray we will maintain a healthy balance between our primary allegiance to Christ and the gospel, and prophetic issues that await our interest and study.

We learn not only from our past but also from Israel's experience in her journey toward the Promised Land. Because the Israelites got sidetracked, a journey that could have taken a couple of weeks took forty years instead. We know we are sidetracked when our past seems more attractive than our present, when two steps forward are followed by three steps backward, and when we value the shadows more than the realities. The Israelites longed for Egypt, wandered in circles on the desert floor, and worshipped the brazen serpent — a picture of Christ who would be lifted up on the cross so all who look to Him might live (see Numbers 21:6-9; 2 Kings 18:4; and John 3:14, 15).

Lord, help us not be sidetracked. Grateful for our past and for the sacrifices of those gone before, may we delight in living and serving in the present as we move steadily forward. Over the

past thirty years, the Church has grown rapidly in foreign fields, while experiencing slow or no growth here at home. Henry Blackaby's advice to "See where God is working and join Him there" should be heeded, not by focusing on foreign missions alone but by discerning new waves of the Spirit closer to home.

Foreign missions is a bright spot on our radar these days, for which we are grateful. But those who cannot "cross the ocean" nor "preach like Paul . . . can tell the love of Jesus . . . [and] can say He died for all."* And we do this best when we step out of the shadows and embrace the reality of Christ, who declares: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. . . . This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John 15:5, 8, NIV).

So, bearing Christ-fruit, let us commit ourselves to being a hospital for broken lives, to ministering to the deep needs of people, to representing God's unchanging standard in changing times, to raising the standard of educational and theological development so that when we lie in the dust, we will have left a world-class ministry to the next generation of the Church.

*From "Hark, the Voice of Jesus Calling"

Coming Clean

by Greg Hoffman as told to Sherri Langton

I was born into a family much like TV's Brady Bunch, with parents who loved my sister, Michelle, and me. They came to all our school and sports events and helped us make good memories at holiday times.

But that ideal family didn't last forever. On a trip to Disneyland just after eighth grade, my parents told us, "We're getting divorced."

That bomb didn't just destroy the trip; it nearly destroyed my life. What happened to our perfect family? What about the great times we'd enjoyed together? Four years older than me, Michelle was going off to college and didn't endure the emotional upheaval I did. As it turned out, I didn't handle it well.

I lived with Mom a couple of years and then with Dad. They didn't seem to know how to deal with my hurt and anger, so they let me do whatever I wanted. No rules meant lots of parties and lots of friends when they weren't around. I smoked some weed, drank beer, and experimented with drugs. I stole money from my parents to support my habit, but they never found out I was on drugs. My grades slipped, and I barely graduated high school.

When my core group of friends moved away to college, loneliness moved in. I have always needed acceptance — maybe because I was the smaller, chubbier kid on the block and thought I had to make myself bigger for my peers. When I entered college, that need intensified. More than ever I wanted to please my friends, so I got into hard-core drugs. That made me feel better about myself.

I didn't like college and often avoided classes. Eventually I felt so lost, I dropped out and moved to Washington D. C. to live with my sister and her new baby. While there I stole weed from my brother-in-law. No matter how much I smoked or stole, I was never caught.

A year later, in 1996, I moved back to Denver and started managing a bar. In time, I began snorting cocaine and felt so much power and energy — as if I were the strongest man in the world. Even though police were at the bar often, I did cocaine without them catching me.

Things changed somewhat when I met Kelly. She wasn't like me: She was a Christian who never drank or did drugs. While we dated, I joked about Jesus and argued with Kelly about her beliefs. Deep down I wanted to embrace her values, but I was having too much fun with drugs.

I struggled to keep my drug life secret but finally told Kelly about the things I'd been doing. Surprisingly, she seemed OK with it.

We married in July 1998, and I continued to party and even got into pornography. Sometimes I'd stay out all weekend going to strip clubs.

Kelly gave birth to our two children, Keegan in 2001 and Kadie in 2003. By then, my drug addiction was in high gear — a quarter ounce of cocaine daily. I was fired from my job at the bar because of my drug habit, so I got a job in the mortgage industry that let me work at home.

But I was in no shape to be around children. After doing drugs, I wouldn't sleep for two or three days. If my kids cried, I didn't want to hold them because I was afraid of hurting them after my regular highs. Once when I passed out, Kadie found a bottle of wine in the frig and Keegan found a stash of stuff.

This behavior did more than threaten our marriage and family; it ruined our credit. Money went for drugs instead of for things we really needed. We eventually had two cars repossessed and lost our house. Before the bottom fell out, I kept the bad state of our finances a secret from Kelly. At church she made us look like a happy family.

Eventually I couldn't keep up the front any longer. On February 1, 2005, I was in my kitchen to



Nikhil Gangavane—Dreamstime.com

make Keegan a peanut butter sandwich. Searching the refrigerator, I realized I couldn't even afford a jar of jelly for my kid! I was making a thousand dollars per week and spending the money on cocaine. I fell to the floor, sobbing.

My mom was there that day and asked what was wrong. (Neither of my parents had found out about my drug habit all those years. Even Kelly didn't know the extent of it.) At that moment, I was moved to admit my problem to my mom. She was stunned. For the first time I felt the love and compassion of our Lord that day.

I later told my father about my addiction as well. He referred me to a friend of his who was the administrator for the county's mental health division. Through him, I agreed to check myself into a rehab program at Harmony House in Estes Park, Colorado.

It wasn't easy at first. In the classes and discussion groups I had to be honest with myself about my drug problem, and I realized I needed a higher power to overcome my addictions. The guys in the group identified their higher power in nature (like the mountains, trees, or even elk) or religions like Hinduism and Buddhism.

I had had just enough exposure to church as a kid to believe that Jesus could be my higher power, but I wasn't sure. With only two days left at Harmony House, I finally talked to a guy named Paul. He explained that only the love and grace of Jesus could have led me to admit myself to rehab and that only He could forgive me for all the terrible stuff I'd done.

I prayed and asked Jesus to come into my life and to forgive me for my sin.

Home from rehab, I started going to church again with my family. Thanks to the efforts of Pastor Mike Vlad in Denver, I'm growing in my Christian walk. He spends time with me one-on-one, and another Christian brother holds me accountable. Fellowship with other believers lifts me up instead of

bad company dragging me down. Now whenever I see my former friends from high school, they notice the change in me.

Our family life has seen a wonderful change, too. I'm working at being a good father and husband. I volunteer at my kids' school and try to be there for them. Instead of taunting Kelly about Jesus, I'm moving forward with her in faith.

Since coming to Christ, I know that God accepts me so I don't feel driven to get the acceptance of others. I no longer hide from my problems in a pile of cocaine or lurk in the darkness of strip clubs and porn. Now I'm learning to shine in the light of the Lord.

Greg, Kelly, Keegan, and Kadie Hoffman attend the church in Denver, CO.



DECEMBER 2008



YOUTH REACH

Pictured above: Pharr, TX, youth, with sponsor Allo Sanchez (left rear), and Pastor Noe Reyes (right rear)

WCD Youth Rally

Madera, CA CoG7

December 13

Theme: "What is Love? - Purity for the Godly Youth"

Contact: Jorge Perez, NYC
(nazaritemex@hotmail.com)

Trimestral Juvenil

Santa Ana, CA

December 20

Contact: David Sandoval (951-250-6098 or cogdsdelgado@yahoo.com)

SWD Winter Youth Retreat

Salvation Army Camp near Midlothian, TX

December 26-29

Theme: "God is Not Dead"

Contact: Jason and Rose Rodriguez, NYC (832-797-9916 or jandrrodriguez@att.net)

The Gloriator

by Wayne Hrenyk and Kurt Lang

Shocking new evidence has revealed what archaeologists believe to be the first roller coaster ever built. Its remains were found in what is believed to be the same spot where Moses stood when the Lord physically presented Himself before him (Exodus 33:18, 21, 22).

Scholars believe this roller coaster was the very ride Moses took when he experienced God's glory. Moses waited to see the presence of the Lord as he climbed the long hill. Then he reached the pinnacle and dove into the twists and loops of God's glory revealed, through the tunnel of darkness when God covered him so that His face couldn't be seen, and out the other side into the brilliance of His majesty.

Moses' heart pounded so hard, it almost leaped out of his chest. Then he climbed onto the rock and got back in line. That first roller coaster experience was so awesome, he just had to do it again!

What do you think Moses did when he no longer felt like he was still on the coaster, when he no longer saw God or felt His glory? Did he forget what God looked like? Did he get discouraged because he wasn't on the "mountaintop" anymore?

We too can fall into this trap, thinking that the Christian life should be one emotional high after another. Let's say you have a great time with friends at youth camp. What happens when the good music fades, when you don't have all your friends around you anymore, when it's not nearly as much fun to have church in your old building as it was by the campfire? Is your relationship done when the feelings are gone?

You need to think about this. Living for God is exciting when you're riding the Gloriator and you feel the rush of personal contact with Him through His Holy Spirit. But then come the days when God doesn't feel near. Moses had those days, too.

Not feeling much toward God doesn't mean He's stopped loving you or

prove you've done something wrong. It means you must learn to walk by faith, not by sight or by feelings. After all, Jesus promised He would always be with us. Are we always with Him, or is it just when we're "on the ride"?

What about the ride of your spiritual life? Do you jump right back in line and await God's divine presence after the emotional ride ends? How about the long, tedious climb up the hill? Is it a struggle, or do you hang on with anticipation of what's ahead? You'll have a much better spiritual ride when you look with anticipation rather than frustration.

I challenge you, no matter how you feel, to keep looking, searching, asking for more of God in your life. Then you, like Moses, need never doubt His glory in your life, whether you see it and feel it, or not.

Fun Facts About Roller Coasters

Fastest Steel

Nürburgring ring°racer

Nurburg, Rheinland-Pfalz, Germany - 135 mph

Fastest Wooden

Son of Beast

Kings Island, Kings Mill, Ohio, U.S. - 78 mph

Tallest Steel

Kingda Ka

Six Flags Great Adventure, Jackson, New Jersey, U.S. - 456 ft

Tallest Wooden

Son of Beast

Kings Island, Kings Mill, Ohio, U.S. - 218 ft

Source: Coaster Grotto (www.coastergrotto.com/)



Margaret Nunez and Amber Machado of the Midland, TX, church were baptized earlier this year.



For more events and pictures, visit <http://nfyc.cog7.org>



The Month I Said No

Will you enter the dance or sit this one out?
by Angela Dion

I used to like telling others how full my schedule was. “I’m so busy these days,” I’d say. “I work full time. I’m a part-time freelance writer. I edit two newsletters. I’m in two Bible studies, a book club, and a drama ministry. I cook. I clean. I do laundry.

“What about you? How are things going in your life?”

Then the dance would begin as my listeners and I tangoed to out-busy each other. The goal was to prove that each of us was as important and stressed as the others.

One day a friend’s response to my busy-speech shocked me. I was about to trump her list of activities when she asked, “What if you said no to everything for a month?”

My heart raced and my smile faded. *No way!* I thought. *I couldn’t do that.* “Let me pray about it.” I said.

Within two minutes, I knew God wanted me to accept my friend’s suggestion. He had some insights that I could discover only during a thirty-day fast from saying yes.

Rest

My goal for the month was to decline every new activity. The first week I received three writing requests, an offer to participate in a drama, and a speaking invitation. It seemed God wanted to know if I was serious about saying no.

I really wanted to say yes, especially to the writing assignments. Then I remembered that an article I had previously agreed to write was due in a week — and I hadn’t even started it yet!

As I thought about it, I realized I hadn’t put a lot of effort into this assignment because I

was exhausted. I’d been working so much that my body, mind, and spirit never had a chance to rest. I needed to get still so I could hear God whisper, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Mixed motives

God also spoke to me about my motives for staying busy. I was surprised to discover how attached I was to my hectic lifestyle. I claimed to dislike having so much on my plate. I said I wanted to save time, find time, and use time wisely. But the truth was, I relished pushing my over-worked schedule to the brink. It made me feel wanted, needed, and useful. I took pride in keeping my calendar full.

Pride wasn’t the only reason I stayed busy. A few weeks after my fast, I attended a community theatre production and watched another actress perform the part I had turned down. She was good. Very good.

As the audience applauded her monologue, I couldn’t help thinking *That was my part!* I wanted the attention she received. I liked being center stage. Like the Pharisees, I “loved praise from men more than praise from God” (John 12:43).

Before my fast, I would have confessed a little problem with pride and approval-seeking. But once I discovered how expendable I was and how angry I felt when someone else got the attention, I understood the depth of my sin. In filling my schedule so I could satisfy my pride and earn applause, I had failed to serve Christ.

Others' contributions

During the third week of my fast, my friend Karen related to me a parable about carrots. "You plant carrots close together. But once they sprout, you pull some of them so that the remaining carrots have room to grow."

I saw the "carrot principle" at work during our church's annual women's retreat. Because of my fast, I had declined an invitation to speak at the event. The speakers who replaced me were young, but the experiences they shared ministered to everyone at the retreat. *Which one of them wouldn't have spoken had I accepted the offer?* I thought. Allowing God to thin my schedule had given others the opportunity to develop their gifts.

In my busyness, I often wondered how things would get done if I didn't do them. In 1 Corinthians 12:18 Paul explains, "God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be." God would take care of everything if I would get out of the way.

Once I understood this, fasting from yes became an opportunity to see God work in His body. Instead of trying to be "chief carrot" and hindering growth in others and myself, I could appreciate the ways others serve Him.

Trusting God to lead

As a young Christian, I believed that spreading myself thin indicated my passion for God. How could I sit by when there were books to write, cookies to bake, meetings to organize, and toilets to clean? My fast taught me to seek God's guidance before I commit to anything. Sometimes He wants me to say no —

even to things that seem good.

Near the end of my fast, I received a second invitation to audition for a part in a community theatre drama. My friend gave me a copy of the script and, as director, essentially guaranteed me the part. I was honored. A month earlier, I would have said yes immediately. Now I responded, "I need to pray about this, and I'll get back to you when God tells me what to do."

I was also considering pursuing a master's degree through a distance-learning program. My employer would pay most of my tuition. Why not take advantage of the opportunity to further my education with minimal expense? Again, I needed to pray.

Clearly God led me not to take the acting part or pursue the degree. He had other plans for me.

I learned that when I said yes without seeking God's guidance, I often allowed Satan to distract me from the things God desired for me. I was acting on my own wisdom and had deceived myself into believing I was on fire for the Lord. Fasting from yes helped me recognize and resist the lie that being busy is equal to being spiritual.

After the fast

Years after my fast, the principles I learned are still with me. I'm more intentional about what

I say yes to. I don't commit to anything — even things that seem like "no brainers" — without examining my motives and seeking God's guidance. I'm learning to sense the Spirit's warning before I get overwhelmed. And I deliberately spend time relaxing with the Lord.

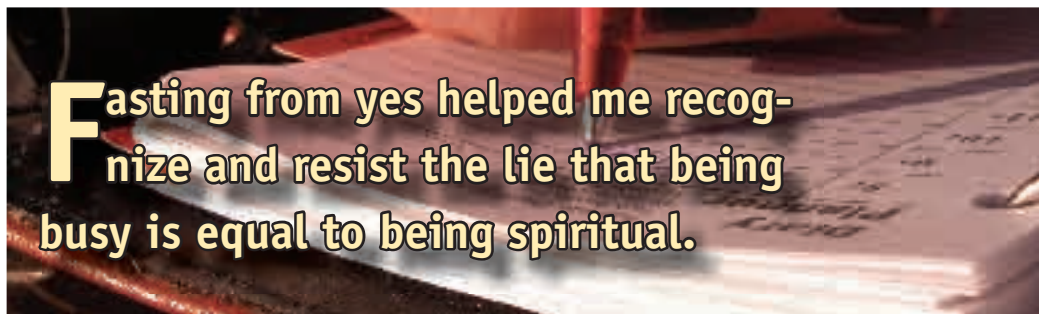
I have a healthier perspective on receiving approval. There are things I do well, and I often receive praise for them. But instead of seeking accolades from others, I now try to work only for the Lord. I understand that I can do nothing without God and people, and I look for ways to acknowledge the contribution of others.

I'm also learning to step back so that others can serve. For the first time in years, I belong to a Bible study that I don't lead! I love not being the chief carrot!

Today when people invite me to tango by telling me how busy they are, I remember what I learned from my month of saying no, and I resist the temptation to enter the dance. **BA**

Angela Dion

writes from Waldorf, MD. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



Mail Bag

More on God's love

How do we know God loves the world ["Q & A," July-August], in view of all the bad stuff in it? Job was a good man devoted to God. When Satan stripped him of everything, he refused to blame God for the bad ruining his world. "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" (Job 2:10).

People easily forget. Many don't even believe it is God who has blessed them. But when troubles and hardships come, they are the first to blame God.

Let the world look up from doubt, self-pity, and sin to fix their eyes on the beauty that surrounds: sunrise, cloud formations, stars, the four seasons. How could anyone question God's love when we are the ones destroying, defiling, taking it for granted, and creating all the evil in it? The question should be "How can the world let God know that we love Him?"

*T. T. (inmate)
Waupun, WI*

Salutes to September

I finished reading the September BA. As always, I found the articles interesting and informative. Diversity is what makes people research their Bibles and become a little wiser in their beliefs. If everyone [lived by the Golden Rule], this would be a much better world.

*T. C.
Dustin, OK*



In Matthew 6:25-34 it appears that Jesus promises unlimited freedom from the painful or unpleasant. We must balance that, as you have done ["Pulled From the Pew," p. 8], with texts that talk of opposition and defeat in our pursuit of Him. Had God not intended that we experience disappointment, Jesus would not have died. Thank you for your personal experience and clear picture of reality.

*M. S.
Stanberry, MO*

I appreciated the excellent articles [in September BA], especially "Double Trouble Ahead?" [p. 10]. It would be so neat if the leadership team set specific goals on addressing the issue, especially the last three subtopics. As an organization, we really need to learn how to care, care about people — those who are lost for all eternity. How we have developed or "constructed" our doctrine is important but is of little value if we do not serve people. Caring can be taught. It can be done.

*H. F.
Grass Valley, CA*

"Double Trouble" was a real blessing and very well said. "Others" is a good motto for Christians — getting "I" out of the way, so needful to doing God's will.

Seniors retreat at Sis-Q was a "treat" again — over 70 attendees. I missed conference this year. We should have had a West Coast conference no matter the cruise. I am so looking forward to next year in Corpus Christi.

*A. W.
Salem, OR*

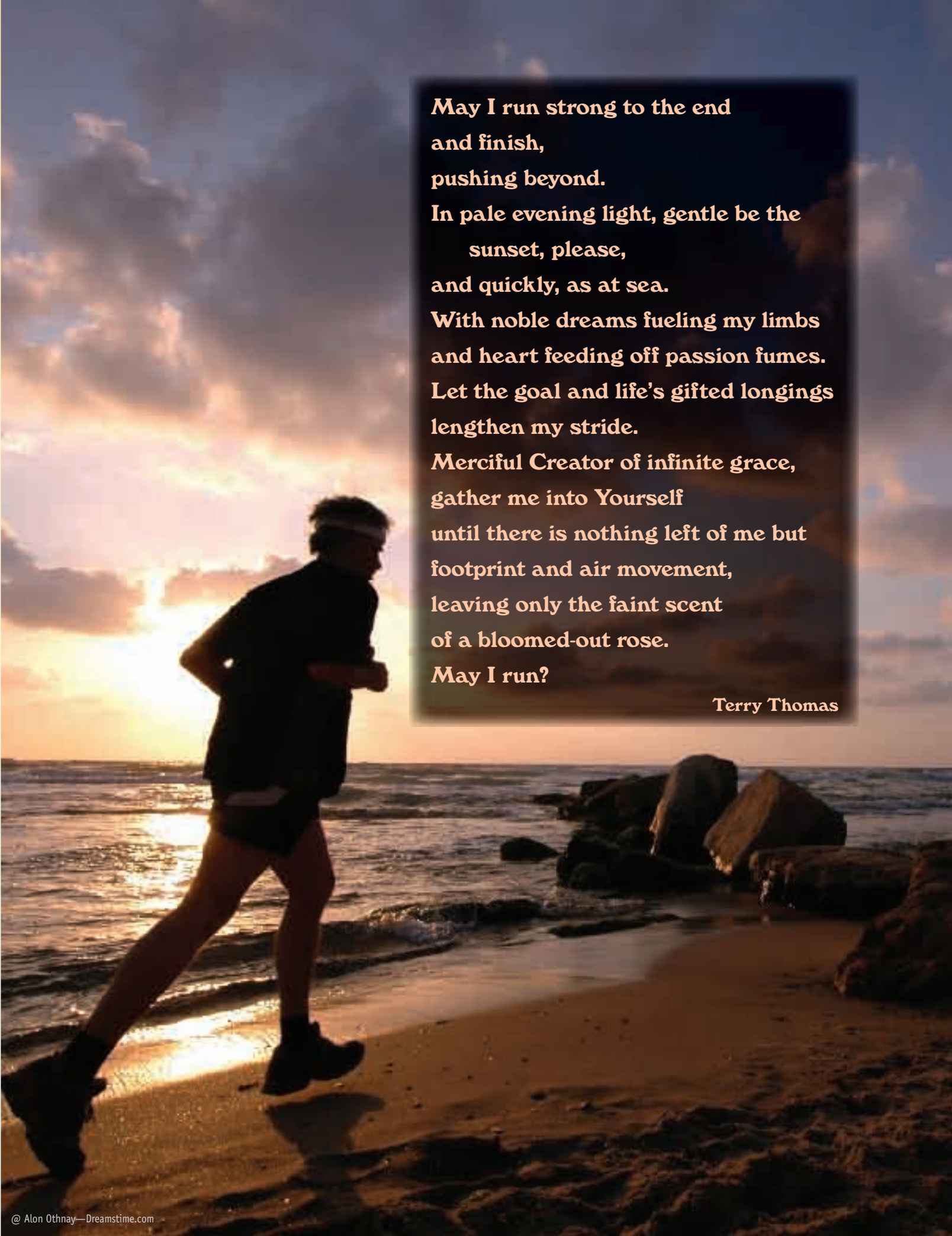
Sincere congratulations to Jill Richardson ["Embracing the Valley," p. 20]. Such spiritual maturity is rare and precious. I hope it is widely read. To my mind, she has received a reward of faith that is more precious than answers to the prayers of those who lack her substantial spiritual character! It also reminds me that some of my prayers may not be answered as I request because someone else's wiser petition to God was!

*R. S.
West Linn, OR*

BA blessings

The BA is wonderful! I always look forward to reading it. It's so helpful, inspiring, and full of truth. I feel very blessed to be a part of the Church of God (Seventh Day) and saved by Christ our Savior.

*L. S.
LaPlata, MO*

A silhouette of a runner is shown in profile, running along a sandy beach. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright, golden glow that reflects off the water and the sand. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds. In the background, there are large, dark rocks on the beach. The overall mood is peaceful and inspiring.

**May I run strong to the end
and finish,
pushing beyond.**

**In pale evening light, gentle be the
sunset, please,
and quickly, as at sea.**

**With noble dreams fueling my limbs
and heart feeding off passion fumes.
Let the goal and life's gifted longings
lengthen my stride.**

**Merciful Creator of infinite grace,
gather me into Yourself
until there is nothing left of me but
footprint and air movement,
leaving only the faint scent
of a bloomed-out rose.**

May I run?

Terry Thomas



Did you know . . .

- that Ministries Training System is searching for a full-time director to lead the ministry — and for a new name to call it?
- the director's job description is posted at <http://mts.cog7.org/jobs?> Interested persons should inquire of Mary Jean Knoll at 541-689-3116 or knoll5853@comcast.net.
- a contest to improve the school's name will be held through December 31? Entries no longer than four words should be sent to MTS, P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233, or e-mailed to training@cog7.org. Submitter of the winning entry will receive \$200 cash from MTS. (Sample names: Sabbathton Institute, Cranmer School of Ministry)

Ministries Training System

Picture a Pipeline

Calvin Burrell Director

MTS is like a pipeline: Its front end opens for every person who hears and answers God's call — not just to salvation in Christ but also to service in His kingdom.

Now picture men and women, young and old, moving along the pipeline as it winds through instruction and mentorship, classrooms and online study, reading and writing, prayer and practice — through the Bible's Route 66 to mature Christian ministry.

Those who stay in the pipeline to its end are thrust into a variety of gospel services, including the pastorate — especially for men. The supply tank of CoG7 ministers and pastors ever has room for many a more, as several exit yearly through its drains of discouragement and death.

By late 2008 the men who've worked their ways through half the MTS pipe are counted in the dozens. A hundred more are in early stages of the system, whose good effect on its clientele is growing. Some will never finish the course, however, and the drainpipes never quit. So more persons are needed to step up and move in among the called to Christ and chosen to serve.

For more on the pipeline into gospel ministry, visit us at <http://mts.cog7.org/home/> or contact training@cog7.org; 303-452-7973 or 713-828-9969 (Spanish).





SVA Offers Dual Enrollment Credits

Spring Vale Academy is pleased to announce dual enrollment courses with Liberty and Regent universities, enabling students to take fully accredited and transferable college classes on its Owosso, Michigan, campus. Also, students have opportunity to do CLEP and advanced placement testing for college credit after completing traditional classes at SVA. The combination of these programs will allow students to complete a year or more of college before graduation, at a fraction of the price.

For the 2008-09 school year, Spring Vale welcomed new staff, including Andrew Fernandez, assistant boys' dean; Scott Fischer, boys' dean; Becky Kendrick, girls' dean; T. C. Molinar, office manager; Duane Peterson, science teacher; Jeff and Missy Smith, maintenance and cook.

SVA's enrollment at mid-term stands at 51. More would attend if they had sponsors. Persons who wish to help students attend Spring Vale, contact dboyles@springvale.us.

Statement of Faith Studies

Bible Truths for Faith and Life (Basic Teachings of the Church of God [Seventh Day]) is the title for the first and second quarters of the 2009 is-

ses of Bible Studies for Adults. These 26 lessons focus on the teachings of the *Statement of Faith* booklet published by the Church. The presentations and questions are supported by many scriptural texts, giving a firm foundation for students individually or in a group. These studies are also available for high school age-students under the title *Living by God's Word*.

Helpful teacher's guides are available. Cost for the student book is \$3; the teacher's guide is \$5. Order from Bible Advocate Press, P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233; 303-452-7973 or bap.orders@cog7.org.

orders@cog7.org.

Checklist for 2008

- () Have you reviewed your charitable giving for 2008?
- () Have you made that major gift you planned this year?
- () Have you written or updated your will and included a portion of your estate to support the gospel?

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

Hispanic Women's Retreat

Another terrific National Hispanic Women's Retreat happened near Corpus Christi, TX, over Labor Day weekend, with 202 ladies attending, despite the threat of Hurricane Ike not far away.

Eva Delgado and Joquebed Martinez de Gonzales, teachers in the seminary of our sister church in Mexico, delighted us with their knowledge and humor. Next year's retreat will be in Northern California.





Council in Gull Lake

The North American Ministerial Council (NAMC), serving the Church in the U.S. and Canada, met at lovely Gull Lake (see p. 3) near Kalamazoo, Michigan, October 6-11. Seventy ordained ministers, 19 lay pastors, and another 35 local and district leaders registered for the meeting that included a track of events for laymen.

Elder Robert Coulter, 78, chaired the council's business. At week's end, he was presented with a plaque recognizing 50+ years as a CoG7 minister and 20 years as the NAMC president (1963-81, 2006-08).

This council gave extended time to two topics. First, it heard several historical sketches on the Church that first sprouted a few miles down the road from this NAMC's meeting site.

The year 2008 marks the 150th since Gilbert Cranmer left James and Ellen White (SDA pioneers) in 1858 to plant or serve congregations of Sabbath-keeping Adventists strung from Battle Creek west



Rex Miller and Sam Holland (with his wife, Maria) receive ordination by Elders Whaid Rose, Paul Heavilin, and Glen Palmer (behind pulpit).

to the shores of Lake Michigan. These were Churches of Christ until they followed the lead of like-minded Iowa and Missouri brethren by adopting the Church of God name just prior to formation of the General Conference near South Haven, Michigan, in 1884.

Second, this council devoted several hours to the report of the new covenant study committee, appointed to investigate the claims

of some that the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection signifies a full break with the moral standard anchored in the Ten Commandments of the old covenant. The committee's view supported the continuance of the Decalogue as a unit under Christ, although its function in the new covenant is not identical to its function in the old. The committee will continue service for two more years.

In other business, the council

- rolled the five-year expiration of licenses and credentials forward (from July 1, 2008) and established guidelines for meeting these continuing education requirements.
- validated the decision of the Ministries Training System regents to raise requirements for the ministerial license (diploma of pastoral ministry) from 42 credits to 72 credits for students who enroll after June 30, 2009.
- approved the recommendation of the General Conference board that the lay pastor certificate program be transferred to NAMC administration and that requirements for the certificate call for 12 credits at the start with continuing education until 72 credits are achieved within ten years. Some exemptions from these requirements will be permitted.
- heard an interim report of the committee assigned to develop a book-length manuscript to support the Church's statement of faith; approved its plan to have the manuscript ready for final review in the fall of 2010 and the book published for distribution at the 2011 G. C. convention.
- elected Calvin Burrell of Colorado as its next president, Raul Lopez of Texas as vice president, and Kenneth Knoll of Oregon as secretary. The License and Credentials Committee consists of Steven Kyner, Raul Lopez, Max Morrow, Don Rodgers, Heber Vega, Michael Vlad, and Glen Palmer, chairman. Nominating committee will be Chip Hinds, Max Morrow, and Melvin Sweet.

On October 11, members and friends from around Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois drove to Gull Lake for a Super Sabbath day, swelling the crowd to around 400. A brief history of the Church in Michigan given on that occasion is available at www.cog7.org/BA. Later that evening, Rex Miller of Michigan and Samuel Holland of Ontario were ordained into vocational ministry, and Elder Whaid Rose preached a council-ending, forward-looking message.



Seekers

Got Seekers? Every church needs a Seekers group, where youngsters from 9 to 12 years work on activity and skill badges. For more information, contact Dorothy Keim, 845 Elm Drive, Eugene, OR 97404-3909; 541-688-1707, dotkeim@hotmail.com.

Disaster Relief Fund

Following the tremendous storm named Ike that struck the Galveston-Houston, Texas, area, we have determined how your Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) can help. The property damage, including the CoG7 building in Galveston, is extensive. Several families in the Galveston, Pasadena, and Spring Branch churches have lost much or all their personal property, and many do not have insurance. DRF will be working through the CoG7 Houston Area Pastors Association to provide aid. Please remember your brethren with an offering marked "Hurricane Ike DRF."

Elder George Hnamte of Mizoram State in Northeastern India has sent thanks to all DRF donors for the \$3,000 recently sent for poor families affected by a typhoon in that region. He also asked for prayers and DRF assistance for Christian families victimized by the persecution in Karnataka, Kerala, and Orissa states, where the CoG7 has only recently been planted.

Brethren, your generosity and your prayers are making a difference for hurting people! Send your Disaster Relief offerings to Church of God (Seventh Day), P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO USA 80233-0677. And thank you for them!

— Bill Hicks
Missions Ministries

Golden Anniversary

Congratulations to Richard and Marilyn Jones of Riverbank, California, who celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on November 29.

Super Sabbath

Phoenix, Arizona, will host a Super Sabbath on December 20, with Whaid Rose preaching. The place is 6750 N. 7th Avenue (two blocks west of Glendale), and 9:30 a.m. is the time. Contact Gabriel Guzman, gzm_chiajchiul@yahoo.com.



LITES behind bars: The 2008-09 team of Leadership in Training for Evangelism and Service visited inmate-teammate Seth Privacky (a third-year student-by-extension of the Stanberry, MO, ministry) in the Kinross Correctional Facility of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Pictured here are Jordan Schlenker of Montpelier, ND; Seth Privacky of Muskegon, MI; Leah Wallace of Eugene, OR; and Bryan Cleeton of Sacramento, CA. Pastor Melvin Sweet and Director Larry Marrs are not pictured. For all but Larry Marrs, this was a first-time visit with Seth, who was greatly encouraged by the opportunity to talk and pray with his LITES teammates.

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, 2008.

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International Tour

The Church We Must Become

A message to brethren around the world.

Much had been said about the purpose of God's church. For some pastors and preachers, the important thing is to win souls, and the numbers become ends in themselves. How many members in the church? How many people attend the service? How much do they tithe? So urgent are numerical goals that it does not matter that great biblical truths are sacrificed, provided the goals are met. Comfort and prosperity become central purposes.

For others, dogma is the main thing. The focus of the message is ecclesiastical traditions not always consistent with God's Word. For such, it doesn't matter that the church is dying or that people are lost. If they truly want to be saved, it is felt, they will observe this doctrine.

Closer to home, we may want to promote our favorite ministry over others. The vital purpose for some is worship or prayer; for others, it may be prophetic teaching. Our church insists on faithfulness to the Bible as the maximum authority for faith and practice. As such, let us reflect on what God's Word says about the church we are called to become. Consider these aspects:

1 We must become a church in complete relationship with God. Here we speak of worship. Our purpose is to be a church that relates with God as Christ teaches: "True worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23, KJV). We must not worship God only at certain times or in certain places, nor relate with Him only in certain aspects of life. Worship must become a way of life for the believer, in all times, places, and circumstances — and with all our being.

2 We must become a church in full relationship with others. Here we speak of unity. Jesus says, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35, KJV). This "one to another" expression is oft repeated in the New Testament. We are not only to love one another but also to forgive, to support, to exhort, and to confess faults to one another. These are sincere relationships, transparent and deep. If our links in the body of Christ are superficial, our links with God will be also. Relationship with God is in direct proportion to relationship with brethren in the faith.

3 We must become a church in urgent relationship with a lost world. Here we speak of evangelization. A church must be conscientiously devoted to the manifestation of God in history

by means of our presence, word, and action. *Presence* speaks of testimony given in the social reality where believers live, different from that of the ungodly world around us. Let us communicate, verbally and nonverbally, the character of God and the recreating truths of His redeeming work. We must be engaged with the world God loves, a work that takes us outside the church walls to a place of pain and death where suffering is ever mounting. "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach" (Hebrews 13:12, 13, KJV). Too frequently our work is reduced to activities within our buildings (temple-centrism). The church must set aside the comfort of buildings to go outside and make disciples. We glorify the Father by bearing much fruit.

This is the church we must become!

— Ramón Ruiz Garza
IMC President



Life in Excess

Christians are to be not just faithful but fruitful. Jesus said, “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:8, NIV).

In his small volume simply titled *Meditation*, Jim Downing paints a beautiful picture of the fruitful Christian. He points out that for every New Testament truth, there is an Old Testament illustration, or picture. Jesus’ familiar discourse about the vine and the branches in John 15 has an Old Testament picture in Jeremiah 17:7, 8:

Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit (NIV).

This tree in Jeremiah’s illustration faced severe heat and drought. However, despite adverse conditions, it remained green and yielded fruit in its season. What was the tree’s secret? It spread its roots by the river, tapping into the life-giving nourishment it needed.

This vividly illustrates Jesus’ words in John 15:5: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (NIV). Through day-by-day connection with Jesus, we share His life and bear His fruit, regardless of our circumstances. This is the picture of the fruitful Christian.

By examining the rings on the stump of a fallen tree, we can know its age. But these rings reveal even more. Large rings indicate that nourishment was plenty that year; narrow rings reflect years of drought.

Phillips’ translation renders John 15:5 “It is the man who shares my life and whose life I share who proves fruitful.” It’s been discovered that a small amount of nourishment sustains what life is already in the tree. When the nourishment is more than

the tree needs to sustain its life, the tree grows. But if the nourishment is over and above what is needed to sustain life and cause growth, it is transformed into fruit. Fruit, then, is excess life!

This sheds new light on another familiar saying of Jesus: “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10, NKJV). To have abundant life is to have life in excess – not just enough to stay alive and to grow but surplus life that becomes fruit.

I now better understand why Jesus had such contempt for the fruitless fig tree (Matthew 21:18, 19). By cursing it, He underscored that to share His life but not bear His fruit is sin. Fruitless Christians compose a fruitless church, and a fruitless church is no credit to the kingdom.

If trees could talk, the fig tree may have offered excuses: “The ground is hard; I couldn’t spread my roots deep enough” or “The fruit I produce isn’t cared for by the culture anymore, so why bother?” But in Christ’s economy, such excuses only accuse. Fruitfulness is serious business. Nothing but leaves, the Spirit grieves!

Sobering thoughts as this sesquicentennial year ends. It began with a Prayer Initiative, themed “A New Season of Fruitfulness,” based on Isaiah 58. In this chapter we find another picture, or promise, of the fruitful life. How fitting to end the year with renewed commitment, not just to faithfulness but also to fruitfulness. And this we will do by daily drawing life-giving strength and nourishment from Jesus. He is our life, and He invites us to share it in excess.

– Whaid Guscott Rose
General Conference President



Ministers in Michigan



*Elder Robert Coulter, Ministerial
Council chairman for 20 years*

**“Come apart and rest awhile,”
said Jesus. For a week in autumn,
this group tended to the Church’s
ministerial interests in Gull Lake
and found the personal body/soul
refreshment to which our Lord
invites His disciples. For a fuller
report on this remarkable time
and place, see pages 3 and 28.**