

July-August 2011

BA
BIBLE ADVOCATE®

A photograph of the Chicago skyline at dusk. The Willis Tower is the central focus, illuminated with blue lights. Other skyscrapers are lit up with warm yellow and orange lights. The city lights reflect on the water in the foreground.

Amazing Love in Chicago

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2011: Year of the Bible

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Have you seen the BA on Facebook yet? Look us up and join the community!

If you want to ask questions about this issue's content and discuss it with others online, visit the new CoG7 Community at <http://cog7.org>. The forum is open; anyone can join and post.

When you see this symbol, visit www.BAonline.org for additional material.

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More Grace

You may know that, since March 1 this year, your editor has been pinch-hitting for CoG7 Missions Director Bill Hicks. Known for his intense, flat-out ministry style, Elder Bill has taken a well-earned sabbatical given by the G. C. board.

As part of this added duty, I traveled to Australia and The Philippines for twelve days in late April, mostly in the company of South Australian Pastor Phil Kordahi. This BA gives me a chance to greet many of the dear brethren I encountered on that mission, undertaken in behalf of Missions Abroad and the International Ministerial Congress. The many Filipinos I met (see p. 28) are beautiful for Jesus, and the Aussies, though fewer in number, have generously proven their commitment to change for our world through gospel missions (see p. 26).

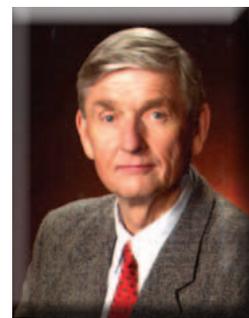
As May ends, Bill resumes his missions role, and my service in that field returns to pre-March levels. It has been gratifying to see close-up the zeal and skill that President Ramon Ruiz and the IMC team demonstrate in serving the gospel cause around the world. By God's grace, as Bill would say it, much has been achieved, and the Church is expanding quickly in several far-flung areas.

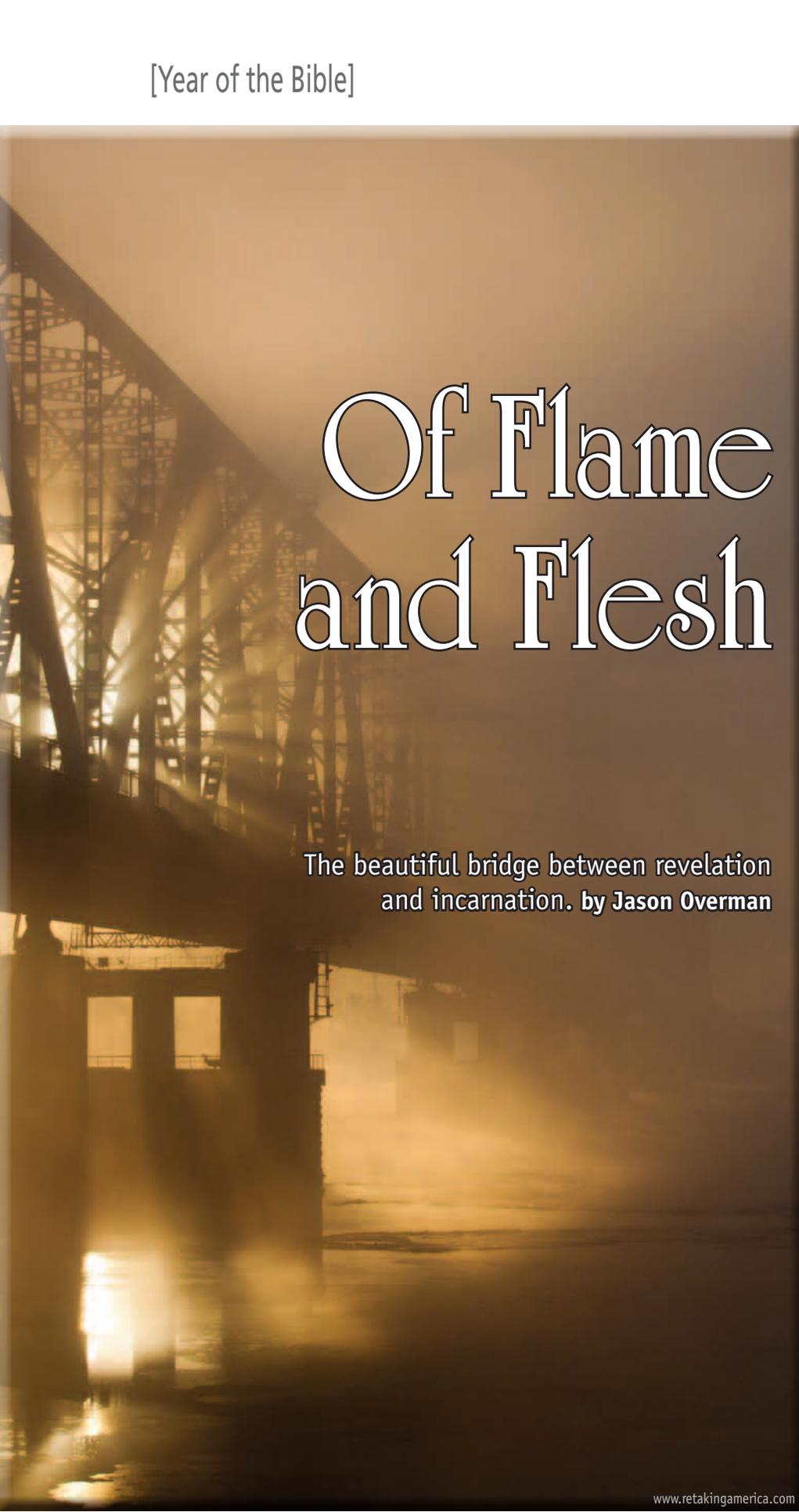
You may know too that your Conference and Missions leaders have faced increased levels of institutional and interpersonal stress this past year. By the same grace, God has been faithful in this matter also. To read the statement issued by three leading churchmen after their mid-May mediation effort, see the June-July *Churchright* (also online at cog7.org).

More and more I'm persuaded that all good gifts come our way by grace — God's unmerited favor (James 1:17). If we humble ourselves before Him, the God of all grace, James says that more grace comes our way (4:6-10). What a fine example of this we see now worked out among our church's leaders. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

We'll celebrate this grace and grow our unity in Christ at the Church's convention near Chicago, July 18-23. Not registered? It may not be too late to join us at Pheasant Run. Visit cog7.org/convention or call 303-452-7973. Wherever you are that week, gratitude and humility toward God will increase your blessings. To the earnestly humble, "He gives more grace" (4:6).

— Calvin Burrell





Of Flame and Flesh

The beautiful bridge between revelation
and incarnation. by Jason Overman

There is a book about a thing;
then there is the thing itself.
There is a book that bears
witness to a becoming, and there
is the transformation. The Bible is
such a book.

As beautiful and significant as
Holy Scripture is to the church, it
is not an end in itself. Rather, it is
a bridge that points both before
and beyond to realities greater
than itself – *before* to divine
revelation that is its source and
strength, and *beyond* to the hu-
man embodiment that is its aim
and aspiration.

Before the written Word, the
story put to paper, or our myriad
translations – before all this was
the flame, the fiery breath of
God, the event and experience
of revelation itself.

And beyond the inscribed
Word, the report put to page, or
our myriad doctrinal debates –
after all this is the flesh, the event
and experience of incarnation
itself.

The Bible tethers us to this
reality. Never content with our
possessing the paper and ink
of it alone, the Bible is always
concerned to convey the story,
transmitting like a conduit these
two critical truths. God's Word
reveals Himself to His people so
that He might accomplish His
ultimate goal, that His people
would embody and become that
very Word in history.

Moses: flame and flesh

The Israelites experienced
this very process at Mount Sinai.
Delivered from captivity so they
might worship their Creator and
Redeemer in the wilderness, they
would now learn what it means
to be servants of God rather than
of Pharaoh. Here at the foot of

www.retakingamerica.com

Horeb they encountered God's tri-fold plan to form a people from revelation to inscription to incarnation.

Flaming revelation: "You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven" (Exodus 20:22c; 1-17).

Inscribing the event: "Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction" (24:12b, NIV).

Fleshly incarnation: "Observe what I command you this day" (34:11a).

The Ten Commandments given in this account began as a flame of revelation, a God-breathed event that Israel heard and experienced personally. God also preserved His revealed message by engraving it on tables of stone so that it would continue speaking to generations to come. And still the purpose of recording the event was that Israelites might embody in their flesh the revelation spoken that day.

This Exodus story is a microcosm for the whole Bible. The stone tablets then, like the Bible itself, were not an end but a means. Both point to the flame that came before and the flesh that will follow.

And yet the generation that received this truth took up its holiness but fell by rebellion in the wilderness. Despite the gifts of revelation and inscription, Israel did not complete what God had intended. She did not incarnate it. The Word spoken and recorded did not become flesh, and so what was intended as gift became curse — a testimony not of what the Israelites were but of what they weren't.

As Israel languished in sin,

the fulfillment of God's plan remained before her.

Prophets: promises of flame and flesh

Another generation would rise up — the children of those who stood at Mount Sinai. They would enter the Promised Land, but not before Moses reminded them of God's triune plan of revelation (Deuteronomy 5:4), inscription (9:10), and incarnation (29:9). They were now the bearers of this story, this truth that would not let them proceed into promise without first accepting its call on their collective lives.

And so it was that generation after generation received this story truth of a God who revealed and recorded Himself so that His people might become like Him. Yet all these generations failed to embody the gift they had been given. Israel's prophets would confront this tragic failure: God has proclaimed Himself, but His defiant people have not personified Him, and thus returned to captivity.

Within the futile darkness of Israel's distress the prophets were given a new revelation, and a new record was inscribed. Israel's failure would not be the last word. God's will would not be thwarted. Where Israel had failed by the deep sting of sin, God himself would act again to

incarnate His Word among His people.

The song of the prophets became Israel's anthem. A new covenant was coming.

I will not rest, until [Zion's] righteousness goes forth as brightness . . . (Isaiah 62:1).

I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts . . . (Jeremiah 31:33).

I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes . . . (Ezekiel 36:27).

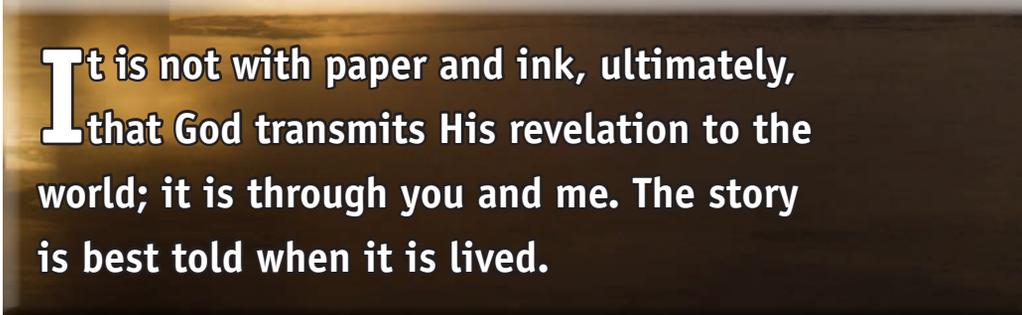
Where Israel had failed to embody His recorded revelation, God's resounding word by the prophets was "*I will.*"

Jesus Christ: flame and flesh fulfilled

Beginning His ministry, Jesus followed the old Exodus paradigm by delivering a host of captive Israelites from their sins and sicknesses and leading them to hear God's Word from a mountain (Matthew 4–7). What was true of Israel at Sinai would be recapitulated in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: The Savior would fulfill the law and call His disciples to fulfill it, too (5:17-20).

The sermon began with the Son declaring God's revelation; it ended with Him calling others to incarnate it.

Flaming revelation: "Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying" (5:2).



It is not with paper and ink, ultimately, that God transmits His revelation to the world; it is through you and me. The story is best told when it is lived.

Required Reading

Christian faith has always been a biblical faith. The role of scripture in shaping the faith is one of the most enduring characteristics of Christianity. Calling Christians a people of the Book or followers of the Word is perfectly appropriate; the Bible is the source of our belief. Scripture is where we meet God. From the theological statements of church leaders to the daily and weekly practices of believers worldwide, the Bible remains central to our Christian identity and to our relationship with God.

But the book isn't everything.

— Jon L. Berquist, *Incarnation*

Fleshly incarnation: “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock” (7:24).

Here once more the people of God experienced the fiery breath of God, the revelation of the Word raining down upon them from the mountaintop — an event experienced up close and personal. And just as Israel was called to obey the Ten Words spoken, so Jesus called His disciples to not just hear His words but also do them.

Inscribing the event. And once more God preserved the moment and the message, not on tables of stone this time but on papyrus so later generations can read and pass the revelation on. The Holy Spirit moved Matthew to the task. Just as Moses chipped the Word into words on stone, so Matthew scratched the Word into words on another material in order that Jesus' sermon might reach our ears.

Although the church often fares no better than Israel in incarnating the Word, God's triune promise of revelation, inscription,

and incarnation remains. We have a better way than Israel of old. Where she, and we, have failed to faithfully complete the journey from revelation to incarnation and so stand condemned due to the sting of sin, Jesus Christ has accomplished that movement perfectly.

In the gospel we discover that Jesus is not just another prophet like Moses and not just one more restoration ministry among others. Jesus was a prophet and had a ministry. But more than that, He is the Only Begotten of the Father — the Word made flesh, full of grace and truth (John 1:1, 14).

Church: destiny of flame and flesh

In Jesus we meet in person the Word that stands behind and beyond the Scripture that we honor. He is Alpha and Omega, the flame that reveals and the flesh that incarnates all the Bible records. In Him we have a better hope to make this journey from revelation to incarnation as well. By Jesus and through His Spirit we are, in fact, participants in this

process by new covenant.

“Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men,” Paul says to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 3:2, KJV). They are a walking, talking word of God to the world. He draws upon the prophet Jeremiah's voice to describe this miracle:

Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart (v. 3, KJV).

Paul was confident that the church will indeed incarnate the revelation of God, because it is not our work but God's work in us: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God” (v. 5, KJV).

The Bible tells an amazing story, but the Bible is not the story itself; it is rather a bearer of that story to the world. It is not with paper and ink, ultimately, that God transmits His revelation to the world; it is through you and me. The story is best told when it is lived.

There is a book about revelation, and then there is the revealing itself. There is a book that tells of incarnation, and then there is the incarnating. The Bible is such a book, and we are the people of the Book — called to *be the Book*. **BA**

After serving as lay pastor in Jasper, AR, for years, **Jason Overman** received his ministerial license in early 2011.



Reading your statements of faith, I am curious as to your position on Israel and Jewish people today. Another church says that Christians are “spiritual Israel” and have replaced the Jews in God’s overall plan. Where do you stand?

Our viewpoint on this intriguing issue assigns more significance to modern-day Israel than some do. Replacement theology, which you cited, teaches that Christians have fully replaced national Israel as recipients of biblical promises.

On the other hand, we attach less modern significance to being Jewish than some others. Dispensationalists, for example, teach that God has two sets of people — the church and the Jews — with a different plan for each, present and future.

We believe that, in the ultimate sense, God has only one “chosen people” — the church, His people in Christ (Eph. 1:4; 1 Peter 2:9). We resist the thought that the old covenant remains valid as God’s religious plan for Israel, or that anyone may be saved through the old covenant alone without the redemption that is in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Christians are, in a spiritual sense, the true Israel of God (Gal. 3:29; 6:16b).

The truth of the previous paragraph, in our opinion, does not negate a continuing role for physical Israel. God is not yet finished with the Jewish people (Rom. 11:1, 2). Some of His promises through the prophets (Isa. 11:11, 12; Jer. 31:7-12; 32:37-44; Ezek. 37:21-28; 38:8-16; Amos 9:11-15) and His words through Christ and Paul (Luke 21:20-24; Rom. 9, 10, and especially 11:25-29) speak to literal Israel’s role in the last days.

It is unclear from Scripture just how the role of Israel will develop among the nations at the end of this age. We watch and pray for God’s final fulfillment.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Do you allow women to serve on boards — as pastor, leader, elder, or deacon? Are there Bible verses for this?

The Church’s position is a moderate one: Women serve in various leadership positions, but not as elder or pastor. Many texts relate to this complex issue.

We find the many Bible examples of women in lead roles: Miriam, a worship leader (Ex. 15:20, 21); Deborah, a judge (Judges 4 and 5); Esther, a queen; Huldah, a prophetess (2 Kings 22:14; several more prophetesses in both testaments); Priscilla, a teacher (Acts 18:26); and Phoebe, a deaconess (Rom. 16:1, 2).

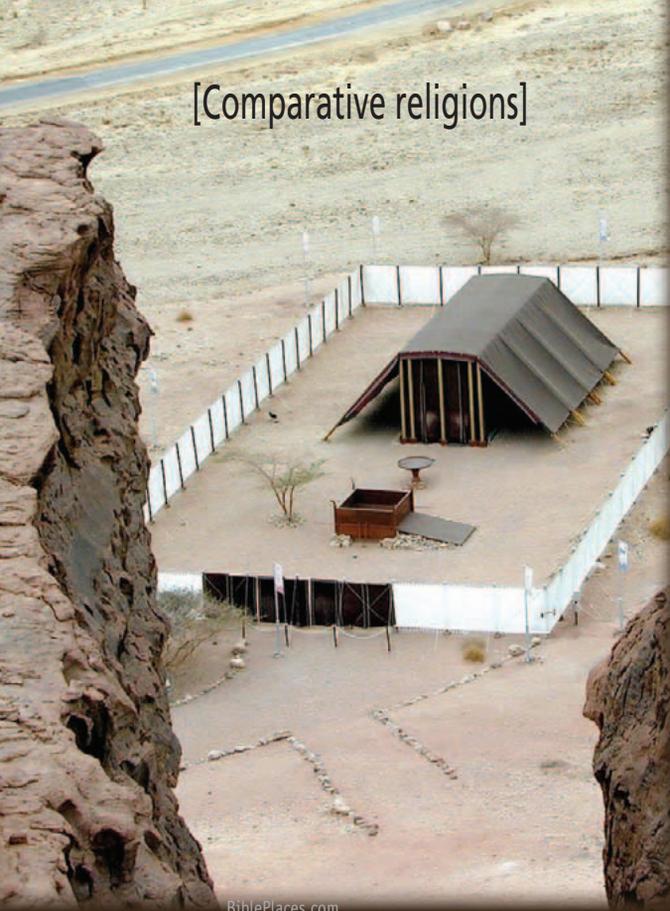
We find general reports of women active in worship and other forms of service. In the New Testament, women were last at the cross, first at the empty tomb, first to evangelize Samaria, and first to convert in Europe. The Holy Spirit inspires both men and women to dream and prophesy for the Lord (Acts 2:16-18; 1 Cor. 11:5a).

Leading women labored in the gospel with Paul (Phil. 4:2, 3), who cited several feminine names for recognition in Romans 16:1-16. Phoebe (v. 1) is called “deaconess” (RSV) — a female servant-leader of the church. *Deacon* and *servant* translate from the same Greek word, *diakonos*.

On the other hand, we also find Paul’s restrictions on women’s teaching and preaching (1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11-15). Reading these as firm church policy for all times and places can be problematic, since that would conflict with the examples and general statements reported above.

In an effort to deal fairly with these diverse strands of truth, CoG7 encourages women to serve in a variety of congregational and denominational roles: teaching, music and worship leading, boards and committees, children and youth work, and many more — while the roles of elder and pastor are restricted to men.

— Elder Calvin Burrell



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Jesus is Our

No man can serve two masters. by Calvin Burrell

Who, besides our Lord, do you regard as the Bible's greatest man?

Would it be the first man, Adam? The flood man, Noah? The faith man, Abraham? King David? Or the apostle Paul?

By greatest man, I don't mean the man most holy. That might lead us to Job or Samuel or Joseph or Daniel. Although none of these men were perfect, few faults are recorded in the Bible about any of them.

What I mean here by greatest is the one most significant in the big picture of things — the greatest influencer of others toward God.

My vote goes for the man who led more people, for more years, through more troubles, from a worse situation to a better destination, than any other guy in Scripture. I vote for Moses.

The Bible says that Moses was the meekest, the most humble of men and that he was the greatest of the prophets as well (Numbers 12:3, 6-8). That's enough to put him toward the top of anyone's list.

For the best evidence of Moses' greatness, however, let's compare him with authentic greatness — with Jesus the Christ. Notice these points of correlation:

- Both Moses and Jesus have four full books in the Bible recounting their lives and teachings (Exodus through Deuteronomy, Matthew through John).
- Both were born under a death sentence (from Pharaoh, from Herod).
- Both were once princes (in Egypt, in heaven), and both

left their royal homes in the interests of others (all Israel, all people).

- Both were called to "Go down" and "Let My people go," and both became successful in that, through the shedding of blood (Passover lambs, Calvary's cross).

- Both took their people out of slavery (Egypt, sin), through water (Red Sea, baptism).

- Both took the people directly to a mountain and there gave them God's law (Mount Sinai, Sermon on the Mount).

- Both led their people on a difficult desert trek, giving them bread and water in a dry and thirsty land.

- Both Moses and Jesus were born to lead, taking their many followers toward the great Promised Land flowing with milk and honey (Canaan's land, God's kingdom).

Given these similarities between Moses and the Christ, one might jump to the conclusion that they are equally great and that it isn't very important which one we follow. Mistake!

More light is shed on our

Moses

subject if we consider not just the similarities between these two great Bible men, but also their differences. We have compared Moses and Christ; now let us contrast them. Notice:

- Moses came with the law, but Jesus comes with *grace and truth* (John 1:17).
- Moses gave bread and water, but Jesus *is* the living bread and water (4:7; 6:32).
- Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, but Jesus himself was lifted up (3:14, 15).
- Moses killed the Passover lambs, but Jesus *is* the Lamb of God (1:29).
- Moses struck the rock, but Jesus *is* the Rock that was struck (1 Corinthians 10:4).
- Moses saved that nation for a time; Jesus saved this world for eternity (John 3:16, 17).
- Moses gave the law that points out our sins; Jesus forgives all the sins that Moses' law points out (Acts 13:39).
- To reject Moses' law meant death; to reject Jesus and the Spirit of grace means even more severe punishment

(Hebrews 10:18, 29).

- Moses was a faithful servant in God's house; Jesus was the faithful Son in God's house that He himself built (3:3-6).
 - Moses was transfigured with Elijah, representing the law and the prophets; Jesus appeared with them in the middle, and heaven's voice directed those who stood by to "Hear Him!" (Matthew 17:5).
- The final point above suggests that followers of Christ are not chiefly people of Moses and the law, though we respect both him and it. Nor are we primarily people of Elijah and the prophets, though we have much to learn from them.

Essentially, we are the people of Jesus Christ, the Man in the middle. Only He is worthy of all — our ears, our hearts and hands, our fullest trust and obedience.

Moses rescued one nation from slavery to the Egyptian Pharaoh. Jesus rescued the world from slavery to sin and the Devil.



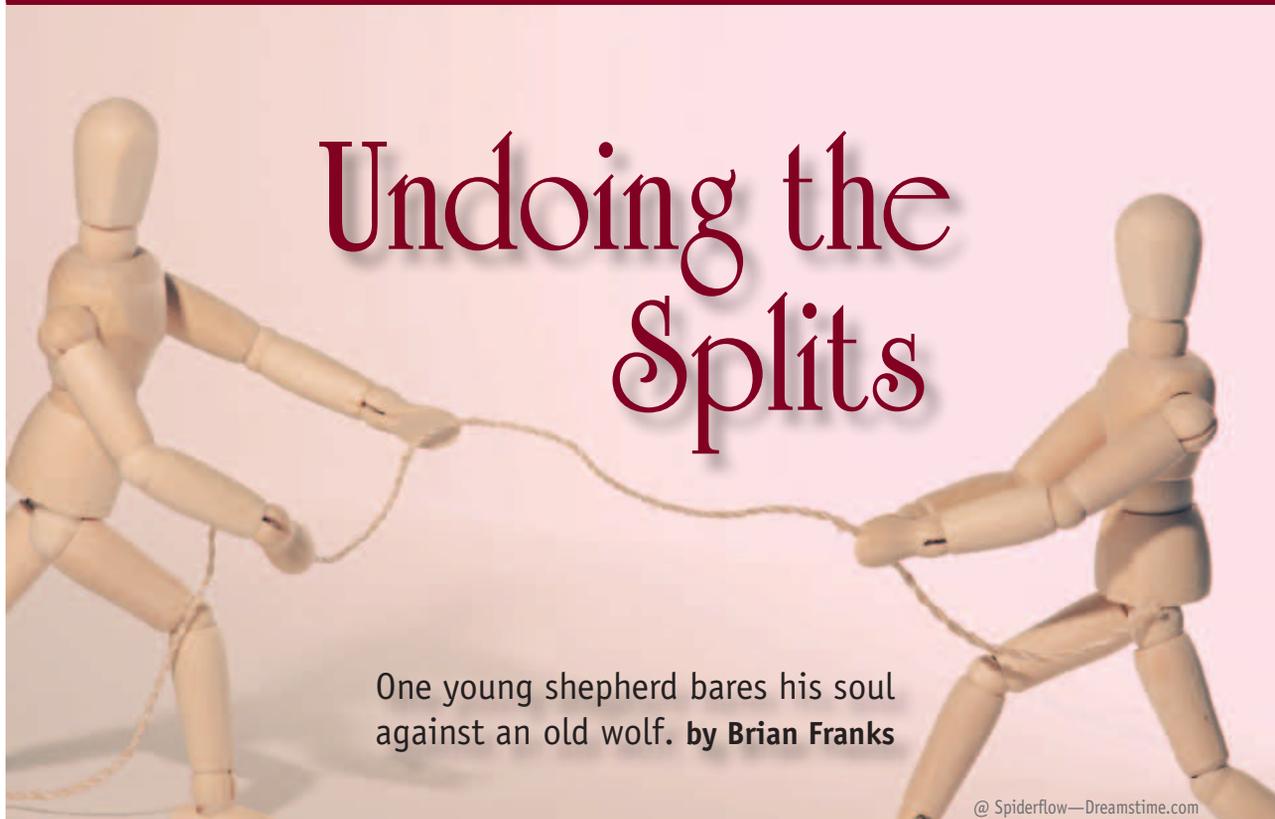
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Moses got Israel out of Egypt and led them toward the place of milk and honey. But he couldn't get 'em in. Most of them died in the desert, and he died at the border, just short of the Promised Land.

Jesus, the author *and finisher* of our faith, will get us all the way to His eternal home, without the loss of even one who truly believes (Hebrews 12:2; John 17:12).

So who is our heavenly Prince, our Deliverer, our Passover Lamb, our Leader and Lawgiver, our Rock and Manna from heaven, the One who brought us out so He could bring us in (Deuteronomy 6:23)?

For Christians, it is not Moses. It is Jesus! ^{BA}



Undoing the Splits

One young shepherd bares his soul against an old wolf. by Brian Franks

@ Spiderflow—Dreamstime.com

A pastor in our church asked me, “If you could change anything about the Church of God (Seventh Day), what would it be?”

I knew quickly what I would do: I would work to heal the Church’s schisms and prevent them in the future. May this article be a spark for that fire.

Disputes and resolutions

The disputes that separate local churches are apparent when some refuse to share the same physical meeting place. More ominously, not genuinely fellowshiping with each other is a spiritual matter. It divides the very body of Christ.

Members may attend the same Super Sabbath or even greet each other at convention, but they make little or no effort to resolve the conflict that split their fellowship in the first place.

The resolution here is for the two groups to become reunified in the Spirit, thus ending the real struggle. They may then physically reunite or work harmoniously as two congregations in the same area.

By reuniting, the two groups may gain strength as they pool their resources and talents in service. They may also realize economic savings from the merge, thus freeing more funds for gospel outreach. If they remain as two congregations with positive relations, they could still pool some resources and reach even more people in their area by being in two places at once, each with a unique personality and style.

Some members may not fit well with one congregation’s approach but would do amazing things in another group. In two groups, opportunities for service

are doubled as well. So the congregations can be physically two but united in Spirit and working together for the kingdom, instead of against each other.

Obstacles

There are a number of obstacles to resolution. One is attitude. Persons may excuse themselves from action and lay all blame on others. “They broke up the church!” “They’re the ones who had a problem with us.” “They aren’t doing anything to fix it, so why should we?” Others say, “We want to fix it, but we don’t know how.”

The best start to resolution is for all to adopt the Christlike attitude of a servant, not of a lord over God’s heritage (Philippians 2:5-8).

Christ’s followers can hardly escape the import of His statement: “If a kingdom is divided

against itself, that kingdom cannot stand" (Mark 3:24, 25; also Matthew 12:25; Luke 11:17).

Viewing this axiom in terms of the body of Christ, how can we expect a church in which competition and adversarial spirits prevail to function well? How effective will we be in showing the love and forgiveness of Christ when we can't practice it ourselves? We can be sure that any divisions we create or allow to develop will be used by the Devil to the great detriment of the local church.

Forgiveness

That's why forgiveness is so important. But extending it to others isn't easy. Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21, 22, KJV).

Many times we have Peter's attitude: If we've forgiven our brother seven times, then we've done our righteous part. But Jesus corrects our thinking here. We should lose count before we stop forgiving a brother who sins against us. The fact is that we have all sinned more than seventy times seven, and God still forgives us. What excuse, then, do we have to stop our forgiveness at only seven times? How can we neglect such a basic practice of our faith? We need to not only forgive but also seek the forgiveness of others for our offenses.

Even if we were horribly wronged in a church division, what an opportunity to show our gratitude for God's forgiveness by forgiving one of our brothers

in the faith, whether the offense was deliberate or accidental (Ephesians 4:31, 32).

Prayer and honesty

While it is true that "An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel" (Proverbs 18:19), we can gain access to a fortified city and break through the gates of a citadel if we persist in adjusting our attitude and forgiving the offending person. Let us begin with prayer.

Many Christians suggest this old standby when they have no idea what else to say. In truth, prayer is one of the most effective and under-used things we can do. The resolution of a conflict may be beyond us, but nothing is too difficult for Almighty God. He opposes discord among brethren (16:19b).

Another crucial step is to face the problem, not ignore it. Serious church conflict needs to be publicly admitted and dealt with as soon as it is recognized (Matthew 5:23). I've seen pastors and churches ignore a molehill issue until it grows to a full mountain

of a problem. Sweeping it under a rug seems an easy way to deal with it, but the problem grows bigger over time. Then follow years of asking, "What elephant in the room?"

Admitting the conflict, we can then take steps to deal with it head on. More often than not, both sides share in the blame. All concerned should strive to be honest, humble, and straightforward in its resolution.

Finally, we should weigh our efforts at restoring a broken relationship by asking, "Could I tell God face-to-face that I tried every possible avenue and used every resource at my disposal to fix this broken relationship?"

Perseverance

Will these suggestions solve every split among us? Maybe not. But we can't stop trying until we have done all we can for as long as possible — before our all-knowing God.

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 15:5, 6). **BA**

How effective will we be in showing the love and forgiveness of Christ when we can't practice it ourselves?

Brian (and Jessica) Franks

has a newborn son, a new ministerial license, and his first church — in Walla Walla, WA.

Scripture quotations were taken from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.



Prowling Beast, Present

An Alaskan adventure puts one frightened faith to the test. **by Samuel Hall**

I jerked awake, aware not of a sound but of a presence. I cocked my head but heard only the patter of drops on the rain fly. A swish of wind scrubbed even that, leaving a silence as impenetrable and obstinate as the darkness that filled our tent. I leaned down toward Gloria, my wife, and confirmed her quiet, rhythmic breathing. Thankfully, she was asleep.

Then I heard it — the *chuff* of a heavy footfall, then another, like anvils placed on a starched carpet. Cold terror shuddered my body. Another step . . . then another, arcing around the backside of our tent, scant inches away. It paused and I involuntarily raised my arm. I knew what was outside — a Kodiak bear, the Alaskan grizzly that could weigh over half a ton.

I wanted to scream for help. I wasn't prepared for a midnight visit by a monster.

Alaska trip

Gloria had come with me to Alaska on this business trip. We took our camping gear so we could hike in Denali National Park. After the train ride from Anchorage, we made camping reservations at park headquarters. The following day, a shuttle bus took us up the slopes of Mount

McKinley the length of the road — eighty miles. Only low scrub and tundra covered the rugged slopes.

Then we saw them. The bears. Silence from everyone on the bus. We simply stared at the giants. I'd seen pictures — even seen one mounted in a lodge outside Fairbanks that was nearly ten feet tall. But seeing the real thing was like being in Jurassic Park.

Now a grizzly was outside our tent. I fished my watch out of my boot. Two minutes before two. Just two more hours before morning light would overcome the darkness. Maybe daylight would offer deliverance, as fires were forbidden outside campgrounds. My hunting knife would be worthless in hand-to-claw combat.

Scary story

The story of the Fish and Game man flashed into my mind. Before we'd returned to Anchorage, we'd spent an evening with friends on the Kenai Peninsula. They'd invited other guests, one of whom practically called us fools when we told him we planned to hike in the Denali wilderness.

He described what happened to the Fish and Game ranger who set his tent up alongside a rushing stream. In the middle of the night a big grizzly flattened his tent and tried to bite his head off.

That's what the Kodiaks do.

They can't open their mouths wide enough to complete the job, so they end up scalping you. The ranger survived, but it was six months before he could walk. And not everyone lives through something like that.

Prayers

Should I awaken Gloria? No. Better that she not realize what was about to happen. Convinced that we would die that July night, I implored a merciful God to keep us from suffering. I thought of our little girl, staying with Grandma, and prayed for her. Any moment I expected a tornado of claws, teeth, and fur to rip into our tent in a flurry of destruction and intense pain.

Two faltering prayers generated thoughts of other possibilities. Accounts of God's rescue of His people seeped into my mind — especially the storm on the Sea of Galilee. . . .

The waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves . . . (Matthew 8:24-26, NIV).

Images of God's deliverance awakened hope, then a flurry of reasons God would ignore our dilemma: the shallowness of my Christian life, past sins, the blackness in my own heart that spoke blame and pride instead of praise

Savior

and thanks. I began praying the most focused, fervent prayers of my life.

Later, I realized the problem was my concept of God, that He was like me — vindictive and judgmental, uncaring or oblivious to desperate need. The beast outside our tent would be God's instrument of judgment. Now I'd get what I deserved.

But our heavenly Father is not like us. He's what He's shown Himself to be — a rock, our defender, Savior, Lord of the universe. Jesus rebuked the disciples because they forgot all He'd taught them. Only a few days before, He'd told them the parable of the sower. They thought Jesus would call them "the good seed," little realizing their seed had fallen on rocky soil. When the waves drenched them and the boat rolled before the raging waves, they knew only fear.

Risky trip

We'd asked park staff about danger from animals. "Respect the bears," they said. "Carry rocks in a can or jingle a bell so you don't surprise them. They'll avoid you if you give them warning. You'll be all right."

We prayed for protection, but I put more faith in the words of the park ranger than in the voice of God.

I thought back to our return bus trip down the mountain. Amazement and disbelief flashed on the faces of the other passengers as Gloria and I disembarked



at the Savage River Bridge that evening, alone into the wilderness.

We followed the river about two miles and then put up our tent on a saddle overlooking the canyon. After a cold meal, we took all our food and personal gear and cached it on a high rock some distance from camp. That might have been the most important decision we made that day. If we'd kept one package of food or toiletry article in the tent, this story might have turned out much differently.

Gloria fell asleep right away. I gazed out the tent opening across the barren mountain slopes and finally turned in about eleven.

New day

I continued praying. After agonizing minutes, I sensed a different presence — a calming Spirit, even though the footfalls still stirred outside. I lay back into my sleeping bag at about three o'clock and fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

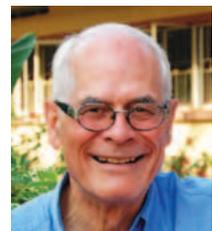
Around seven that morning, I awoke, fully alert. The only sound

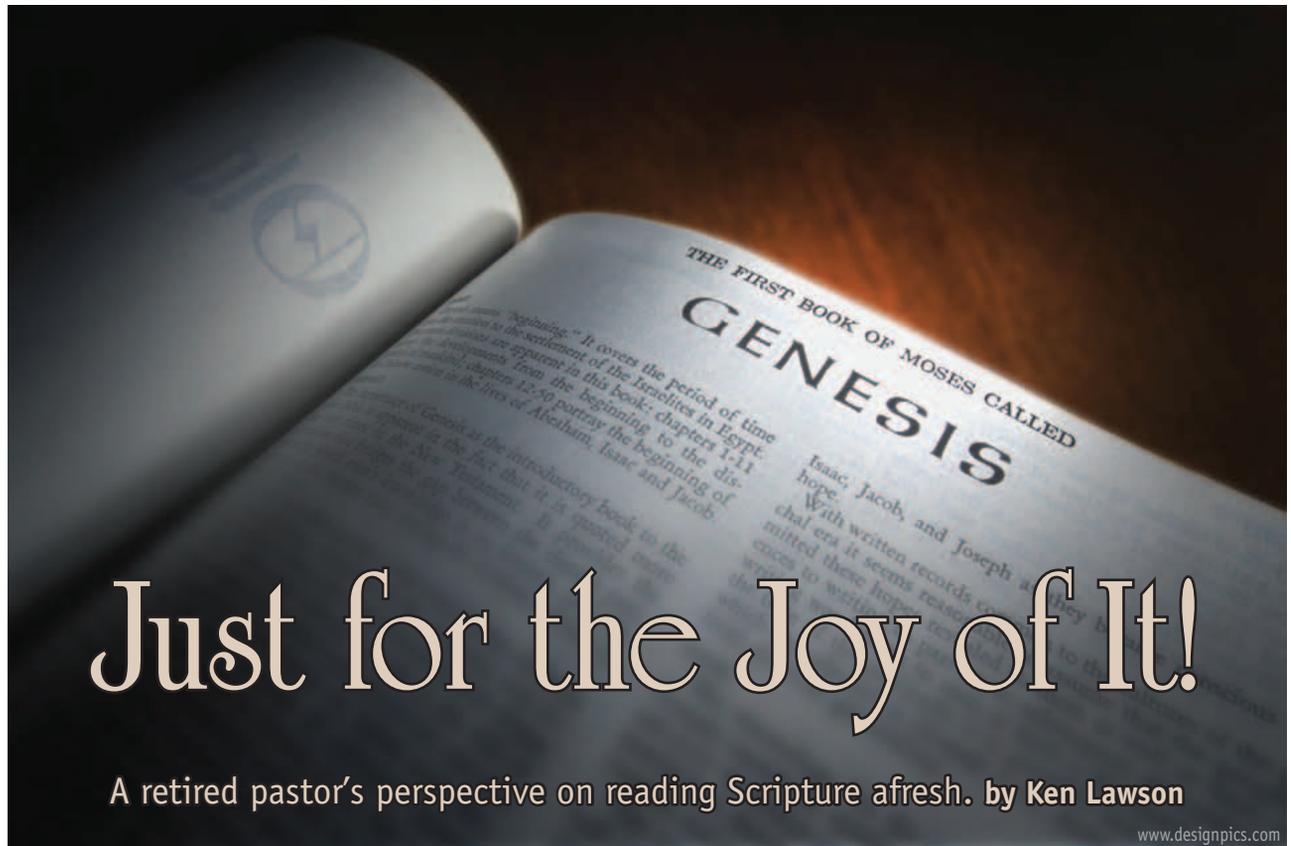
was the wind, whipping the rain fly. Clouds obscured the sun, but the light seemed to be coming from heaven itself. I awakened Gloria and with outward calm said the weather looked like more rain. Let's just forget about camping out another night along the Savage River.

The two-mile hike back to the road was edgy, not because of what I saw but because of what I expected to rise up out of the brush. When the road and an approaching car appeared, I finally told Gloria about our night visitor.

We may go through life with a thumb on the scale, thinking we're ready for life's emergencies. But our deepest challenge and greatest growth happen when we learn we don't have to be in charge. Jesus will be present in the storm, when we're lost or rejected, and even when the bear prowls outside. **BA**

Samuel Hall
writes from
Salem, OR.





Just for the Joy of It!

A retired pastor's perspective on reading Scripture afresh. by Ken Lawson

www.designpics.com

I must get some notes ready for that study on baptism early tomorrow. Jim is considering baptism after all these years. To make the simple yet profound meaning of baptism clear to him, I'll prepare an outline sheet with texts for him to take with him.

My doctrines class is studying the deity of Christ. The room will be packed tomorrow, with visitors from all over for Sunday's wedding. This topic must be presented with clarity, with a review of Hebrews 1 – God's view of His Son. To get ready, I'll need to prepare comments on each verse. That means I'll be up later tonight.

I've worked on my Sabbath sermon every day this week, after several requests for a message on end times, what's happening in Israel and the Middle East, and the battle of the Great Day of

God Almighty. A few news headlines would illustrate how current events match Bible teaching on this. I'll dig out those newspapers and reread Ezekiel 38 and 39 to refresh on this topic.

Bill and Mary want one more counseling session before Sunday, and they're coming by the office in 45 minutes. To be ready, I'll re-read Ephesians 5 before they arrive. . . .

* * * * *

That's how it goes for many pastors most days – week after week, year after year.

For over forty-seven years, including three at Bible college, I have most often read the Bible to study some point of truth or to prepare for a class, study, or message. These valuable tasks are a teaching pastor's passion, and they can consume the lion's

share of his time. A most precious time for pastors, however, is often sacrificed: simply reading Scripture just for the joy of what it says to your heart.

When the preparation for one Sabbath is done and the presentations are made, it is time to think ahead and do it all over again. Too often a pastor's mind does not relax; it just shifts to preparation for the next Sabbath. Joyful work? You bet it is! There is never any regret for all the time spent in study, research, teaching, preaching, counseling, and all the other tasks related to pastoral ministry.

But more personal time in the Holy Scriptures is a longing most pastors have when that time is missed. Too often my quiet spiritual time with the Savior would get pushed aside because of commitments to others' needs,

study and research for classes and services, and emergency ministry to hurting and searching people.

Just before my wife, Sandy, and I retired, we bought new parallel Bibles, with the *New International Version* and *The Message* side by side. Our plan? To reread the Scripture, highlighting all the phrases, verses, and passages that jump off the page to our hearts and sharing those with each other. Then we'll do it all over again in the other version, sharing again those things God impresses upon us. Our desire is to read the Bible through at least twice, just for the joy of doing it!

Fresh discoveries

We started on our trip from Oregon to Minnesota, reading separately. The excitement of what we found moved us to often read together — twice a day. This time is now the most joyful part of my retirement days.

Let me share three examples of fresh discoveries I've made from Genesis.

1. Starting with the last verse of chapter 1: "God looked over everything he had made; it was so good, so very good!" (*The Message*). This was Creator God's own analysis of His creative genius. How awesome and lovely everything must have been — color and taste and sound — with no pollution of air, water, or land. The very spirit of total joy must have been in the hearts of everything God made, expressed from His own heart.

2. I was thrilled to see how God worked so personally with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to separate to Himself a people — a

nation — and give them a land to possess. Every detail was His, whether a wife, a place, or a newborn son. Would Abraham have slashed down that knife to sacrifice his son as God instructed him? Really? Would he have gone that far? In reading just for the joy of it, I noticed something. God had to stop Abraham! He was really going to do it! And the angel of the Lord said, "Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son" (22:12, NIV). It came to me clearly again that just like Abraham, God did not withhold His only Son, Jesus, but gave Him up as a sacrifice for my sin.

3. Rereading the Joseph story (one of my favorites), I found myself weeping with Joseph when he reunited with his brothers in Egypt . . . weeping when he forgave them . . . weeping when he hugged his father's neck . . . and weeping again when his brothers were afraid and Joseph reassured them, heart-to-heart, "I'll take care of you and your children" (50:19, *The Message*). I wept again when Joseph asked them to carry his bones out of Egypt when God would take His nation home to the Promised Land.

Looking deeply

The joy of reading Scripture just for the thrill of hearing what God has to say is a rich privilege that can fill a heart to overflowing. Every word is exciting to me. This reading exercise is not to be done because our job calls for it. It demands no extra research, no proof-texting, no preconceived theology to defend. It just asks us to look deeply into Scripture written at the Spirit's inspiration — there to reveal God's mind, heart, and plan for the salvation of our souls.

God's Word is so profound, His expressions to those He created in His image are so deeply personal. With nothing ulterior to prove, we may experience new joy and a molding of our hearts to His as we are refreshed by the depth of His love through the words, chapters, and books of the Bible — God's Book! **BA**

Kenneth and Sandra Lawson recently relocated to Cottage Grove, MN, near Little League grandsons Hogan and Jack.



More personal time in the Holy Scriptures is a longing most pastors have when that time is missed.



www.designpics.com

What the

In our January-February issue, readers were invited to write on “What the Bible Means to Me.” Below are excerpts from essays received by May 15.

The contest continues. To be considered for the grand prize, write your 200- to 600-word testimony and submit it by **August 31, 2011**. All writers, published or not, will receive a copy of *How We Got the Bible*, by former BA editor Jerry Griffin. Essays should be e-mailed to the Editor (bibleadvocate@cog7.org).

The Bible served as my disciplinarian. During my high school and early college years, I was a bit mischievous while at the peak of life changes and explorations. This led to easy recognition and often to quick acceptance by others. However, the Word of God knocked some sense into my young, silly head. I was reprimanded – I admit it now – with some little divine spankings. But it’s for my spiritual growth according to God’s perfect plan.

– Manasseh Mark Bomboe
Philippines

If you were stranded on an island, what book would you want to have with you? To me it would be the Bible, as it would surely keep my attention. It truly is the only book one would need to cover every facet of life. Perhaps that is why it is called the Book of Life.

– Donna Dailey Alvarez
Santa Monica, CA

I hear God speak to me in many ways, from His fingerprints in creation wonders to the shadow of His love as I held my newborn children. But only in the Bible does God’s voice speak clearly

from heaven. Only there do I have the voice interpreted by my Lord Jesus Christ.

– Timothy Chaffee (inmate)
Midway, TX

Most Christians know and read the Bible, the basis for doctrine and peaceful living.

Misunderstood if not properly examined, this book requires constant reading so we will know the truth. Believing it will lead to eternal life. Just practice opening it to be familiar with its books. Memorize chosen verses or chapters for your protection and guidance. It illustrates the love of God.

– Diosdada Caser
Cagayan de Oro, Philippines

I’ve made many mistakes in my 42 years, all because I turned from God’s truth, assuming I was wise enough to live by my own morality. Rather than inventing our own truth, it’s our responsibility to discover God’s truth by reading the Bible. Discovering it is like opening a window to new knowledge that has always existed, like finding the place I belong as a human – especially as a child of God.

I don’t know if these words will ever touch your heart. They definitely touched mine – from depression into abundance, from mistaken paths into righteousness. Thank You, Father, for showing me the way through Jesus. Your Word is indeed the truth that sanctifies (John 17:17).

– Ramiro Palacios
Aurora, CO

The most discussed book on earth, the Bible is a veritable book of life, as God willed it – not written for a special people or class but for every-

Bible Means to Me

one who cares. From the Bible the darkest soul is mended, and many have been saved. In the Bible you find unity and equality, which have eluded mankind. Eternal life is not for a privileged few, but for all.

– Samuel Ugochukwu
Nigeria

Of the blessings I have received in my life, the Bible is truly the greatest. How wonderful is it to know that the Creator in His perfection and wisdom has given us His laws to govern our lives in regard to Him and our fellowman and that they are all written down for us so that we do not have to doubt. Material things will no doubt pass away, including my physical life someday. However, His words, as recorded in the Bible, will endure forever and carry us on into the future and His glorious kingdom with His Son, Jesus, as King of Kings and Lord of Lords for a millennium.

– Diane Thomas Purdo
Queensbury, NY

Are You Involved?

Six more months in 2011 are still enough to make it a true Year of the Bible. Here are our BA suggestions for honoring God's Word:

- Read the Year of the Bible Declaration in the January-February issue (p. 19) or online at cog7.org. Use its contents to shape your response.
- Pledge your personal support for the Declaration by e-mailing yearofthebible@cog7.org, as many readers already have.
- Start a daily reading plan. If time is tight, just five minutes and a single verse will trigger quiet thoughts, growing your faith, hope, and love in Christ.
- Write a short testimony on "What the Bible

Means to Me" and submit it to the BA (see note, p. 16). One published winner will receive a handsome 9-1/2 x 12-inch hardback edition of *The Story of the Bible*, with 90 illustrations and 23 pull-out pages from old, treasured Bibles.

• Visit *BA Online* (baonline.org). Send us your Bible question, or respond to something you read for our Mail Bag page. **BA**

10 Ways to Take the Milk of the Word (1 Peter 2:2)

1. Read the Bible through in a year. Daily reading plans are available.
2. Read it one verse at a time. *Daily Bread* kits are recommended.
3. Hear it preached and taught, starting at a local church.
4. Hear it via audio tape or CD, professionally read and recorded.
5. Study it with a small group in homes and Sabbath schools.
6. Memorize it and meditate – a proven sin-cleanser and preventative.
7. Sing it. The best music has Bible quotes or allusions.
8. Pray it. Speak God's words back to Him.
9. Take it secondhand, through BA or other Christian publications.
10. Get it straight from the cow – your Bible, either in print or electronic form. Download a Bible app to your iPhone, iPod, iPad, and other devices.

– Calvin Burrell

Freedom and Liberty –

American independence traces to 1776, but we have better reasons to celebrate. **by Calvin Burrell**

We can study Scripture many ways. For the simple method outlined here, grab a Bible, a concordance,* pen and paper, and you're ready to go.

With the US holiday celebration of July 4 in mind, let's study today to see what the Bible says about freedom and liberty. Commonly used, these two words mean essentially the same as the word *independence*. Here we go. . . .

First, use the concordance to identify all verses where the word *freedom* and its near relatives – like *free* and *freely* – occur, about 100 or so texts. The same thing will be done for the word *liberty* – about twenty-five more texts.

Second, go through all texts identified above and read – not just the snippet in the concordance but the entire verse from the Bible. Some will contain valuable teachings or insights, while

**I've used KJV for this study. Another version might work as well if your concordance matches it.*

others are less important to the topic. As you read verses containing the select words, record each significant book/chapter/verse and add a few key words to aid in recall of what's said there about the topic. You should now have a list of a few dozen key texts, perhaps not more than half the 125 in the concordance.

Next, with Bible handy, organize your list of key texts under major subheads. For this lesson, I chose "Free-range," "Hebrew liberty," "Christian freedom," and "Paradox" as these subheads.

Now reflect on the evidence found under each subhead and write a summary sentence for each. Finally, capsulize in a paragraph or two what you've learned about the biblical concepts of freedom and liberty. My efforts at these last two steps are provided for you below.

Free-range: miscellaneous texts with interesting perspectives

- Free to roam – wild animals (Job 39:5)
- Free at home – newlyweds (Deuteronomy 24:5)
- Free to give – willing hearts (2 Chronicles 29:31)
- Free among the dead – shadowy Sheol (Psalm 88:5)
- Free from taxes – any Goliath-killer (1 Samuel 17:25)
- Freely eat (Genesis 2:16; Numbers 11:5; 1 Samuel 14:30)

- Free to worship – full-time musicians (1 Chronicles 9:33)
- Free citizenship – born free or buy it? (Acts 22:28)
- Free from temple tax – no charge for kids (Matthew 17:26)
- Free to marry – who to whom? (Romans 7:3; 1 Corinthians 7:39)
- Freedom of speech-and-preach (Acts 2:29; 26:26; 2 Corinthians 11:7)
- Freely receive, freely give (Matthew 10:8; Romans 8:32; 1 Corinthians 2:12)

Hebrew liberty: expressions of ancient national truth

Israel's concept of liberty is best seen in the Old Testament's central event: her exodus from Egyptian slavery. Reflecting on this emancipation experience, Moses taught that all Hebrew servants be freed each seven years (Deuteronomy 15:13-18) and that every fiftieth year be a Jubilee in which liberty is proclaimed throughout the land (Leviticus 25).

Seizing on the people's neglect of God's true intent through Moses, both Isaiah and Jeremiah pen strong passages of support for the spiritual realities implied by these seventh- and fiftieth-year freedom traditions. Isaiah calls for a true fast that will break bondages and liberate the oppressed (58:6f). He also rein-

by the Book

states the Year of Jubilee by seeing its true meaning in the promised Messiah to come — “liberty to the captives” (61:1-3).

Jeremiah 34:8ff reports the words of the Lord threatening destruction upon King Zedekiah, Judah, and Jerusalem. The reason for the dark forecast: After first releasing their slaves as Moses commanded, they later backslid and reinstated slavery in the land.

Christian freedom: gospel liberation through Jesus

- The salvation (justification) we have in Christ is a “free gift” (Romans 5:15, 16, 18) — the forgiveness of sins. It has made us free from the law of sin and death (6:23; 8:2). This freedom is ours now; we stand fast therein by faith (Galatians 2:4; 4:22 — 5:1).
- The salvation (sanctification) we receive moment-by-moment is described by Jesus in terms of Jubilee (Luke 4:18): healing for our sins, wholeness of life, liberty to the captives! This freedom is truly coming to pass — as we follow Christ (John 8:32, 36).
- The salvation (glorification) yet to come is described in terms of universal freedom: “the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious *liberty* of the children of God” (Romans 8:21).

- Who may come to Christ for this salvation, and how? The Spirit gives poetic reply: “I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life *freely*” (Revelation 21:6b); “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life *freely*” (22:17b).

Where is this gospel liberty? Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Paradox: Christian liberty involves dynamic tension

- It is true that those who are in Christ by faith are freemen and freewomen. It is also true that we are servants of the king — Christ’s slaves (1 Corinthians 7:22; 9:1, 19). Service to God is the truest form of freedom.
- On one hand, trust in Christ frees us from law as a means to right standing before God. On the other hand, there is a perfect law of liberty to which we gladly consent (James 1:25; 2:12). Obedience to moral command, then, merges well with saving grace.
- *Liberty* is a great watchword of Christian faith. We are free in Christ! However, Paul and Peter offer caution lest we abuse freedom, quench the Spirit, and so return to bondage (1 Corinthians

Year of the Bible Declaration

Renouncing the biblical illiteracy of our age, the compromise of the call to preach and teach God’s Word, and the post-modern spirit whereby Christian churches exchange entertainment for exposition, popular opinion for scriptural authority, and feel-good theology for Bible truth; and

Recognizing that “as the pulpit goes, so goes the church,” that history’s greatest eras of spiritual awakening and revival are linked to the rediscovery and faithful exposition of God’s Word; and

Recalling that defining moment in the mid-1800’s, when his conviction concerning the authority and sufficiency of Scripture inspired Church pioneer Gilbert Cranmer to declare, “My Bible and my Bible alone”;

The leadership of the Church of God (Seventh Day) hereby reaffirms the commitment of our Michigan pioneers by declaring 2011 “The Year of the Bible” and encouraging Church-wide participation in this emphasis by

1. Daily reading and regularly memorizing God’s Word.
2. Promoting Christian education at all Church levels; supporting General Conference efforts to produce Bible-based curriculum for children and youth; and responding to the need for writers, editors, finances, and prayers.
3. Supporting denominational focus on leadership and LifeSpring School of Ministry.
4. Recognizing and encouraging the gift of teaching, determined that every Sabbath class in every local church be taught by a gifted and well-prepared teacher.
5. Urging greater student participation in every church’s Sabbath school program.
6. Making the Bible central to Sabbath worship by reading it publicly, reverently.
7. Ensuring that pastors heed Paul’s charge to “Preach the Word . . .” (2 Timothy 4:2-4) and commit themselves to faithful exposition of the Scriptures through preaching and teaching.

— Calvin Burrell
Ministerial Council President

— Whaid G. Rose
General Conference President

This document highlights the term *Bible-based* in the CoG7 Vision Statement; declares 2011 the Year of the Bible; complements the BA’s year-long emphasis; and calls the Church to renewed zeal for the Scriptures, making the Bible central in personal and corporate life.

To mark this emphasis, a commemorative Bible will be placed in the General Conference archives. Throughout the year, this Bible is made available to local churches, upon request, for public reading. Additionally, you may “sign” the declaration above by sending an e-mail of support to yearofthebible@co7.org, including your name and location in the message.

Lists will be kept of congregations and individuals who respond.

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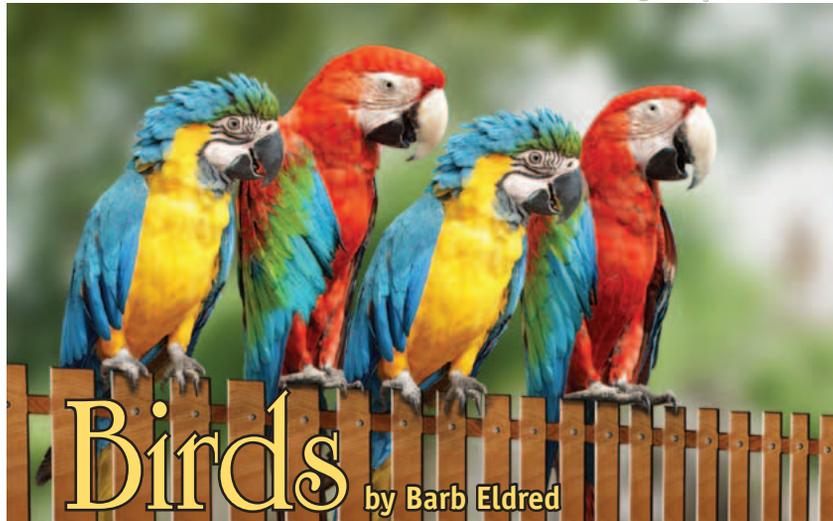
8:9; 10:29; Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16; 2 Peter 2:19).

What have we learned today?

We learned that the Bible uses the terms *freedom* and *liberty* over 100 times in reference to various life circumstances. The Israelites were taught a remarkable lesson in physical freedom as they were redeemed from Egypt, but they often forgot that lesson in dealing with others.

We learned that the concept of freedom reaches its zenith in the gospel of Christ, by which we have been liberated from the guilt of our sins and are being liberated from sin’s grip. True freedom is never the right to do anything we might be tempted to do. Rather, it is the desire and power to do what we truly ought to do, as told in God’s Word.

We learned that the great emancipator, for those who believe, is Jesus — the Christ. **BA**



I've watched two hens hatch eggs — one a good mother, the other not. Both started with ten eggs. One just sat until three days before they were due. She got up, ran around, flapped her wings, had a meal, and then settled down for the last stretch, the critical hatching time when she doesn't move at all. You can hear the young chicks peeping in the eggs; the mother tosses out the eggs that are not cheeping. The other mother kept getting up for a drink and a chat and a run-around and a panic every time the wind changed.

Good Mum hatched seven chicks, bad Mum two. Good Mum had six brown chicks and one yellow chick. Bad Mum hatched two yellow chicks, got up, and wandered off, and forgot her chicks. Good Mum taught her chicks to drink and eat, what was good to eat, and other things; bad Mum didn't. So I put the chicks from the bad Mum with the others — now ten in all. Good Mum accepted them. Reminds me of a parable. . . .

Birds are an amazingly diverse part of God's creation. Seen through binoculars, every single one is beautiful. Their plumage

and calls are identifying points. Sitting in the rainforest, I can tell which sort of bird is overhead from their flight pattern through the trees and the sound of their wings breaking air. Currawongs squeak. So do crows, but differently. Rosellas fly in wavelike motion and are always talking. Pigeons flap loudly. You don't hear a goshawk or an owl at night. Just silence.

Birds are a work of art. Every one is lovely, even in its juvenile form. Add the wonders of a mother hen with her chicks, of flight and eating patterns, the amazing complexity of a nest, their calls and migration. Beauty shouts Creativity.

Then consider the feathers and their structure, the way a bird's wing works (which scientists say is aerodynamically impossible). So functional yet so diverse. No single size fits all!

I have a King Parrot that comes down for a chat. Initially I thought he was telling me there was no food in the tray, but he just likes to sit there chatting. I answer in parrot talk. The whole parrot family has verbal skills much more than mimicking. But that is another story.

God uses birds in many ways to teach us about Himself and His world. In Genesis we are told that God created them "each in its kind." Some were used for sacrifice; Jesus' mother used a pigeon to atone for her uncleanness. Deuteronomy's laws protect bird eggs, and so the species. (God was always a greenie.) Psalms use birds as a simile for freedom (Psalm 124:7).

Abraham used birds in his late-evening sacrifice; others were part of Pharaoh's dream. Some are edible, others not. Birds caught in a snare represent us when we're stuck in our sin. Birds leaving an area are shown as a portent of disaster. Birds of prey represent Israel's attackers.

Jesus used birds in His parables. A cock called Peter to repentance. Ravens fed Elijah by the brook. A dove brought good news to Noah. Eagles' faces were part of Ezekiel's vision.

My hens reminded me of Psalm 91, where God likens Himself to a mother bird spreading her feathers over her chicks. Jesus uses this idea to bewail the fate of Jerusalem forty years later (Matthew 23:37). A hen spreading her wings over eggs or chicks is a wonderful sight. Those amazing feathers moving like a fan over the tiny things touches a chord as she clucks and fusses and cares for her babies. Like God does.

The babies trust her implicitly. Like we should. **BA**

Barb Eldred worships with Fellowship in God every Sabbath in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.



Dedication: Stockton

Snowstorms raged. Snowflakes fluttered down . . . and piled up. Roads were plowed; some closed, others barely opened. Cars ground to a halt; flights were cancelled.

Amid last winter's weather turbulence across America, a new church opened its doors for dedication services February 4-5 in Stockton, California. Only Pastor Wesley Walker of Arkansas, scheduled as the main speaker, didn't make it. One after another of his flights was cancelled due to weather.

Still, it was a joyous celebration in Stockton. Absent in body, Elder Walker was present in spirit and thought. His notes were used as the foundation for sermons presented by local Pastor Ruben Frausto on Friday evening and by San Jose Pastor Ruben Davila on Sabbath morning. "A church should show itself friendly, loving, ever learning, ever believing and teaching the truth," they said, in the former Stockton pastor's stead.

Over 300 persons — more than the new building could hold — came Sabbath morning. Lodi Pastor Loren Stacy spoke to more than 200 in the afternoon.



Tables set up under canopies in the yard served lunch to the large crowd under beautiful sunshine — an ironic contrast to the snow that covered much of the country.

"We felt the presence of the Lord through all three services," commented Pastor Frausto. "We had so many blessings. People wonder how such a small congregation can build its own church," he mused. "Everything is because God is good."

While the entire congregation had been instrumental in the building effort, longtime members Oleta and Clifford Teem were given special thanks, along with Bill Mathis who oversaw the construction without remuneration.

"Everyone's welcome," says the pastor, who may be contacted at 916-832-4982. The church is at 3929 Hubbard Road in Stockton.

— Bev Brenniese

Editor's note: Rebirth of the Stockton CoG7 occurred after a 2006 effort to pluck up local roots in Christian Sabbath observance. Several members, supported by the General Conference, West Coast District leadership, and others, refused to stand by and let death happen. WCD Superintendent Larry Zaragoza says, "The rest has been a miracle."



Judaism vs. Christianity

The article [March-April, p. 4] defines Judaism as the religion and culture of the Jewish people, then equates it with “a hope for salvation through knowledge of and obedience to God, i.e., human merit and works.” This view is long accepted within Christianity, but I wonder if it’s accurate.

Legalism (doing certain works to win God’s favor and be counted righteous) is a very real temptation for many or most of us. The warning against it is well taken. I’ve easily believed this tendency is more prevalent in Judaism than in Christianity, but I’ve been surprised to hear from different sources that this may not be so.

For example, in his video series *That The World May Know*, Ray Vander Laan uses Jewish understanding to deepen the messages spoken by Jesus and written about Him in the New Testament. Vander Laan presents the religion and culture of the Jews as being grace-based, with obedience being a way to respond in love.

I don’t want to take anything away from the strong warning about our sad, prideful, fellowship-destroying tendency to exalt human merit. I do suggest that this

tendency might be common within Judaism *and* Christianity, rather than being the defining difference between the two.

May God bless your efforts to help BA readers grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

J. L.
Fennville, MI

I’ve never read an article (nor authored one) that didn’t have potential for some contentious soul to retort, “Yes, I see your point, but what about. . . .” This is no exception. Being “all things to all men” seems nigh impossible, especially for “broad brush” topics crammed into tightly edited spaces.

Judaism today is as close to the original Mount Sinai message as Roman Catholicism is to the original message of the Savior. We should distance ourselves from both these aberrations; neither is close enough to truth to be embraced.

We should, however, follow the example of Paul, other apostles, and numerous among the elect and “the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). Both original sources (Moses and Y’shua) can be safely absorbed into our faith-walk in principle.

S. S.
Adelaide, South Australia

Messianic Judaism

I appreciated Steinmetz’s article [May-June, p. 20] — clear and accurate regarding [MJ] views as I’ve experienced them. At a service, I was surprised and uncomfortable to see small children learning Hebrew as if it were more sacred than other languages. Most Messianic Jews I’ve known aren’t Jewish but Christians who want to be Jews [and] willing to ignore Paul’s counsel to Gentiles.

We’re not called to be Jews but followers of the Messiah. [This is] greater than Jewish culture.

G. F.
Trenton, FL

This article is good but incomplete. We will see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Daniel, and many more in the New Jerusalem. Not considered Christians, they are as saved as we in God’s sight. He was a God of grace in the beginning, long before blood sacrifice.

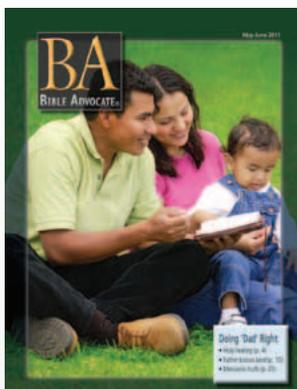
S. S.
La Pine, OR

Jews for Jesus, Jewish Roots, and Messianic Jews are all much the same, starting you off with a Torah study group and eventually working you into the Talmudic practices. This is alluring, but these are the very traditions Jesus constantly rebuked the Jew for. Nothing much has changed. So Messianic Judaism is a contradiction in terms: One foot in, one foot out. It’s for Christ, yet against Christ. A divided house can’t stand. The day will come that many will go with the Jews because they heard that God is with them (Zechariah 8:22, 23). This is a warning to Christians to beware of the spirit of antichrist.

J. P.
Roswell, NM

Hebrew elements enable us to understand Jews and appreciate our heritage better. Festivals and sacred names enrich this understanding but should not be a condition for fellowship, holiness, or salvation. I truly appreciate CoG7’s approach in dealing with these areas of contention.

Judaism and the Hebrew Scriptures should not be seen as old but as foundational. The Torah is more



than law, but “insight” or “enlightenment” to the Hebrew mind. Most Christians and many Jews have a shallow concept of Torah.

Much emphasis on externals in Messianic Judaism, including non-biblical customs and rabbinical traditions, has no place for Gentile Christians. Jews may well maintain their traditions even when accepting Jesus as Messiah, but it is a mistake for Gentiles to pretend to be Jewish in some way.

Semitic languages (Hebrew and Aramaic) are essential to fully understand the Scriptures. A basic understanding of these enable one to grasp otherwise unrecognized nuances. The Peshitta (Aramaic/Syriac Bible) has been gaining emphasis recently, giving us an edition unchanged for 1,600-1,800 years.

I enjoyed the article and believe this issue to be very important to Sabbatarian Christians.

J. D.
Mishawaka, IN

As good as the article is, it also contained a message [that] the law serves as a standard of holiness. After admitting that the law given to Israel was incomplete; after admitting that the law was weakened by the flesh and incapable of doing what only Jesus can do; after

admitting that the law was our schoolmaster leading us to Christ (and failing to mention that once the schoolmaster leads us to Christ, we’re no longer under it); after admitting that the law can do nothing to save or sanctify us, the author then tells us that the law serves as a standard of holiness! I disagree.

J. W.
Folsom, LA

Reply from Israel Steinmetz:
Thank you for drawing attention to this important point. I was deliberate in calling the law “a” standard of holiness, rather than “the” standard of holiness. “The” ultimate standard of holiness is full love for God and neighbor. This standard was set by God and perfectly reflected in the loving life and death of Jesus Christ. This God of love and Christ’s command of love is our ultimate standard and guide for holiness, not the Torah. However, the law is a guide in helping us understand how to love God and people in everyday life. God’s commands to Israel express our love to Him and to one another. By the grace and Spirit of God in us, we are no longer held and judged by the law’s letter, but we can be guided by its spirit to show consistent love.

Dialogue refines arguments, clears up ambiguities, and focuses our thinking. Feedback on my article has benefited me in this way, and I hope to pass those benefits along.

Regarding the relation between Jews and Christians, Paul gave numerous metaphors. In Romans 9-11 he described God’s people as an olive plant made up of ethnic Jews. Those who don’t respond in faith to God’s grace are cut off, but they can be grafted back by turning to Jesus as Messiah. Gentiles who place their faith in Christ are like wild olive

branches grafted into the plant. Thus God has one “plant,” made up of Jews and Gentiles who share a common faith in the Messiah. In Ephesians 2:11-22 Paul describes this one covenant people as a “new man/humanity” and “fellow citizens.” In each of these metaphors their unity is found in Christ.

Thus Gentile Christians have not “replaced” Jews as God’s people; rather, they have joined the true Israel of God as the one covenant people of faith in God through Christ (cf. Galatians 4:21-31). As Gentile Christians we do not boast against the Jewish branches that have been cut off. Rather, we long for them to be moved to jealousy by our reception of mercy, and thereby grafted back into the plant (Romans 11).

*To whatever degree Messianic Judaism has played a role in God’s grafting the natural branches back into the olive plant, we celebrate its success. At the same time, we recognize that only those who place their faith in Jesus as Messiah can claim to be a true Israelite/Jew — that is, a true member of God’s covenant people. **What identifies us as being God’s covenant people is not being ethnically or religiously Jewish, but a confession and life of faith in Jesus as Messiah of the Jews and Lord of the cosmos.***

*Regarding covenants, several who responded took issue with my reference to an “old” covenant. They felt this carried a negative connotation that overlooked the foundational nature of God’s covenant with the Jewish people. Rather than a negative reference, I intended **old** primarily in a chronological sense, but also as a reference to value and relevancy. For the new covenant is **better** than the old, having truly fulfilled and replaced the old as the only legitimate*

and saving relationship between God and humankind.

This new covenant is not ultimately founded upon the old covenant. Rather, the lasting covenant of faith with the uncircumcised Gentile Abram, made centuries before the giving of the law and covenant with Israel (see Genesis 12:1-3 and ch. 15), is the foundation for the new covenant. All those who were saved during the dispensation of the old covenant were saved by grace through faith, just as we are today. The covenant given at Sinai simply could not annul the covenant of grace and faith given to Abram (Galatians 3-4).

In Acts and Paul's letters, a recurring question is whether Gentiles must become Jewish, either prior to or after accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord. The consistent answer of Scripture is no. Instead, Jews and Gentiles alike are invited to accept the free grace of God in Christ to become the new humanity, members of a new covenant that is not based upon the old Mosaic covenant but upon the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

*Jews need not give up their distinct heritage to remain part of the olive plant, and Gentiles need not embrace a Jewish way of life in order to be grafted in. **Their unity does not come in being Jewish or Gentile, but in being a new humanity in Christ.** We applaud the success of Messianic Judaism in helping Jews to be grafted back in, but we are wary of its tendency to cause Gentiles who have already been grafted into the vine to become more "Jewish." It is this latter tendency that my original article warned against and is the centrality and supremacy of the Lord Jesus in everything that I advocated then and now.*

Clarifying Cranmer

"What Cranmer May Not Have Meant" [May-June, p. 31] quoted Gilbert Cranmer as saying "My Bible and my Bible alone." More accurately, the slogan was "The Bible and the Bible alone."

Cranmer's slogan unwittingly expressed his belief in *Sola Scriptura* as a rule for Christian faith and practice, never as a basis for church polity. His frequent use of the slogan was meant to declare allegiance to the authority of Scripture alone in contrast to those who incorporated the visions and writings of Ellen White, cofounder of Seventh-day Adventism, into their discipline.

The Whites' intolerance of Cranmer's biblical views and their denigration of his character led him to start the Church of Christ in western Michigan in 1858. Having experienced White's tyranny, Cranmer and his members chose congregationalism as their polity. The Church's Michigan State Conference affirmed this choice by stating, ". . . each church has power to transact their own local business, and the body (Conference) shall sanction their proceedings . . ." ("Resolves of the Brethren in Conference at Waverly, June 8-11, 1865," *The Hope of Israel*, June 29, 1865).

Cranmer's full quote helps clarify that he was not addressing *Sola Scriptura* but his solitary effort to establish an alternative to the Whites' movement: "At last I made up my mind I would not belong to a church that was ruled by a woman any longer. From that time the Bible has been my creed, with Christ at the head of the Church. I started alone with my Bible in my hand. God has blessed my labors beyond my utmost expectations . . ." ("My Experience," Gilbert Cranmer, *The Hope of Israel*, August 10, 1863).

President Rose's suggestion that the Church continues to struggle with its polity overlooks 60 years of growth and peace it experienced with the balance it had struck between the role of the Conference and that of individual members and their congregations.

R. C.
Northglenn, CO

Rejecting God's plan

Sperm donations [May-June, p. 24] are a rejection of what God has ordained and blessed, marriage and children through marriage (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:24; Psalm 127:3-5; 128:3).

Abraham tried an ancient, non-medical form of sperm/egg banks, if you will, using one of Hagar's eggs to provide himself an heir. Apparently he felt God needed help, but God rejected the idea and Ishmael, the son so born. Consider the ramifications of their deed through the centuries, the misery and human suffering it has caused and continues to cause.

Children are always to be considered a blessing from God, but that doesn't mean our actions to bring them into the world are right and will always bring God's blessing (Gal. 6:7).

S. Z.
Newalla OK

Bible study aid

My non-denominational campus study group at the University of Ibadan seeks to get to the heart of Bible truths, not just popular opinions. The BA has been helpful because of your emphasis on letting the Scripture interpret itself. Thanks for the help and understanding.

T. F.
Nigeria

Garden of My Soul

***O Gardener of my soul,
Nurturer of tender roots,
gently extract
that which would choke my frailty.***

***Husbandman of the vine,
no uncaring hireling this,
ruthlessly tearing
shaky foundations.***

***Correction's stormy days
Invoke to prayer, to hold on,
while refreshment after rain
reaffirms Your constant care.***

***May the warmth of Your approval,
the delicate balance of the two,
Cause me to flourish,
lest Your overlong displeasure overwhelm.***

***At the harvest of life
may some remnant of my passing
remain to influence
those who come after.***

Dorothy Nimchuk



G. C. Ministries
Emphases

Missions Ministries

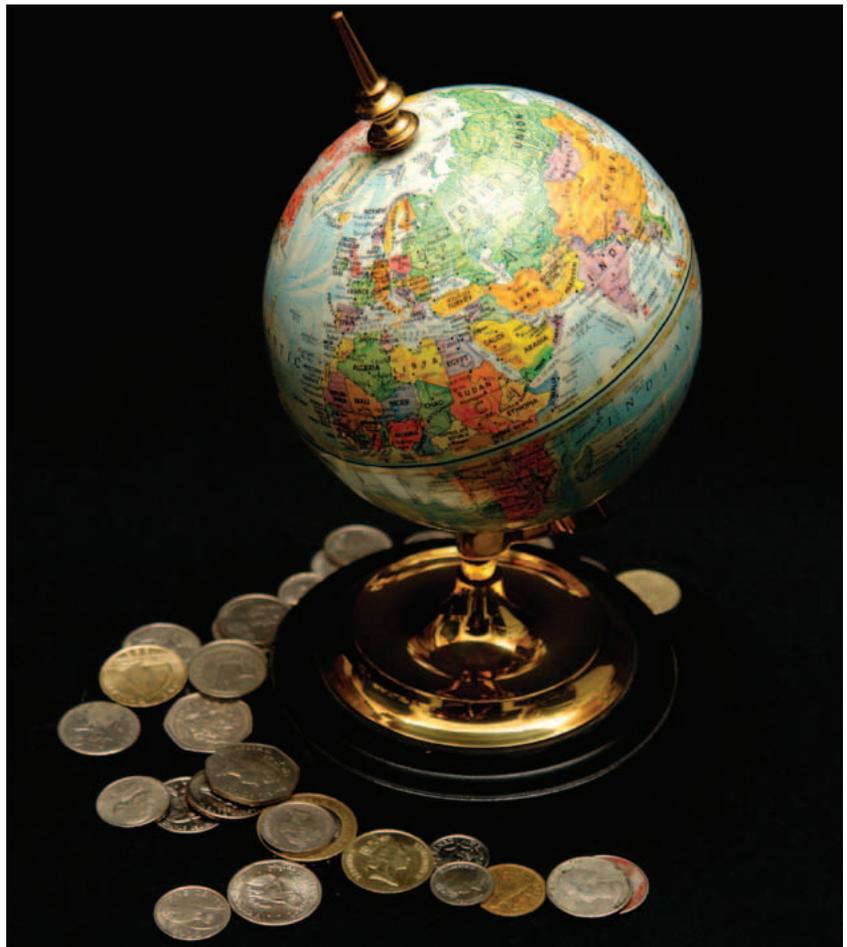


*Bill Hicks, Director
See back page*

Spring Vale Academy



*Mark Caswell, Director
See page 29*



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Change for Your World

International Ministerial Congress (IMC) is the track on which the Church of God (Seventh Day) runs around the world. Each year in July we ask members to dedicate one offering — 365 days' worth of pocket change — to help IMC cover its administrative costs.

- IMC coordinates evangelistic activity in many nations.
- IMC promotes unity among national member conferences.
- IMC receives inquiries from many new contacts in foreign fields.

In August 2012, IMC delegates from approximately forty nations will meet near London, UK. Without IMC and the leadership it provides, none of our global efforts would be as effective as they are.

IMC officers and staff are Ramon Ruiz, president; Calvin Burrell and Henry Harley, vice presidents; Jacobo Gonzalez, secretary; Carlos Ceron, treasurer; and Bill Hicks, executive director.

Thanks for giving to this year's Change for Your World offering — in your local church or mailed to Missions Abroad, P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233.

King's Daughters

In Sierra Leone, a group of more than forty girls have found new lives and new names. Once forced to work as prostitutes, these girls have been set free to live for Christ. They are now daughters of the King.

In 2010, the CoG7 women's ministry in Freetown, S. L., began getting permission of brothel madams to talk with these under-aged girls. Jemimah was the child of a prostitute. Her mother (with AIDS) died giving birth, and the virus passed to her. Jemimah's aunt and uncle raised her, but they perished at sea. At age eleven, Jemimah was recruited into prostitution and made her living for the next several years at the brothel.

Early in 2011, Jemimah was rescued by the women's ministry of our church. She and her new sisters moved into their new "palace" safe house — a ten-bedroom home overlooking an ocean bay. They are receiving Christian education, including a one-year

continued on page 28



These LITES students (Abigail Wallace, OR; Ivonne Garcia and Sandra Marquez, NV; Samuel Steinhauser and Levi West, MO; and Damaris Jimenez, Mexico) just completed the 2010-2011 school year, and took the challenge to be Christ's hands and feet in our church and our world. The next school year begins in September.

LITES is committed to being a foundation-building ministry with an emphasis in character development. What started as a summer ministry has grown to a full school year of classroom training, practical ministry, and intentional discipleship.

Beginning in September 2011, LITES will teach two of the classes needed for LifeSpring's Certificate of Biblical Studies. This provides a seamless transition for those who wish to continue in academic training for the pastorate or other ministry areas in our denomination.

Students engage in a wide range of daily ministry experiences: state school for disabled children, soup kitchen, nursing home, local outreach center, Special Olympics, and church maintenance. Students are also responsible for the mid-week youth ministry of the Stanberry church. Our staff works hard to tailor ministry training to the interests and gifts of the current LITES team.

Interested? Check us out on Facebook or on our Web site, or call for our free info packet. Let's dream big about God's plans for you and His church!

LITES • P. O. Box 172
Stanberry, MO 64489
lites.cog7.org • 660-783-9544



Warmly, from The Philippines: Many of the 500+ brethren who attended the annual CoG7 conference near Cagayan de Oro on the southernmost island of Mindinao are shown gathered for the Sabbath service at the Church-owned conference and campgrounds. Also in attendance were IMC Zone 6 representative Phil Kordahi of Australia and BA Editor Calvin Burrell, both of whom expressed gratitude for the amicability and vitality of the Filipino church.



South America first: Leadership from national Church of God (Seventh Day) conferences across this continent met in Quito, Ecuador, in mid-May for the first time to get better acquainted and plan together. Included in this photo are representatives from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Coordinating this historic meeting was International CoG7 President Ramon Ruiz (far right) of Mexico.

continued from page 27

course designed by the Salvation Army for girls who've been rescued from sex trafficking.

Orphans and Widows Ministry of Missions Abroad seeks sponsors for each of these girls, at \$15 per month. Inquire at brianatbakersacres@juno.com.

— Brian Baker

Tornados Strike Home

The twisters that wreaked havoc across much of the South and Southeastern US this spring touched several CoG7 families.

In the Gadsden, Alabama, area, the Oak Grove Church was completely destroyed by a tornado on April 27, as was the home of lay pastor Ray Lowery. Thankfully, neither Ray nor his wife, Doris, was seriously injured, although they were at home when the tornado struck.

In the Phil Campbell-Haleyville, Alabama, area, lay pastor Billy Cornelius and his wife were seriously injured and hospitalized for weeks by the same set of storms that tore across the state (April 27, 28), and one member of the Phil Campbell church was killed.

In Joplin, Missouri, the giant tornado that destroyed much of that city on May 22 took the life of one young man who attended church and was related to members. Amazingly, neither the church nor its membership suffered significant property damage in Joplin!

To respond to these and other natural disasters around the world, see the back cover of this BA.

CoG7 Congratulates . . .

- Art and Marie Roche of Monclova, Ohio, who celebrated their golden wedding anniversary on May 14.
- Mayne and Faye Harris of Bloomer, Wisconsin, who celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary on June 12.
- Loren and Rose Marie Reynolds of LaCygne, Kansas, who will celebrate their golden wedding anniversary on July 16.

CoG7 Announces . . .

General Conference Convention, July 18-23, Pheasant Run Resort – St. Charles, IL; youth contact: Kurt Lang (*nfyc@cog7.org*)

Spring Vale Academy opens its doors for fall semester on August 18. Dorms open the 17th.

Dakota Youth Retreat, August 11-14, Medina, ND (*www.csbcamp.org*); contact: Amber Schlenker (*ambermarie92@hotmail.com*), David and Jamie Nienhuis (701-655-3532), Jesse and Wanda Hopewell (701-428-3667).

XXIV Annual Hispanic Ladies Retreat, September 2-5, Denver, CO; for information and registration, go to *cog7.org*.

Michigan Women's Retreat, September 9-11, The Springs in Gladwin, MI

Harvest of Thanks celebration, September 23-25, Alfred, ND

Super Sabbath, October 15, Sioux Falls, SD

Michigan Men's Retreat, October 21-23, Lawton, MI



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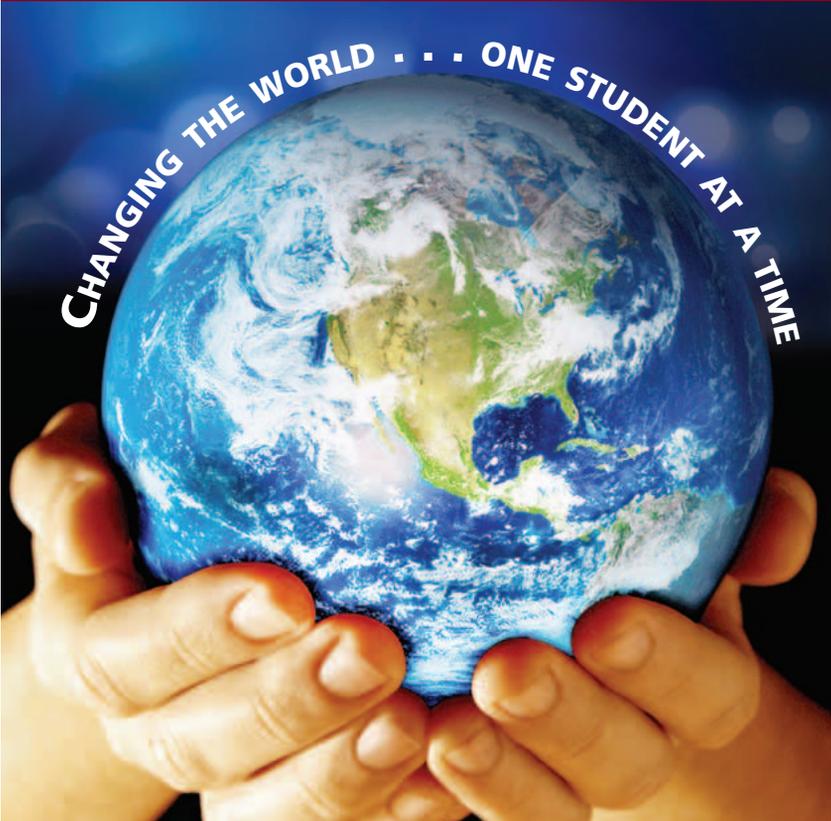
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CHANGING THE WORLD . . . ONE STUDENT AT A TIME



Navigating the Path Ahead

by **Bill Hicks, Missions Director**

Before GPS, we found our way around with a map and a prayer. Today, we simply input an address, and a voice tells us where to go.

God's Word and a prayer work better than GPS in guiding us into mission fields. God's people have always been challenged to go into unknown and uncharted territory, sometimes with a cloud and pillar to guide and sometimes only a promise: "For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9b). The important thing is to keep moving into the unknown with courage.

Developing our global gospel work, we needed to become aware of the location and condition of our contacts around the world. We needed to help our brethren communicate in timely fashion. With modern devices, what took weeks before now takes days or minutes, making us much more accessible.

The next step is now possible. Aware of needs and opportunities, we can engage in the gospel together with our brethren. Representatives in our seven global zones work diligently to improve cooperation and communication so that we can all better understand the path ahead.

Once development is mature enough to sustain our investment in a region, we chart a course for cooperation with available resources. This can include working in disaster relief, funding key personnel, training them onsite, or enabling them to reach out in their region.

Once the work is begun through brethren in the field, the challenge is to do it better. This requires raising funds, selecting projects, following up work in process, and seeing efforts to fruition. As this happens, God works mightily in ways we never imagined.

Pressing on into the unknown, we must learn to

work together more efficiently and respectfully. Our International Ministerial Congress (IMC) is made up of conferences diverse in cultures and ministry approaches. Respecting this diversity while still sharing a common understanding of basic beliefs, we become a more functional community. When all contribute what they have with no attempt to dominate others, new doors of opportunity and blessing open.

Many blessings in recent years have come not simply from financial resources but from a willingness to reach into the unknown and see what God will bless for us. Perhaps a primary key to success is simply being willing to attempt what we have never done before.

By God's grace and our willingness to reach out together, our IMC has grown! Many new efforts have become vibrant ministries through open doors in new countries, supported by Missions Abroad. These did not result from full planning and full funding at the outset, but from those willing to press ahead with whatever limited resources were available at the time.

The Orphans and Widows Ministry, Disaster Relief Fund, SHINE Medical and Dental Missions, Pioneer Missionary Training, Cristo Viene missionary support, and projects supported by various national conferences testify to the benefits of pressing into the unknown. You and your church can support further IMC development through the Change for Your World offering in July.

The Word of God is the great map that calls us into the uncharted unknown. Rest assured that God is encouraging us to press on up the path ahead . . . together.



Good for the Soul

Throughout church history, Christians have found it necessary to develop statements that clarify essential biblical teachings, distinguishing the true gospel from distortions of it. These statements are called creeds, from the Latin *credo*, meaning “I believe.”

Historically, however, CoG7 has grown up skeptical of such creeds. But the fact that we have a creed (Statement of Faith) of our own should alert us to the reality that historical confessions of faith are not inherently opposed to “the Bible alone.”

Creeds and confessions are not to be equated with Scripture; they merely outline its content. Among other purposes, they “show a coherent and unified understanding of the whole scope of Scripture,” quoting a noted theologian. In other words, they testify to the intelligible and systematic nature of God’s written revelation, refuting common notions that the Bible doesn’t make sense.

From this perspective, these documents take on new meaning. I do not subscribe to the theological content of all creeds. For example, parts of the Nicene Creed are doctrinally incongruent with CoG7 beliefs. But generally I find in most creeds much with which I agree, much by which I’m inspired.

Some creeds were sealed with blood, beginning with “Jesus is Lord,” the earliest semblance of a confessional statement among first century Christians. By denying Caesar’s lordship, the creed earned Rome’s persecution — even death — which many gladly accepted. The authors of the Belgic Confession vowed to “offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to the fire,” rather than deny the truth of the gospel.

Credal statements, such as the Apostles’ Creed, provide a concise summary of essential New Testament teachings. Confessional documents, such as the Westminster Confession of Faith, serve to distinguish between Roman Catho-

lic teachings and Reformation tenets. Catechisms, such as the Shorter Catechism, are designed to “educate laypeople in matters of doctrine and discipline.” From the Greek *katecheo*, meaning “to sound aloud,” *catechism* describes how faith principles are orally communicated to a younger generation. They are written in simple question-and-answer format to facilitate memorization, thus encouraging the pursuit of holiness through prayer, study of God’s Word, and personal spiritual discipline.

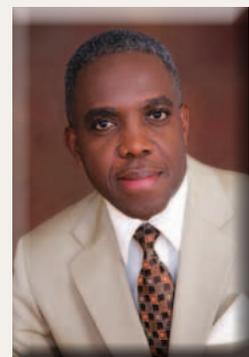
Additionally, these historic documents reflect a high view of the law, which may come as a surprise to some. They emphasize the importance of the Ten Commandments, including the sanctity of the Sabbath — a whole day set apart for rest and worship, though the fourth command is applied differently.

To summarize, “Confession is good for the soul” and so are creeds and confessional documents. We would do well to think outside the box of our aversion to them. Every church espouses some creed, confession, or statement of faith. Therefore, cynicism of confessional documents reflects misunderstanding more than fact. Contrary to the belief that these documents disarm the Bible of its authority, they actually affirm it.

So don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater; don’t be confessionally challenged. The Heidelberg Catechism begins: “Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?” The answer: “That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. . . .”

“I believe” that, and confessing it does my soul good.

— *Whaid Guscott Rose*
General Conference
President



We Care!

DISASTER RELIEF FUND

After the property damage, personal injuries, and death inflicted by tornadoes in Alabama (April 27, 28) and Missouri (May 22), your G.C. Missions Ministries has activated its Disaster Relief Fund (DRF). On page 28, read how CoG7 members and congregations fared in these storms.

Better than almost anything else, an offering to DRF expresses compassion to brethren in the US and other places where God's people suffer around the world. Send yours to Disaster Relief, G.C. Ministries, P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233. Or drop it in a local church offering earmarked "Disaster Relief."



Above: Tornado damage in Joplin, MO. Photos courtesy of Shawn Miller, nephew of Joplin CoG7 member Carolyn Cupp.

Right: Kenya, East Africa, famine relief.

