

Living

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There Is More Work to Do!

Dear Brethren and Friends,

We can all thank our Father in Heaven for the truly *magnificent* Feast of Tabernacles we recently experienced! The outpourings of love, loyalty and a *deeper Christian spirituality* were manifested more in that festival than ever before. Now, more than ever, thousands of our brethren undoubtedly realize that our human society really *is* coming to an end! It is inspiring, and yet *sobering*, to see traumatic world events taking place around us. After the terrible financial crisis that has struck our nations almost across the globe, and after a truly “historic” American election has changed our nation, the world will *never be the same again*. All of us, especially the young people who may not have seen as much as we older brethren, need to think through and fully realize this fact! God is intervening at the end of an age to humble the British-descended and American peoples, and to **teach His people the lessons** that we desperately need to learn.

We, who have been called by God, need to genuinely try to learn what He is trying to teach us! We, of all people, need to “wake up” and genuinely seek God as never before!

Meanwhile, this Work of Christ is **growing** more than ever—and God is blessing us! We are very *grateful* for His blessing and guidance. We were blessed with good offerings during the Holy Days. *Thank you*, dear brethren! We are blessed in having been able to go on a number of new stations, and are now receiving some of our best-ever responses to the *Tomorrow's World* telecast. More and more of our weekly responses total over 4,000—with a few weeks even breaking the 5,000-response level! Far more prospective members are writing in to request visits, and a number are beginning to attend—and a number of new members and ministers are coming with us from other groups, as they sense more than ever where Christ is working and where the full message of God is being preached. For all of this we are thankful, and I personally want to *thank* all of you brethren for your part and for your prayers!

Brethren, most of you have heard about the recent stroke that I experienced. My left side—especially my left arm and hand—is still somewhat numb, and I am only able to work a few hours a day. A stroke also leaves one somewhat debilitated and lacking in energy. So I ask for your *servent prayers* to continue! God is obviously “testing” me—and indeed testing many of us—through this trial. For all of us need to fully realize that this is **not** my Work, but **God's Work**—and that it will continue regardless of me! I know that, and I know God is fully in charge. We have a *wonderful* team of dedi-

cated leading ministers to carry on the Work if something should happen to me. Mr. Richard Ames, Dr. Douglas Winnail, Mr. Dibar Apartian and others are certainly beginning to take some of the load off of me, and all have proven themselves *very loyal* in this time of trial. For that I am thankful, and I know you are, too. These men have been faithful to God for *decades*, and God will use them to carry on the Work even without me if that becomes necessary. **None** of us are inexpendable!

However, I deeply feel—as do many others, including the other leaders—that the living Christ still has *much work* for me to do! I am trusting that God will **heal me**, strengthen me and use me more than ever, if I more fully **surrender** to Him and try to “learn every lesson” He wants me to learn through this trial. Brethren, it is important *that we all* realize this when trials come to each of us. God rebukes and chastens every son He **loves**. It is not a matter of His lack of love, but a matter of His wanting us to be even more yielded and to strengthen us. Jesus’ own teaching in John 15 gives us an insight into the situation. For Jesus said, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He **prunes**, that it may bear more fruit” (John 15:2).

Notice that God does not “hurt” or *destroy* those who are serving Him. He does, however, “prune” them—even *when they bear fruit*—that they may bear **more** fruit! So He wants each of us to achieve our *full potential*. He wants us to become **like Him** in every possible way. So, He **allows** various trials and tests to come upon us—and sometimes He directly brings them on us, to *teach us lessons* for **all eternity**! We should try to learn those lessons, and we should *thank God* for His love, His concern and His patience with each of us. I sincerely want to do that, and I appreciate your prayers for God’s guidance, for His patience and for *His mercy* to me and to the Work in this entire situation!

Brethren, just before the Feast—too late to announce in any written communication—I learned of the **death** of my dear friend and former brother-in-law, Mr. Raymond F. McNair. Most of you know that Mr. McNair was one of the first seven evangelists ordained in the Philadelphia era of God’s Church. He was a long-time evangelist, and served as Deputy Chancellor of the colleges at Bricket Wood and Pasadena. He served God’s people in many situations all over the world, and *did much good* during his long ministry. Although he left us at one point, and then came back to the Living Church of God to serve for a few years, he was not with us at the end. He did not wish to move with us here to Charlotte, North Carolina, and chose instead to carry on a small Internet work on his own from a small city north of San Diego.

However, Mr. McNair did remain faithful to the Truth to the end. He tried to serve God’s people in many ways. So I think it is important that we honor the **decades** of service of

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What Is Deep Conversion?

Editorial

By Roderick C. Meredith

What is the one key area of Christian life which shows whether a person is *deeply converted* or not? Sabbath keeping? Showing love? Being zealous for the Work?

While all of those fruits are important, by themselves they may be misunderstood or misguided. For instance, many Orthodox Jews keep the Sabbath even more strictly—at least according to their understanding—than we do. And even some Buddhists and people of other religions around the world may—*on the surface at least*—seem to have more kindness and love than even many true Christians. Also, some people I have known were *very zealous* for the Work of God because of *their personal involvement* in it—because it made them feel more important to see “their” activity growing in power and prestige.

So what is the key area of Christian behavior that profoundly denotes one’s deep conversion? After being in God’s true Church for 59 years and being very well acquainted with all of the leading ministers, it has become quite clear to me that *one key element* denotes real conversion in a person—probably more than any others.

What is that key character trait?

To find the answer, let us consider carefully a number of fundamental teachings in God’s inspired word. Notice Proverbs 1:7: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wis-

dom and instruction.” God says it is the “fools” who despise wisdom and instruction. In other words they *will not take correction*. In verses 25–26, we read: “Because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes.” When even professing Christians will not take God’s *rebuke* and *correction*, He says that He will “laugh” at their calamity!

In the foundational teaching that Jesus Christ gave in the Sermon on the Mount, He tells us: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:4–5).

Many biblical scholars acknowledge that a primary meaning of “mourn”—as used in this passage—is a profound *repentance* and deep *sorrow* for one’s sins. The word “meek” indicates a *humility* and *teachability* before God. Taken together, these verses certainly show that a true follower of Jesus Christ will be humbly sensitive to God’s will *and quickly willing to repent when sin or self-will is pointed out*.

Are you like this?

It would be wrong to do so, but I could name dozens of leading ministers, administrators and teachers in God’s Work in years past who were very definitely **not** willing to take correction—**not** willing to humble themselves and submit to God’s will or to take correction based on His word. When I tried to explain to one leading minister why his son—a known fornicator—should not be appointed to an important position, he *yelled* at me:

“You don’t understand the relationships of fathers and sons!”

Later, this man had to take a lesser position and a smaller office for a while. He exclaimed: “*I can’t take this anymore!*” A very few years later, he surreptitiously joined in an effort to overthrow Mr. Herbert Armstrong and cause a split in the very Work of God.

Another leading minister, who always tried to keep others away from Mr. Armstrong so he could *control* him, told me later on: “You’ve got to learn how to *manage* Mr. Armstrong!” Of course, I did not follow that advice. Rather, I prayed that *God* would “manage” Mr. Armstrong—and that I would continue to give him straightforward advice even though it might not always have been popular in every case.

Through much experience, I found that if people like this—even ordained ministers—will *not take correction* or heed instruction—then it usually turns out that they will leave God’s Church within a few years and also *leave much of the Truth* that they had themselves taught and preached!

God reveals to us the kind of attitude He wants in Isaiah 57:15: “For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him *who* has a *contrite* and *humble* spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.’” The word “contrite” has to do with deep, heartfelt repentance—a willingness to acknowledge wrong and to *take correction!* This basic attitude of *total surrender* to God, of being

willing to *admit it* and to *repent* when one is wrong—*this* is the key attitude of which I am speaking. Although keeping God's commandments and showing love to fellow man is the *way of life* that must be followed—this “key” attitude of self-abnegation and a *willingness to take correction* is something which “separates the men from the boys,” so to speak, when it comes to truly discerning the depth of a person's conversion.

Notice Isaiah 66:1–2: “Thus says the LORD: ‘Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,’ says the LORD. ‘But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a **contrite** spirit, and who **trembles** at My word.’” Again, Scripture points out this attitude of properly *fearing*—giving *deep respect* to—the great God, and shows us that He wants us to be “contrite” and constantly subjecting ourselves to *correction*, to *instruction* and to His *chastening* when necessary.

The Apostle Paul was inspired to show us that this same attitude must be involved in our study of God's word: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for **reproof**, for **correction**, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17). If a person will not take “reproof” from God's word, then—even though he may presently be a Sabbath keeper—he will probably “go off” sooner or later because of his lack of humility and willingness to take correction. Then, as I have found in most cases, he will often *drop* the Sabbath keeping, the whole understanding of keeping God's commandments and many of the other truths he may have learned.

In Psalm 51, we read of David's repentance after his sin with

Bathsheba. Notice the totality of David's confession and repentance! *No excuses here!* For David said: “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge” (Psalm 51:2–4).

Though David was a man of great drive and great passion, he *acknowledged it* when he was wrong! He made *no excuses!* And so, because of this and because of his wholehearted love and obedience toward his Creator in the vast majority of cases, God called David “a man after My own heart” (Acts 13:22).

Yet David's predecessor as King of Israel, King Saul, became proud, stubborn and would **not** take correction! This was a very important thing to God, for our Creator tells us in His word: “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king” (1 Samuel 15:23). Soon after this inspired statement, Samuel said to Saul: “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you” (v. 28). God would **not** put up with Saul's stubbornness and unwillingness to take correction! But, again, He kept David in office even in spite of his sins *because he was willing to acknowledge his sin and take correction!*

Ask yourself: “When I am corrected, do I usually argue, justify myself, and try to explain it away, or do I show myself willing to *repent* and to *change*? Do I constantly challenge the one who gives me the correction, and perhaps get my feelings hurt? Or do I sincerely seek to be sensitive to God's will, to God's

speaking through this other person who may be trying to help me, and try to *be willing to take correction even when it hurts?*”

Speaking to many who had been in God's Church from the beginning in the area of Palestine—including some of the “old timers”—Paul warned them: “And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.’ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?” (Hebrews 12:5–7). Then, in verse 11, Paul summarized: “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

This entire attitude—of *total surrender* to God, and of being willing to *take correction* and even submit to “chastening” from God—is one of the most vital issues of Christian development imaginable! For God is now “testing” His people (James 1:2–3). He tells us in 1 Peter 4:17: “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” God wants to *know* and *know that He knows* that we will always submit to Him “even when it hurts!” So He is working with us, fashioning and molding us, and seeing *if* we will wholeheartedly respond to Him through His direct teaching and through correction from His true ministers and servants who are teaching the Truth.

How well do *you* take correction? How well do *you* measure up in this key area, which so plainly signals the attitude of *total conversion*? ■

Trust in God's Power in 2009

By Richard F. Ames

Every year, billions of people celebrate December 31 as “New Year’s Eve.” We in God’s Church know that the world is following a secular pattern founded in superstition and paganism, so we do not observe that holiday. We know that God’s calendar begins in the spring, not in the dead of winter.

We customarily use the time before the Passover for self-evaluation, as we should. But, in another sense, we should always be evaluating ourselves. There is never a “wrong” time for us to review our own lives and take stock of where we are and where we have been. As the world’s year comes to a close, news analysts and commentators will review the trends and events of 2008, and we can do the same in our own lives.

For the Church, as well as for the nations of planet Earth, 2008 was an eventful year. The world’s economy suffered from the fallout of catastrophic U.S. mortgage and credit failures, amounting to trillions of dollars lost. Military conflicts continued unabated in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Russia invaded Georgia, spurring fears of a destabilized Europe. From the ruinous 8.0 magnitude Sichuan earthquake last May 12—which killed nearly 70,000 and injured nearly 400,000—to the ongoing Murray-Darling Basin drought that has disrupted the lives of millions across Australia, our natural environment was wracked by disaster in 2008.

Many observers are hoping that the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States will bring positive change to the U.S. and to the world. However, we in God’s Church know that while temporary gains may occur, an overall pattern of decline is inevitable unless our peoples turn from their selfish, anti-God, materialistic ways of life. God is testing the national character of the U.S. and our Western nations. Will we repent and avoid God’s

judgment, as did ancient Nineveh? Will the Western nations trust in their own righteousness and power, or will they trust God’s power for deliverance, peace and prosperity?

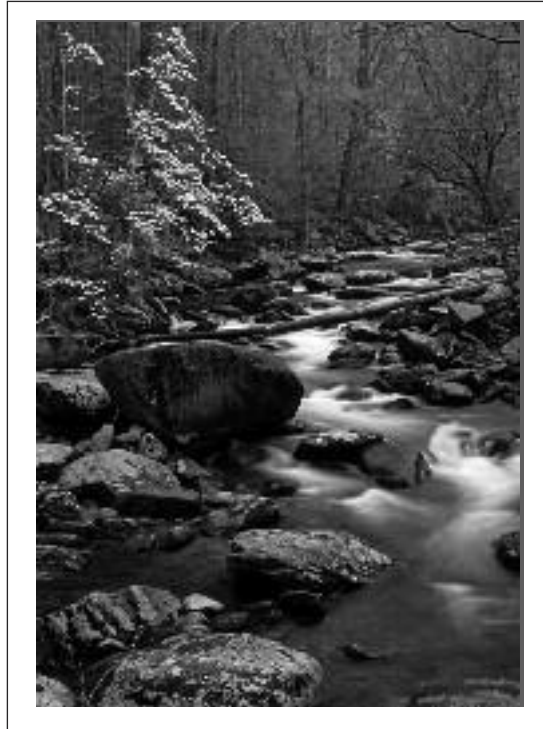
The Work experienced important milestones in 2008. In March, Christ opened the television door of Black Entertainment Television (BET), which reaches 89 million households in the U.S. and Canada. God also in-

spired hundreds more donors and co-workers to begin supporting the Work. In just the first 10 months of 2008, 17,783 new students began taking the printed version of the *Tomorrow’s World Bible Study Course*. Another 2,793 began taking the online edition. In total, students from more than 170 nations are now studying the Bible in depth, through *Tomorrow’s World*. The November–December *Tomorrow’s World* magazine had a print run of more than 390,000 copies, sent to subscribers in more than 160 nations around the world.

Some of our brethren “endured to the end” in 2008. Our six *Living Church News* issues in 2008 honored in the “In Loving Memory” section 23 brethren—including many long-time members,

ministers and their wives—who died in the faith. Others died whose names were not sent in for inclusion, and we love and honor them all. The “faith chapter” of your Bible gives us this encouragement: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).

What greater honor could these brethren have? They died in the faith. May that be said of any of us who die, or go to sleep in the Lord, in 2009 and beyond. “And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better



for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us” (Hebrews 11:39–40).

Brethren, we must grow spiritually in 2009! We must become more like Christ in 2009! And we must actively trust in God’s power in 2009!

We should understand that God is so powerful that not even death can prevail against His Church. Our Savior declared, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Not even the gates of the grave can prevent God’s Church from fulfilling its mission. Why? Because God is in control! God rules supreme!

Years ago, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong asked rhetorically, “What is the greatest fact?” When you think about truth and reality, how would you answer the question? Mr. Armstrong stated: “God rules supreme!” Yes, God is El Shaddai, God Almighty. He has all power in the universe. He is *omnipotent*. Remember the events leading up to Christ’s return: “Then a voice came from the throne, saying, ‘Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!’ And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia! *For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!* Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready’” (Revelation 19:5–7).

Yes, we—the Church—are making ourselves ready, not through our own power, but through the *power of Christ!* “Alleluia! *For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!*”

We thank God for His sovereignty, His authority, and His power. But do we truly realize that God wants us to have power?

God’s Power in History

When the peoples of Britain, the U.S., and other nations have humbled themselves before God, He has intervened for them and blessed them. In May 1940, Hitler’s armies had overrun Western Europe. 335,000 Allied troops were trapped near Dunkirk in France with no means of escape. On May 26, King George VI requested a National Day of Prayer. The British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.), was delivered in what became known as “the miracle of the calm seas” or the “miracle of Dunkirk.” Adolf Hitler blundered! Dr. Lynn Torrance wrote an article for the July

1961, *Plain Truth* magazine, describing what transpired: “Hitler issued the most amazing order ever recorded in all military history. He ordered General von Rundstedt and General Guderian to stop their fast-succeeding drive to surround the helpless British Army. The British troops escaped into Dunkirk under the silent muzzles of the German guns” (“Hitler’s Seven Fatal Blunders,” p. 10).

Hitler blundered by commanding his panzer tank division to halt its advancement, hoping to give the Luftwaffe the glory of victory. Two incidents of divine intervention redeemed the B.E.F. A storm prevented the German air force from completing its mission, and the British Channel experienced calm waters. Every boat, fishing vessel and ship was pressed into service. A third of a million troops were rescued from certain defeat.

The British celebrated a Day of National Thanksgiving on June 9. An article by C.B. Mortlock in *The Daily Telegraph*, June 8, 1940, reported the historic events. Mortlock wrote: “Officers of high rank do not

hesitate to put down the deliverance of the B.E.F. to the fact of the nation being at prayer on Sunday, May 26.... The consciousness of *miraculous* deliverance pervades the camps in which the troops are now housed in England.... One thing can be certain about tomorrow’s thanksgiving in our churches. From none will the thanks ascend with greater sincerity or deeper fervour than from the officers and men who have seen the Hand of God, *powerful* to save, delivering them from the hand of a mighty foe, who, humanly speaking, had them utterly at his mercy” (*We Have a Guardian*, pp. 11–12).

God rescued 335,000 British troops. God has all power in the universe, and He does intervene in human history.

The Bible records how God miraculously delivered His people on many occasions. When the Assyrian armies of King Sennacherib surrounded Jerusalem, King Hezekiah pleaded with God to save the city and its people. You can read how God powerfully intervened. What did He do? “And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh” (2 Kings 19:35–36).

Remember God’s demonstration of power to deliver His people. He can use His power to help you! Yes, God “is able

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to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Ephesians 3:20).

God’s Spiritual Power

One of God’s greatest gifts is the gift of the Holy Spirit. God is willing to give us His spiritual power! “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). Even while we are physical, God gives us the powerful spiritual dimension. Billions of human beings around the world have yet to receive God’s Spirit.

Spiritual power, spiritual love and sound-mindedness are dynamic characteristics that we must nurture after they are given. If we do not tend to them, we can become lax and lose them. So, God tells us to “stir up” His gift (2 Timothy 1:6). We must pursue a close relationship with God, and decide always to “be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

God’s spiritual power instills within us the greatest quality in the universe, God’s love: “and hope putteth not to shame; because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us” (Romans 5:5, ASV).

The Spirit of Begettal

God has called us to become His very children, not by “adoption,” but by actual Spirit begettal. His Spirit combines with the spirit in man (1 Corinthians 2:11–12) and begets us as His children! One of the most inspiring and encouraging verses (among many) in the Bible reveals that our Father in Heaven personally chose you and me to become His spiritual children. Notice: “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (James 1:18, KJV).

God knows you and me intimately and showers His love and Spirit upon us. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17). As His children, we must use the power of His Spirit to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

The Spirit of Creation

God has demonstrated His omnipotence as the great Creator of all things. We stand in awe as we see what seems to be a limitless universe rapidly expanding out into space. God has created the glorious galaxies that startle our imagination. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). As we have explained in our publications and telecast, Lucifer and his angels caused great

havoc to the earth and its galactic neighborhood. The earth “became,” as it should read in Genesis 1:2, “without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (KJV).

Through the power of His Spirit, God renewed the earth as His chosen environment for the unfolding of the incredible human potential. “You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You *renew* the face of the earth” (Psalm 104:30). Creation is one proof of God’s existence, and through the creation human beings should understand the very power of God. “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,” (Romans 1:20).

Yes, God’s power is clearly seen in the creation! All humanity must recognize God as the Creator. Historically, many American patriots recognized God to the best of their ability. Even to this day, U.S. currency contains the motto, “In God We Trust.” Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong observed: “Trust in God is the very foundation of godly character.” Let us trust God and continually thank God that He has given us of His Spirit, the very Spirit of creation!

Christ Upholds the Universe!

The physical world is susceptible to decay and destruction. Yet God created the heavens and the earth as an environment through which human beings could begin to understand and appreciate His great power. Notice this inspiring revelation concerning Christ’s role in the universe: “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, *upholding the universe* by his *word of power*. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs” (Hebrews 1:1–4, RSV).

In addition to working with us individually as our great High Priest, Christ is actively working with the power of the universe, which Christians will eventually inherit (“all things,” Romans 8:17, 32).

The Power of the Resurrection

When the Sadducees tried to challenge Him with a difficult question, Jesus illustrated another aspect of God’s power. They asked Jesus, regarding a woman who had had seven husbands in her lifetime, “in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her.’ Jesus an-

swered and said to them, ‘You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor *the power of God*. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.’ And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His teaching” (Matthew 22:28–33).

Jesus also demonstrated the power of God when He raised His friend Lazarus from the dead. He told Martha, “Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘*I am the resurrection and the life*. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (John 11:23–25).

God’s Power for the Weak

At some point in most of our lives, we have experienced physical and spiritual weakness. Even the great Apostle Paul knew the stress of pain and weakness. When Paul pleaded with God to remove his “thorn in the flesh,” God gave him this encouragement: “And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that *the power of Christ* may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9–10).

The Apostle Paul trusted in Christ for the strength to go forward. In his old age, Mr. Herbert Armstrong would often quote Isaiah to credit God for whatever zeal and power he was able to exhibit: “But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31). I hope you have claimed that promise in your prayers to God—I certainly have many times. God gives us this further encouragement: “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. *He gives power to the weak*, and

to those who have no might He increases strength” (Isaiah 40:28–29).

The Power of the Gospel

The good news of God’s coming Kingdom gives us hope, and reveals God’s overall plan of salvation. The world believes in a false hope, based on a false gospel, but the truth gives us encouragement and power. The Apostle Paul wrote: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for *it is the*

power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’” (Romans 1:16–17). The *Moffatt* translation states it this way: “For I am proud of the gospel; it is God’s saving power for everyone who has faith...”

Christ is our living Savior and Great High Priest. How much power does He have to save us? “Therefore He is also *able to save to the uttermost* those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). The gospel of Christ is the power of salvation for all who believe!

**We may suffer
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Goals for the Year Ahead

In 2009, we will certainly face challenges and trials, as we did in 2008. Philosopher Elbert Hubbard shared this perspective on life: “God will not look you over for medals, degrees or diplomas, but for scars” (*A Thousand & One Epigrams*, p. 104). We may suffer pain and problems in 2009, but we must set goals and go forward in faith. Many around us will make resolutions at this time of year. What goals have you set? What goals have you genuinely committed to achieve? The book of Proverbs gives us this advice: “The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty” (Proverbs 21:5).

As most of you know, I enjoy the comic strip *Calvin & Hobbes*. In one strip, the precocious boy Calvin and his tiger, Hobbes, are walking through the snow on a winter day. Hobbes says to Calvin, “Are you making any resolutions for the New Year?” Calvin responds, “Yeah, I’m resolving to just wing it and see what happens.” Hobbes follows: “So you’re staying the course?” Calvin concludes: “I stick to my strengths.”

Of course, our strength is in the Lord, and not in ourselves. We can plan for 2009 by considering the commitment we made last year at the Passover. How much have you grown in godly character since you took the bread and wine after sunset last April 18? When you take the Passover in 2009, after sunset on April 7, will you be able to say that you have become stronger in the faith in the past year? If not, now is a good time to redouble your efforts with God's help. Are you sowing seeds to the Kingdom? Are you applying Acts 20:35 daily?

Bernard M. Baruch, the noted statesman and advisor to U.S. Presidents Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt, wrote in his autobiography: "During my eighty-seven years I have witnessed a whole succession of technological revolutions. But none of them has done away with the need for character in the individual or the ability to think" (*Baruch: My Own Story*, 1957).

Throughout 2009, be sure to apply the tools for spiritual character and growth. Set specific goals for yourself. Perhaps you will commit to read the first five books of the Bible over the next three months, or the first five books of the New Testament over the next month. Perhaps you will resolve to fast one day in the next month, or one day a month all year. Have you fasted since the Day of Atonement last October 9? If not, perhaps you can make fasting a higher priority in your life in 2009.

Several years ago, Dr. Douglas Winnail gave this excellent advice regarding year-end evaluations and plans: "For most organizations, winding up another calendar year is a time for year-end reports, assessing problems and accomplishments of the past 12 months and mapping out plans for the coming year. If we are really serious about growing, overcoming and bearing spiritual fruit, we can benefit by using these same procedures in our own lives. In the coming week, it might be very helpful to spend some time reflecting on your actions and activities of the past year. Make a list of what you have accomplished and what problems you have had to deal with—and what lessons you have learned. Then make a *list of goals* that you would like to accomplish and challenges that you need to overcome. Study the Bible to find out what God has to say about the goals and challenges that you face (Psalm 119:105). Do some reading to find out what may be helpful in achieving your goals and overcoming your particular challenges. Get wise counsel about issues you face (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22). Then formulate some plans—with specific things to do—to achieve the goals you set. This is what Solomon meant

when he advised, 'Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established' (Proverbs 4:25–27)" (*The World Ahead Weekly Update*, December 29, 2005).

Brethren, think over this past year. Has God worked a miracle in your life? Thank God for every day of life God has given you. Thank Him for His blessing, mercy and forgiveness. Remember: "The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. All Your works shall praise You, O LORD, and Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, and *talk of Your power*, to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations" (Psalm 145:8–13).

God has called us to prepare the world for the *Second Coming* of Jesus Christ. He has called us to accomplish a mission. How will we accomplish that mission? By His great power! "'Not by might nor by [human] power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). God has given us spiritual power to fulfill His will and to do His Work. We can look forward to the Kingdom and the resurrection of the saints. We can look forward to the time when Christ's faithful servants will be given even *more power*. "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give *power over the nations*—'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'" (Revelation 2:26–27).

We can look forward to the time when all the heavenly hosts will praise the King of kings: "'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive *power* and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!' And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: 'Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!'" (Revelation 5:12–13).

In 2009, each of us ought to be trusting God's power to work with us and through us. As we do so, we can trust His promises that He will give us power: power to overcome, power to grow in spiritual maturity, power to become more like Christ and power to keep growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ!

Brethren, trust in God's power in your life, and remember Paul's words, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). Yes, we as Christians can persevere, succeed and grow in 2009 and beyond! ■

Clarification: "The First Feast of Tabernacles" (September-October 2008 *Living Church News*) relied in part on an assumption that the first Pentecost of the Exodus occurred on Sivan 6, contrary to the long-accepted chronology placing Pentecost on Sivan 8 that year. While we encourage readers to appreciate the valuable and lasting spiritual principles and lessons in the article, the Church continues to accept the traditional Sivan 8 chronology.

Healing: What God Expects of Us

By Wyatt Ciesielka

Shortly after Jesus Christ's resurrection, He visited the disciples and gave them some very important instructions that we often call "The Great Commission" (Mark 16:14–18). Christ foretold that certain signs would follow those who believed. Of those signs, the promise of healing is surely the one most sought after today by those in need. Yet many who seek the fulfillment of that sign find that it can pose a *severe challenge* to their faith. How should we understand this promised sign, and what it means for the testing of our faith and our relationship with God?

A Test of Faith and Understanding

When we claim the promise of healing, or see someone else who needs healing, we must often reconcile scriptural truths that may seem to be in conflict. On the one hand, we know that God is "a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). We know the many scriptures that reveal God as our Healer. By Jesus Christ's stripes we are healed (1 Peter 2:24). Yet when we face the reality of our situation, or of a loved one terribly, pitifully and helplessly afflicted, we may struggle to understand the application of another key verse: "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28).

I have known in my own life the struggles of faith that severe

health trials and death can cause. When I was a young teenager, my father was abruptly killed in a farming accident—leaving behind a young family completely unprepared for his sudden absence. Later, when I was a young adult, my mother suffered terribly from cancer before she died. A few years later, my father-in-law battled cancer and died. In all of these situations, my family and I sought God's will and His mercy. And while I saw God's hand intervene at different times during these trials, my faith and understanding were often tested.

Naturally, in such situations, questions arise. What is *God's will*? What is my (or the ailing person's) level of *faith*, or state of spiritual health? *When* will God intervene? *Why* has God not yet intervened? *What* should I do, and *what more* should I do? Thousands of God's people have asked these questions over the centuries. Thankfully, since God does indeed love us very much, and since He knew we would suffer various afflictions, He gave us many principles in Scripture to help us understand His will for us. In particular, we can consider the following seven key points to help us have the right context about divine healing.

Seven Foundational Truths

First, remember that Christ was *brutally* beaten for our healing, and that it is His *sincere desire* to heal us. No matter how pro-

longed or severe our suffering, it is *nothing* compared to the completely unjust punishment that Christ, the perfect Son of God, *willingly endured*. Why did He endure this punishment? Far from being a callous, uncaring God who does not care about our health, our suffering or our healing, God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son allowed this brutal punishment because of Their love for us.

We know that Jesus was the ultimate Passover sacrifice for our sins. But just as Passover lambs were *not* savagely beaten before sacrifice, Christ did not need to be savagely beaten to pay the price for our sins. However, in complete submission to the Father's will, Christ allowed Himself to be beaten brutally to provide for our *physical* healing (1 Peter 2:24; Isaiah 53:5). Although there are times when we are not healed, we need to remember that if God and Christ did not intensely love each one of us, and did not *desire* that we have the blessing of physical healing, Christ would not have suffered that scourging and that beating. We know that God both forgives and heals (Psalm 103:3), and that He wants to heal us. We should be deeply thankful that He is such a merciful Heavenly Father and that He and Christ were willing to allow that punishment for the purpose of our physical healing.

Second, we often forget that *all* are fated to die (1 Corinthians 15:22) and that death will remain

with us until after the Millennium, at the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God on this earth (1 Corinthians 15:24–26). Yet, when the righteous perish, we sometimes fail to consider that they have been taken away from the pains and the evils of this world. They now have rest (Isaiah 57:1). A Christian may be sorry to lose a loved one, and may deeply miss that loved one. But we should *not* become depressed when a loved one succumbs to death, and we should not impute judgment on the faith or the level of conversion of one who is afflicted or who has died. From the most sinful to the most righteous, all are fated to die, and those faithful Christians who have preceded us in death will have their next moment of awareness at the return of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:15–16).

We know about Paul's "thorn in the flesh," which God refused to remove (2 Corinthians 12:7–9), but we should also consider the example of King Hezekiah (2 Kings 20). Though God did show mercy by extending King Hezekiah's life for 15 years, the king *still died* at the end of those years. Was Hezekiah an evil king? Was Paul a rebellious and unfaithful Christian? No! Here are two zealous, obedient, powerful servants of God who nevertheless died. One had his death delayed for a while, and one had to live with his affliction, but Paul and Hezekiah were *not* given perfect health or immortality during their physical lifetime! When we encounter brethren in God's Church who are sick today, who have chronic illnesses or disabilities or who eventually succumb to death, we should view them with the same love and respect we have for Hezekiah and Paul. All die, *including the righteous*.

Third, God has given us very practical instructions for living a happy, healthy life. While obeying God's health laws does not guarantee that we will never succumb to sickness or injury, we will be much healthier if we obey those precepts. God's Church has published many books and articles on this topic. Decades ago, our Presiding Evangelist, Dr. Roderick C. Meredith, wrote about practical and biblical principles in *The Seven Laws of Radiant Health*. That booklet has long been out of print, but its principles are timeless, including such keys as proper diet, ample sleep and exercise, and quarantine when one is sick. His "Strengthen Your Body" article in the July-August 2005 *Living Church News* gave a brief overview of some of these vital principles.

The health laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy are well known to most of us. As another example, consider the beautiful instruction of Psalm 104:14–15, which is just one of many scriptures where a kind and caring God has given us practical dietary and health instruction. In this brief passage, God gives us a number of health principles that, if followed today, would prevent many illnesses. Notice here the simple instruction that livestock should be allowed to roam free and eat a vegetarian diet. Today, too much of the meat we consume comes from animals that get no exercise or fresh air, are fed harmful animal by-products as part of their diet, and are loaded up with innumerable vaccines and artificial hormones that affect those who consume them. God never intended this, but mankind's greed, laziness and refusal to practice biblical agricultural principles have created a system where it is very challenging to find nutritious food not damaged by human pro-

cessing. In this passage, we also see that God advises a *balanced diet* that includes vegetables, good bread, healthy oil, and wine in moderation. God created us, and He knows how we work physiologically. Thankfully, God gave us ample instruction for maintaining good health.

A *fourth* key is that God does indeed have a plan to heal the *entire* world. We should take comfort in knowing that, ultimately, God will remove *all* sickness from the entire earth. In the Kingdom, God will provide complete physical and emotional healing. He will heal the entire creation (Revelation 21:4, Revelation 22:1–2). God truly is a loving Father who cares about our health now, and has a plan in which all sickness, disease, emotional trauma and death will finally be put away forever.

The *fifth* and *sixth* keys relate to *intercessory prayer*. Specifically, the fifth key is to call on the elders of the Church for anointing, and the sixth key is that the brethren must intercede in prayer for one another (James 5:16). Scripture tells the sick to call on the elders of the Church (the ordained ministers) for anointing (James 5:14). When an afflicted person asks for anointing, this shows the individual's submission to God and His Church government. The elders pray, lay hands on, and anoint with oil—asking Christ and God the Father to *intercede* for the afflicted person. Also, brethren in the Church should intercede in prayer for one another (vv. 15–16). Both of these instructions involve intercessory prayer. We know that the intercessory prayers of the righteous are vital, powerful and *commanded*.

Further, 1 Corinthians 12:26 illustrates that the Church of God is one body and when one member

suffers, we all suffer. Consider that metaphor from a personal perspective. If you have been painfully injured, you will naturally be very aware of, and very concerned about, your injury. Similarly, if one of our spiritual brothers or sisters is ill or suffering, we should be just as acutely aware of and concerned for that person. Then, we should take that concern to our loving Father and to Christ and ask Them in intercessory prayer to intervene for that member of our spiritual body.

As we see in James 5, “the prayer of faith will save the sick” and “the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Whether God chooses to provide healing now, in the future, or upon that person’s resurrection, God does hear the prayers of the righteous (Proverbs 15:29), and we are told to intercede for one another because when one member of the body suffers, the entire body suffers.

A vital *seventh* key is that we must fully submit our will to the Father’s, just as Christ did. Consider that Christ was perfect in all His ways, spiritually and physically. He was completely obedient and without sin (Hebrews 4:15). But this does not mean that He looked forward to His suffering as a pleasurable experience. He did not desire to be terribly and brutally beaten. He did not desire to be cut off even momentarily from God the Father. However, He did desire to fulfill the Father’s will—and He loved the Father, and us, enough to perfectly submit His will to His Father’s.

Matthew 26:38–39 poignantly shows the depth of Christ’s sorrow, knowing what lay immediately ahead. He was not only sorrowful

about the physical suffering He knew He would endure, but He was also extremely sorrowful, knowing that taking our sins upon Himself would for a brief moment separate Him from His Father (Matthew 27:46). The Word had preexisted with God the Father from the beginning of time (John 1:1–2), and Christ knew that He would be momentarily separated from the Father when our sins were placed on Him

Ultimately, we understand that it is the spiritual character that God is developing in us, through various tests and trials, including health trials and even death, that will truly matter in the end (Hebrews 9:27–28).

(2 Corinthians 5:21). Ultimately, we must *always* subject our will to God’s will. God is our Healer, whether in this life or in the resurrection, and we must always have the attitude that it is God’s will and not ours that must be done.

What God Expects of Us

These are just seven of the vital truths the Church of God has understood and taught on this topic through the centuries. It is important that we understand these points, so we can have the proper context from which to answer the simple, but sometimes agonizing question: *What does God expect of us when we seek His healing intervention?* Now that we have the right context for the question,

an answer can be found by studying one of the earliest statutes that God gave Moses and the Israelites, soon after their deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

Exodus 15 tells the story. Soon after crossing the Red Sea, the tribes of Israel came to the Wilderness of Shur. This was a very inhospitable and arid place, where they could find no water over the course of their three-day march (Exodus 15:22). Without a source to replenish their water supplies, the Israelites would soon begin to die. They were already in a physical (and spiritual) state of weakness because of their years of bondage, abuse and slavery. Now, after three days of marching through rough terrain, they were becoming desperate. They needed God’s intervention.

Finally, they came to a place they would later name Marah—which means “bitter.” Most Bible scholars agree that Marah was located in the area now called Wady-Amarah, at a place currently known as Ain Howarah. This location on the Sinai Peninsula is about 30 miles from where the Israelites likely exited the Red Sea, consistent with the expected distance such a group could travel in that amount of time.

Precipitation in this area creates small rivulets, which flow through seasonal streams during the winter months and collect in small pools and pockets that often last into the summer. However, as this water collects and becomes stagnant, it can become contaminated by poisonous vegetation or by the rock and soil itself. In the Wady-Amarah area today, small amounts of water still collect through the same seasonal process, and the local Arabs typically avoid this bitter and im-

pure water—not even allowing their camels to drink it.

The Israelites' physical, emotional and spiritual state immediately after their deliverance from slavery was *very desperate*. In an immediate sense, they needed physical intervention—they needed water or they would die. Much more importantly, they needed to be taught spiritual lessons. They needed divine intervention and healing in a national sense—through which God began to reveal what He expected from Israel, and what He expects from us. It is at this early point in the Exodus when the Eternal intervened and gave His children profound instruction. “If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and *do what is right in His sight*, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you” (Exodus 15:26). How important is healing? Here we see God *identifying Himself* by a name—*Yahweh Ropheka*—rendered in English as “the Eternal Who heals you.”

So, what did God instruct Israel to do? How did God want Israel to obey? What did God then promise? God wanted Israel not just to obey Him, but to do so *in the way that most pleases Him*. In return, God promised to protect Israel from the diseases and pestilences that they had seen afflict the Egyptians. This promise of divine healing and protection was not just for ancient Israel during the Exodus—it is for us as well, and is repeated in scriptures where God states that though thousands may fall all around us from disease, pestilence or violence, those who really obey God will receive His protection and shall not be afraid (Psalm 91:4–8).

When we understand what God expects from us as we seek divine healing, we can see that *the answer never changes*. God expects of us what He expected of the Israelites at Marah. His expectation is the same when we are healthy. His expectation is the same when a family member or loved one is sick. We are not to just “go through the motions” of being Christian, but we are to really obey Him in meekness, in humility and in complete submission to His will.

Stated another way, God has shown us what is good, and what He requires of us—to do justly (keep the commandments), to love mercy (be kind and merciful with each other), and to walk humbly before Him. These characteristics are summarized in Micah 6:8, and this is how we “do what is right in His sight”—whether we are sick or healthy.

Developing Righteous Character

Divine healing is a sign that has always accompanied God's true Church as it carries out the Great Commission. God has used healings to comfort others, to show His mercy, to build faith and to show where He is working. We should continue faithfully to seek God's intervention for ourselves and for others when we face illness, injury or disease. We should continue to believe and faithfully accept the promises of Romans 8:28, Hebrews 11:6, 1 Peter 2:24 and Isaiah 53:5. But we must also understand that there is no contradiction between those truths and the reality of our situation when we, or those we love, may desperately need God's healing intervention.

God's promises will always stand. And just as the Eternal was not challenged by Israel's desperate

situation and lack of water, neither is He challenged by our disease or sickness. But it is also vital to understand that He wants us to keep His commandments in a way that pleases Him—showing mercy, kindness, humility, faithfulness, and remaining in a *good attitude* no matter what our condition. This is what God expects of us, whether we are healthy or sick. This is what allows God to build righteous character in us. We must always remember that it is not our physical healing, or the healing of a loved one in this lifetime that is ultimately important. Rather, our spiritual health and *righteous character* are of utmost and *eternal* importance.

God loves us more than we can imagine. He is “the Lord Who heals,” and He is working out a grand plan on this earth that includes each one of us individually. This is why He gave His Son to die for our sins. This is why Christ was beaten for our physical healing. This is why He has given us so many health principles in Scripture. And, this is why sometimes He heals us, but sometimes He requires that we wait until Christ's return—whether Christ returns in our lifetime or not.

Ultimately, we understand that it is the spiritual character that God is developing in us, through various tests and trials, including health trials and even death, that will truly matter in the end (Hebrews 9:27–28). Ultimately, we must fully believe that “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). Whether He works with us in sickness or in health, God is working with us to develop our confidence in His promises and our complete submission to His will. This is what He expects of us, whatever our circumstance. ■

Festival 2008: A Foretaste of Millennial Joy

More than 6,800 Living Church of God brethren gathered at 44 Feast sites in 30 countries last October to keep the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. Here are reports from many of those sites, to help us recapture the spirit of uplift and excitement that was felt by brethren around the world who had come to the places where God had placed His name.

Prescott, AZ

Brethren from around the world were greeted by beautiful blue skies and crisp, cool air in the mile-high city of Prescott, Arizona during the 2008 Feast of Tabernacles. The local community provided a warm reception for the Living Church of God, and many of the local businesses indicated they were pleasantly surprised by the courteous behavior demonstrated by Festival attendees.

Services were conducted at the Quality Inn and Suites, where many of the brethren were lodged. Five hundred and twenty registered attendees heard inspiring messages on such subjects as: becoming peacemakers, practicing how to serve as kings and priests, patriarchal government, why we are here and having the mind of God. Each message helped us focus more clearly on God's soon-coming Kingdom.

Mr. James Sweat, Assistant Festival Coordinator, admonished attendees to recognize "Two Different Worlds"—the present day world and "Tomorrow's World." Arriving on Friday, Mr. Lambert Greer continued the Festival theme begun with Dr. Meredith's "Catching the Vision," by speaking on "God's Plan for Restoring All Things," and also "God's Plan of Salvation for All Mankind."

A highlight of the Feast was the baptism of three new members by Mr. Rodger Bardo, Festival Coordinator. Quite a

crowd gathered at the Quality Inn swimming pool to warmly welcome these new members to God's family, a direct result of this end-time Work! We were also observed by the hotel staff, who commented that they had never seen such a wonderful "family" atmosphere and happy smiles.

Family Day participants enjoyed a wide range of fun and fellowship at Prescott's Freedom Station, while singles gathered that evening for an elegant reception at the Quality Inn's Lariat Restaurant. Later in the week, many attendees boarded the Verde Canyon Railroad for a 20-mile excursion, followed by a chuck-wagon dinner with Western entertainment. Another tour group was able to witness the beauty of God's creation by traveling to the magnificent Grand Canyon.

Lunches together on the High Days provided an opportunity to enjoy food and fellowship, while our musical members shared

their talents with one and all. A highlight for many was the Festival Dinner Dance, held outside on the Quality Inn's Patio Courtyard, featuring professional entertainment provided by the "Mariachi Mexico Nuevo" singers. This was followed by recorded music, dancing, and entertainment by our own Feast "Show" performers during the evening. Throughout the Feast, our children and teens demonstrated their extraordinary talents with arts and crafts, and the teens also enjoyed an afternoon bowling activity. Finally, golfing enthusiasts had an opportunity to "tee off" at the Living Golf Outing.

Our Church family members in Prescott this year were provided with a very special opportunity to embrace the vision of Tomorrow's World, echoing the words: "best Feast yet!"

—Rodger Bardo and Prescott Feast Site Administrators

Newport, OR

Two hundred forty brethren gathered together in the northern Pacific seaside town of Newport, Oregon to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. Unseasonably clear weather highlighted the beauty of the area and the abundant sea life that inhabits these waters, such as sea lions and seals. Many took advantage of the good weather to stroll along the seashore in search of crabs, anemones, and a few even saw a whale or two. In one of guest speaker Dr. Douglas S. Winnail's sermons, he spoke of the important ecological role that the shellfish play, giving us more appreciation for their beauty. The splendor of the region provided a backdrop for the spiritual meat received.

The brethren were delighted to see two traveling Headquarters ministers this year—Mr. Gary Ehman and Dr. Winnail. Mr. Ehman spoke about "The Mind That Was in Christ," and that "He Will Return." Dr. Winnail explained that we are training to be teachers in "Methods of Teaching," and reminded



us of the importance of God's law in "The Law, the Feast, and the Lessons of History." Festival Coordinator Mr. Glen Gilchrist asked "How Important Are We to God?" and encouraged the brethren to "Visualize the Kingdom of God." Mr. Darrell Lovelady spoke of "A Time of Restoration" and later "The Hope of Mankind" during his Last Great Day sermon. On the weekly



Sabbath, almost a dozen small children were blessed, and throughout the Feast three baptisms were performed.

Several nearby attractions to visit included a tour of

the Yaquina Head Lighthouse, the Oregon Coast Aquarium and Science Center, the Rogue Ales Micro-Brewery, and whale-watching cruises. There was a full calendar of scheduled activities to engage all generations. The youth had several socials before services, which were designed to meet peers of like mind. The younger children participated in a Millennium art project, which was on display during the Art and Talent Show. Over 25 children and their parents participated in a field day with activities such as roller-skating, indoor car racing, and relay races. Other highlights included a teen bowling activity, a seniors' luncheon, a square dance, and a family day barbeque. For many, the most exciting event was an elegant formal dinner-dance. The hall was transformed into an elegant ballroom where couples practiced the swing, the waltz and other dances. On the few free nights there was always a fellowship gathering where people could engage in lively conversations with their brethren.

Newport, not far from where the Philadelphian era of the Church of God was established, was truly a picturesque environment in which to celebrate the Feast and catch the vision of the coming Kingdom of God.

—Michael and Shana Jewsbury

Wisconsin Dells, WI

For the second year in a row, enthusiastic members made their way to Wisconsin Dells for the Feast of Tabernacles 2008. Our 377 brethren enjoyed an array of gorgeous fall colors and drifting leaves under clear and sunny skies, with moderate temperatures in the 50s throughout most of the Festival.

Mr. and Mrs. Lambert Greer joined us for the first half of the Feast, and Mr. and Mrs. Richard Ames arrived during the middle portion. Mr. Greer's message on the first Holy Day was on "Sojourners in This World." Later in the Feast, Mr. Ames gave a Sabbath sermon titled, "Visualize the Kingdom." Other sermon topics included, "Putting God First at the Feast," "Restoration of All Things," "The Light of the

Kingdom," "Transition and Transformation," "The Healing of the Nations" and "The Great White Throne Judgment."

Mr. Ames was the guest speaker to 115 seniors, ministers and their wives at the seniors' luncheon, where our teens contributed by serving the meal. The entertainment portion of the afternoon began with a piano duet played by sisters Jaclyn and Krista Hart, and was followed by a guitar and vocal solo performed by Mr. Tom Geiger. After the luncheon, the teens all walked down to Knucklehead's Bowling (where the singles had also reserved bowling lanes for that afternoon) for a couple of hours of fun and games.

On Sunday evening, a formal dinner and dance was held at the Glacier Canyon Lodge and Conference Center. The theme for the evening was, "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb." The room was adorned in white, with silver accents representing the fine linen, both clean and white, in which the bride of Christ will be arrayed at the Wedding Supper. Brethren enjoyed fine food, wine and dancing in an opulent atmosphere. Many had their formal photographs taken for a keepsake. The children enjoyed spending time together in the adjacent activity area where they played games, dined on children's fare and received prizes.

Other organized activities included: a family activity at Mount Olympus Water and Theme Park, a scramble golf tournament, and a Family Adventure at Pirates' Cove. Teens and singles enjoyed a catered meal between services on the first Holy Day, and children's activities were offered before services on most days. During these activity classes, the children learned about and made scrolls, crowns and treasure chests, and decorated a picture of a lion and lamb.

God's people truly rejoiced together and partook of the abundant physical and spiritual food at this Feast! We are very thankful for the blessings and protection God provided for all of us who came together to praise Him and keep His Feast!

—Joette Monson

New Braunfels, TX

Nestled in and among the Brazos, Guadalupe, and Comal Rivers, the city of New Braunfels provided a beautiful millennial setting for the Feast of Tabernacles 2008! Services were held in the newly expanded New Braunfels Convention and Civic Center, where 394 Feastgoers attended. Nearby lodging in condominiums, vacation homes, and motels afforded the brethren quick and easy access to the facility.

Feast messages concerning our ultimate destiny and the millennial rule of Jesus Christ were spiritually uplifting to all present. Guest speaker Mr. Davy Crockett gave sermons titled: "You are Chosen" and "God's Precious Jewels." Our final guest speaker, Evangelist Douglas S. Win-nail, gave sermons titled: "Preparing to Teach" and, "The Feast, The Law and Living History." Other sermon topics

were: “Chronicles of the Kingdom,” “The Foundation of God’s Kingdom,” “Make God’s Kingdom the Priority,” “God’s Work Today and Tomorrow,” and, “The Light of the Kingdom of God.”

In addition to the excellent messages, brethren experienced a variety of activities. The singles canoed and tubed



on the Guadalupe and Comal Rivers, enjoyed a mixer with pizza, and relaxed at Landa Park—grilling hotdogs and hamburgers on the banks of the Comal River. Pre-teens made plaques and decorations for the Last Great Day luncheon, and designed their own photo albums.

On a wonderful Family Day, held at the Rio Cibolo Ranch, most everyone enjoyed a hay wagon tour of the ranch during which the brethren were able to feed the buffalo and the famous Texas longhorn cattle that made the Chisholm Trail a legend in the old West. Special events included pony rides, a petting zoo and a variety of games. The meal for the day was slow-smoked beef brisket and mesquite-grilled chicken with all the trimmings! On Friday, the seniors enjoyed a delightful get-together, followed by a country sing-along led by Mr. Don Yale and Mrs. Brenda Stow. On Friday evening, the teens savored ice cream and fellowship before an insightful Bible Study by Mr. Davy Crockett on “Zion, City of Our God.”

On Saturday evening, the much-anticipated semi-formal Family Dance highlighted the Feast, featuring an elegantly decorated and delicious buffet dinner followed by music hosted by Feast DJs Deric and Jason Forrestier. Our Last Great Day luncheon, held between services, provided yet another opportunity for fellowship over a delicious buffet meal, and was truly unforgettable.

The New Braunfels Feast was indeed inspiring and memorable, with timely and meaningful messages highlighting the urgency and reality of God’s soon-coming Kingdom, and the vital role of God’s saints in the Kingdom. The staff who made up the Festival Team were exceptional! God’s spirit permeated the Feast with acts of service and cooperation, attentive audiences and love and consideration shown by all.

—Gary Stein

Branson, MO

Highlighted by tremendous sermons, loads of brotherly love, inspiring music and a dash of autumn colors, the Feast

of Tabernacles this year in Branson, Missouri was truly a glorious celebration of the world to come!

Almost 1,000 of God’s people gathered daily to attend services at the beautiful Presley’s Theater on the Branson strip. Our speakers started off powerfully with Mr. Richard Ames, who explained that we are pioneers of a New World, and that a time of transition and transformation is coming. Mr. Davy Crockett also spoke, explaining how we have been called to a very special purpose, and colorfully illustrating the characteristics and qualities we are to be developing.

On the day of the Blessing of Little Children, Mr. Rand Millich explained what the ministers pray about during that ceremony and how God uses parents as the means of transmitting the many blessings He intends for our children. Mr. Karl Beyersdorfer spoke on the scourge of global slavery, past and present, and reminded us all that God will one day proclaim liberty throughout the land, while Mr. Wallace Smith illustrated the “Character of the Kingdom,” using the words of Isaiah 9:6. Branson also hosted three “Early Bird” Bible Studies, a Singles Breakfast and Bible Study, and an inspiring Friday Night Bible Study, where Mr. Ray Clore painted a beautiful picture of what Jerusalem will be like in the New World.



Our Family Day activity at the Dixie Stampede was wildly successful, and many of our members even took part in the show! Other activities included several breakfasts and luncheons, a ropes course for our teens, and a Festival-long “putt-putt” tournament, rewarding teams that included a broad range of age groups.

By the Feast’s end, everyone seemed in agreement: with stunning messages, moving special music, fantastic fellowship and activities, and what many called the best “Behind the Work” film ever, God certainly rained down His blessings on the Feast in Branson!

—Ally Maddox and Wallace Smith

Sunset Beach, NC

Sea Trail Resort in picturesque Sunset Beach, North Carolina provided a brand new venue for the Feast of Tabernacles 2008. Located on the southern tip of North Carolina, Sunset Beach is just minutes from North Myrtle Beach. Comfortable weather enabled members of God’s Church to gather according to God’s command in Leviticus 23:34 and the brethren enjoyed a Feast of relaxation and reflection on God’s creation among the white sandy beaches and clear, calm waters. Evangelist Douglas Winnail, the first guest speaker, focused on

learning the lessons of God's law in history, and preparation and methods of teaching in the Kingdom. Festival Coordinator Rod McNair encouraged Feastgoers to rule over their emotions and learn servant leadership, not self-serving leadership. Assistant Coordinator Charles Ogwyn explained what a Christian's true identity is, and detailed the spiritual heritage of the Church. In other messages, young people were encouraged by Mr. Jack Lowe to develop a personal relationship with God, and Mr. Jim Meredith explained the difference between the way of war and the way of peace.

Singles at the Feast enjoyed taking part in a Sunset and Dolphin Cruise and a Planetarium activity. Teens gathered at



Ocean Isle Beach on the third day of the Feast to construct and participate in beach games with other teens. The Ice Cream Social and mixer on Friday evening provided teens an opportunity to fellowship

and develop long-lasting relationships. On day four of the Feast, the seniors enjoyed a luncheon featuring entertainment provided by the young children, and a surprise address from Dr. Roderick C. Meredith, who exhorted the seniors to carry on in their responsibilities to the Church and the Work. A Church Family Activity, and the Family Dinner and Dance topped off a week full of enjoyable fellowship and activities.

Arriving toward the end of the Feast, Evangelist Richard Ames focused on the subject of vision on the seventh day of the Feast. His Last Great Day message, on the "Hope of Mankind," encouraged us to be lights to the rest of the world, as we prepare for our destiny in God's Kingdom. Brethren were delighted to have the opportunity to hear from Dr. Meredith during the offertory message on the Last Great Day. In his extended offertory, Dr. Meredith gave a dynamic appeal to stay focused on supporting the Work, not only for the Gospel's sake, but for our own sake as well.

—Phillip Rorie and Rod McNair

Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

Beautiful Lethbridge, Alberta was the site of the 2008 Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great day for western Canada. An atmosphere of unity and love, along with inspiring messages by a variety of speakers including Evangelist Gerald Weston, and visiting ministers Gary Ehman, Arnold Lalum, and Philip Sena, set the stage for an exciting Feast. Other Feast highlights were the enjoyable dinner and dance at the El Rancho Hotel, and a

Family Day activity at the Evergreen Golf Center, which included mini golf, go karts and a three-hole golf course. A Hawaiian theme provided a delightful backdrop to the Seniors' Luncheon hosted by Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Lalum.



Feastgoers enjoyed the many restaurants in Lethbridge, along with popular attractions including Fort Whoop-Up on the Oldman River, which was used by Rum runners in the 19th century, and the beautiful Japanese Gardens. Visiting brethren came from as far as California, Montana, Texas, and Boston in the United States, and Ontario, Canada.

—Frank Best

Orford, Quebec, Canada

In Orford, Canada, God's loving presence was manifested in the warm and appreciative attitudes of His 225 children present, and the tremendously inspiring and positive messages delivered. Tangible joy, peace and harmony were felt throughout the Feast. Without a shadow of a doubt, the highlight of the Feast was the presentation of "Behind the Work 2008." The best ever! This year's film inspired so much enthusiasm among God's people, that some were crying during this powerful illustration of the Work of the Almighty God through the ages, up to our Work now.

God also blessed us with a beautiful and convenient location for services, which were held in a concert hall located in the forest of a national park, close to our housing facilities just minutes away.

Those who came to the Feast prompted by a strong desire to learn more about fearing God, went back home really uplifted, inspired, and much encouraged!

—Yvon Brochu



Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada

One hundred two friendly and enthusiastic brethren kept the Feast together in the beautiful Canadian maritime province of Prince Edward Island. The capital city of Charlottetown, centrally located on the south shore, has a population of about 32,000 and is distinguished as the birthplace of the nation. Lovely fall colors were ablaze in the strikingly gentle countryside. On the spiritual side, in-

spiring messages, ardent hymn singing and warm fellowship was the flavor for every day of services. Many expressed their appreciation for the encouragement they received through the many uplifting and informative messages.

Sightseeing, experiencing local cuisine and just fellowship over a meal with friends were highly enjoyable and popular activities. Pleasant weather, with temperatures slightly below normal did not detract from outdoor activities such as the “Amazing Millennial Race,” where several teams searched the downtown area in a treasure hunt for historical information and trivial items. This was followed by an ice cream social, and the hilarious “Are You Smarter than a Minister?” game. The Family Day activity was enjoyed by the young and the young at heart alike and was followed by bowling. The event was highlighted by “Crazy Olympics” team relay races, where the Repenters triumphed gloriously over the Gnostics, Heathens, Heretics, Pharisees and Sadducees. Children’s activities were held on two days, and consisted of Feast-related crafts, including special cards that were presented to the seniors. A movie night, an inspiring Bible Study, and a seniors’ luncheon rounded out the special activities.

—Dale Trenerry

Ocho Rios, Jamaica

The *Jewel of the Caribbean*, and the Sunset Jamaica Grande Resort in Ocho Rios, once again played host to God’s people for the Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day. Two hundred eighty-six people attended the Feast in Jamaica this year—a 30 percent increase over previous years. God’s people generously contributed to the festival atmosphere by powerfully singing with all their might, and serving each other through hearty, deep and spiritual fellowship. The warmth in fellowship among children, teens, young adults and everyone else, the powerful rejoicing, and highly generous offerings, all spoke to the deep dedication and focus of God’s people to His awesome truth and Work!

According to feedback from the brethren, sermons and sermonettes this year were clearer, more tangible, and even more powerful than in previous years. This feedback was especially inspiring since half of the speakers either spoke at the Feast for the first time, or gave a sermon at the Feast for the first time! God truly blessed the speaking and the hearing. Powerful themes running through the messages included: letting our lights shine powerfully to the world as Ambassadors for the Kingdom of God, preparation to be Kings and Priests, and working harder than ever to develop a closer and more trusting relationship with Jesus Christ and God the Father. The heartfelt special music added to the God-filled atmosphere of the Feast.

Highlights of the Feast included the Family Picnic, with local Jamaican cuisine prepared by the Jamaican brethren.

Almost everyone attended this fun-filled afternoon event, located in a beautiful state park in the jungle hills overlooking the sparkling Caribbean. The Night of Biblical Presentations, another annual Feast event, featured Bible-based skits performed by the Jamaican brethren along with a Bible Bowl that involved the entire group. The Talent Extravaganza featured nearly 20 performers, with a high level of quality and talent, and this very uplifting evening was attended by every Feast attendee.

God’s Feast in Ocho Rios was hosted by the very loving and giving Jamaican brethren and was accented by extremely warm and meaningful fellowship. Although most brethren were reluctant to leave the Feast, many expressed excitement about returning home to their “earthly embassies” (dwelling places of Ambassadors of God’s Kingdom), and to begin putting into practice the powerful admonitions gleaned at the Feast this year.

—Scott Winnail

Barbados

The tropical island of Barbados is located just north of the equator on the eastern rim of the Caribbean Ocean. It is the home of about 80 brethren who sponsor an active work of preaching the gospel in print and television on this small jewel of an island with temperatures comparable to those in south Florida in the summer. Services for the 130 attending here were held at the Barbados Beach Club.

The 50 transferees from the U.S., Canada, Trinidad and Ireland constantly mentioned the warmth of the Bajan brethren, and their joy in hosting the Festival visitors. That joy seemed to be expressed in the beautiful singing of the hymns during services, so that it was tempting to occasionally stop singing for a moment in order to listen to the harmonies of the combined voices. Sometimes it was a bit like being in a choir of 130 people.

Feastgoers enjoyed inspiring sermons from Mr. Bob League, Mr. Ron Poole and Mr. Dexter Wakefield, which focused on various aspects of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. After services, the Bajans made sure there were plenty of activities to occupy all the brethren. As in previous years, there was a bus tour of the island that acquainted the visitors with the island’s history and scenic beauty. Those on the tour could also visit the beautiful caverns of Harrison’s Cave. Back by popular demand was the Catamaran Cruise along the west side of the island to a spot well-known for its snorkeling and sea turtles. The Bajan’s also hosted a Family Day picnic at a local park where the visitors could try their hand at cricket, the national sport of Barbados.

The Barbados Beach Club has a beautiful beach with turquoise waters, windsurfing, jet skis and a “Hobi-Cat” to sail on. Some brethren took the opportunity to scuba dive

on nearby sunken shipwrecks with local dive-masters. If all that wasn't enough, Mr. Clyde Skeete, the local deacon, put on a Bajan Barbeque featuring delicious charcoal-grilled tuna steaks, barbequed chicken, steaks and hamburgers—all done Bajan-style.



The love of the Bajans was evident in that they spared no effort to make it a most memorable Feast for all.

—Dexter B. Wakefield

Georgetown, Guyana

The Feast of Tabernacles 2008 in Guyana was kept by 59 brethren at the Hotel Tower, Main Street, Georgetown. The sermons and sermonettes were very timely and well received, prompting many of the brethren to take copious notes, and encouraging uplifting conversations after services.

Following services on Wednesday, there was a picnic in the Georgetown Botanical Gardens. Many later enjoyed food and drink while watching the young people engaged in a game of cricket. Later that afternoon, everyone visited the zoo to view many indigenous animals, birds and fish. On Thursday, brethren boarded buses in Georgetown and headed for the Soesdyke/Linden Highway, where services were held at the beautiful Splashmin's Fun Park. After services, while some enjoyed the outdoor sports on land, others opted for water sports such as jet skiing, kayaking, and swimming. Later, most present enjoyed a boat ride to a farm situated on the opposite side of the lake, where we were able to pick and eat citrus and other fruit. We even enjoyed some sugarcane while touring the area and seeing some rabbits and Macaws, and later enjoyed table tennis, food and fellowship. On Saturday evening, everyone was invited to the Zoom-Inn Hotel for an evening of board games and snacks.

Services were held at 8:00 a.m. on Sunday, after which everyone boarded buses for a trip to Parika, a village on the Essequibo River. On the way we crossed the Demerara Harbour floating bridge, which is about a mile and a quarter long and spans the Demerara river. At Parika, we entered motor boats and traveled along the river for about three and a half hours to a village called Bartica. On arrival, we enjoyed some food and drink before taking a tour of the area. On the way back, we stopped at Fort Island, where we saw

three cannons used by the Dutch for defense against invaders during the 1700s. Continuing on our journey, we were able to see baboons swinging from trees along the bank of the river, and finally we returned safely to Georgetown, after a thoroughly enjoyable day of activity.

The Feast in Guyana was a very enjoyable and rewarding experience for all.

—Fitzroy Greeman

Evian, France

Colorful autumn leaves decorated the hillsides and floated down over the setting of the 2008 Feast of Tabernacles in Evian, France, providing a peaceful and extraordinarily beautiful location for the 160 attendees. Evian, with a population of 7,300, is located on the south shore of pristine Lake Geneva, and is the home of the natural Evian mineral water springs and spa. It was a favorite holiday destination of the former French President Mitterrand.

The 160 assembled brethren were a multilingual group. Sermons and sermonettes were translated into French, English, Spanish and German. While not all of the Feastgoers were able to communicate fluently with one another, there were still many friendly reciprocal greetings and expressions of joy in being together at God's Feast!

The Festival coordinator, Evangelist Dibar Apartian, set the tone for the Feast with inspiring sermons full of wisdom and good humor. Other speakers included Dr. Jeffrey Fall and Messrs. Stuart Wachowicz, Roland Lecocq and Vincent Larde. The edifying and encouraging messages focused on the soon-coming Kingdom of God and on the character that God wants to build within each of us as we prepare to enter His family.

The ordination of two French-speaking elders, Mr. Roland Lecocq of Switzerland and Mr. Vincent Larde of France, was a highlight of the Feast. This will be a great blessing to the European French-speaking Work of God!

Another highlight was the spiritual and family environment. Brethren stayed together in the resort, enjoying food and fellowship for three meals a day in the same dining area.



The French cuisine (including a large assortment of wines, cheeses and breads) kept everyone superbly well fed.

In this setting were numerous small, charming villages nestled in the surrounding hills of France and Switzerland.

Nearby were ancient castles and other points of interest, such as the magnificent tram ride offering spectacular views of Western Europe's highest peak, 15,000-ft. Mont Blanc, as well as the French, Swiss and Italian Alps.

Activities included a trip to the historic Gruyeres castle in Switzerland, shopping in the heart of Geneva, a family day activity and an excursion to the historic center of Geneva that included a visit to the "birthplace" of the Red Cross.

Evening activities included: an excellent talent show, a Friday night Bible Study, an outstanding cheese fondue with cultural explanations, a Jewish music concert and a dance.

The picturesque setting of Evian, along with exuberant spiritual family activities and the uplifting and edifying messages, made for an outstanding Feast experience.

—Jeffrey Fall

Llangollen, Wales, United Kingdom

Many of the Feast visitors to the pleasant town of Llangollen in the Dee Valley of North Wales spent a lot of time trying to pronounce the name! Two "l's" written together in



Welsh are pronounced almost like "chl" with a soft guttural sound so it sounds like Chlangochlen.

Not being able to pronounce the town name perfectly did nothing to dampen the joy of 150 of God's people as they met at the Bryn Howel Hotel, two miles out of town. Many of the American and Canadian visitors stayed at the hotel, which made for convenient access to the meeting hall.

As was to be expected, the highlights of the Feast were the messages delivered by Messrs. Meakin, Stafford, Shumway, Gosse and King. The sermonette speakers excelled themselves with practical, clear and encouraging messages. We heard about catching the vision of the Millennium; a shepherd's heart; learning to fear God; and were given a "virtual tour" of the transition from the Millennium to the Last Great Day.

Those who attended the medieval banquet at Ruthin Castle had a marvellous time, as minstrel singers and waitresses in period costume sang and served our people. There was even a mock investiture of "Sir" Winston Gosse as a "knight of the realm."

Other activities included a trip to Caernarfon Castle, a canal ride across a 19th century aqueduct and visits to numerous local shops and restaurants.

We also had two baptisms, with one Irish man being brought into God's Church 40 years after he received his first *Plain Truth*. The other was a young lady who has grown up in the Church in Mexico.

Many commented that they would like to return here in 2009 for another Feast of Tabernacles.

—Rod King

Kisii, Kenya

The 2008 Feast of Tabernacles was held for the first time in Kisii in the western highlands of Kenya near Lake Victoria. Ample rain and very fertile soil contribute to a wonderfully productive area of the country. The verdant hillsides are covered with a patchwork of small farms growing a variety of crops and supporting a few livestock. A group from Tanzania, as well as a few visitors from the United States and South Africa joined brethren from all over Kenya. All were conveniently housed at the Monarch Hotel and Conference Centre where services were also conducted. Approximately 135 attended of which over 40 percent were children.

Besides a few DVDs, messages were given by the Kenya Pastor, Mr. Simon Muthama, as well as the guest speaker, Mr. Pieter van der Byl, from South Africa. Translations were given in Swahili for a number who were not conversant in English. Seventeen senior citizens were treated to a luncheon at a local restaurant. The Family Day activity was a highlight for young and old. Our three visiting Americans contributed greatly to the success of the Family Day, helping with the games and also contributing some new equipment and refreshments. Highlights were soccer, Frisbee, volleyball and running games, with lots of enthu-



siastic cheering by all involved. All this activity took place in a hotel field in which a few perplexed cows were also grazing.

During the Feast some final baptismal counseling was given for scattered brethren, and this led to 13 new members being baptized on the last day of the Feast—to the joy of all the brethren present.

—Pieter van der Byl

Glentana, South Africa

This year's Festival in Glentana, South Africa, attended by 108 Feastgoers, was characterized by warm fellowship, good meals and, most important, spiritual edification.

Our guest speaker, Mr. Bill Whitaker and his wife visited the Cape after an absence of 25 years. They enjoyed seeing old friends and meeting new ones. Everybody agreed that Mr. Whitaker has retained his youthful energy, with powerful sermons and spontaneous mischief.

Early in the Feast, 42 senior citizens had their luncheon at a restaurant in the nearby village of Great Brak River. On the same day, 13 singles enjoyed a hike to a lovely waterfall, and a picnic along the river.

The Diaz Strand Waterworld provided an enjoyable activity for the youth, and the young at heart. Everybody who participated tested their courage by taking on high water slides and tubes.

The Family Day was almost marred by rain and cold weather, but it cleared up after services and families enjoyed all kinds of games, including volleyball, ring tennis and darts. For the very young, there was a jumping castle, and Winnie the Pooh even dropped by to share in Festival fun.

Combining fellowshiping with activities was a great way of seeing more of the area. Some brethren went for elephant and horse rides in a local nature reserve, game viewing on quad bikes and visits to the picturesque Knysna, a town surrounded by the Tsitsikamma Forest.

"Vision" was the theme that carried through most sermons and sermonettes. The magnificent setting of the Glentana site made it easy to catch that vision. Being close to nature, with daily dolphin and whale sightings along the beach and a meeting hall surrounded by indigenous trees, made the Feast truly millennial.

—Christo Botha

Maranding, Philippines

Maranding is a small community in the province of Lanao del Norte of Mindanao Islands and has been known as a Muslim rebel-affected area. This was not true during the Feast of Tabernacles, as God is the author of peace. The community is peaceful and cool during the evenings with cool winds coming from the palm trees and the surrounding green fields of the Feast site.

The local business community has fully expanded and increased the number of pension houses and inns within its vicinity. On-line banking institutions and direct dialing telephone system, internet cafés and supermarkets are now available in the community. It can be reached by plane from Manila thru Ozamiz City airport, and from there it will take only a one hour drive to reach Maranding.

At the beginning of the Feast, the brethren were warmly welcomed by the opening night message of Dr. Roderick Meredith which gave the real meaning of this godly journey to God's Kingdom. It was so inspiring to note that messages were all tailored for our needs and due for the season, and the exchange of ministers between the three Feast sites has brought a greater impact among the brethren.

All of the Feast activities were fully enjoyed by the brethren. The financial assistance that was received to make all these activities possible touched the hearts of the brethren and they would like to say "Thank You!" to those who helped in this way.

The opening and Last Great Day luncheons were loaded with delicious foods and delicacies, and were different from



that of the usual meals we served during Feast days. The brethren have been very grateful for those special occasions.

Young and old, and men and women fully enjoyed and participated in these eight days of activities. Great fellowship, and the renewing of acquaintances was wonderful, and we have already begun looking forward to the Feast Site 2009 in Cagayan de Oro City.

—Gideon Benitez

Don Carlos, Philippines

Cheerful brethren coming from San Fernando, Kiara and Mauswagon arrived at Don Carlos to keep the 2008 Feast of Tabernacles. One hundred and four happy brethren were able to attend. Everyone resided within 180 meters of the site, which made all the activities very convenient, even for the little children.

Mr. Freddie Benitez, the Festival Elder, encouraged everyone with his sermons: "Prepare to Rule," "Reason to Rejoice," "Entering the Kingdom" and "Path Less Traveled."

Mr. Felipe Casing and his family arrived from the Davao site and challenged us with his sermons: "The Joy of God's Government," "Kingship" and "The Love of Service."

Then Mr. Casing traveled to the Maranding Feast site, and Mr. Freddie Benitez set out to visit the brethren in Davao while Mr. Gideon Benitez and wife Rosanna arrived from Maranding for the remainder of the Feast. In his sermons he covered "Spiritual Instinct" and further aspects of "Kingship."

The Family Day on Friday afternoon was held at Luanluan Spring Resort. Everyone enjoying the swimming, and in the evening there was a Bible Quiz. The following evening was a seniors and couples night where parlour games were



held and three of the Church members were honored as the oldest members of the Church, namely: Mrs. Pastora Umadlao, Mrs. Fabiana Redoble and Mrs. Pablita Catamco. The rainy nights made the road muddy, but brethren were energized to attend by God's love and guidance.

The Feast ended with us having "full" stomachs and being "filled" spiritually with God's nourishing food from His word.

—Freddie Benitez

Malacca, Malaysia

The Feast of Tabernacles 2008 in Malaysia was held at the Avillion Legacy Hotel in the historic city of Malacca. Seventy-three locals and five visitors from abroad assembled to observe the last two annual festivals of God. This year, we were privileged to meet three visiting youngsters from Sri Lanka and a couple from New Zealand.

Many commented on the quality of the spiritual meat provided to the brethren. A special treat this year was the group discussion held on the weekly Sabbath, where five groups of people were given topics touching on many aspects of the Feast. Mr. Moses gave an overall evaluation after each group presented its views.

This year also saw new faces in the form of duets presenting special music during services, in addition to the power-packed performances of the Festival Choir. A children's choir was also assembled.

Three combined luncheons were organized this year. At other times, members were seen at numerous eating outlets around the hotel and in town, rejoicing according to the commandment over a satisfying meal and the company of like-minded people.

Two baptisms were conducted during the Feast this year. The membership of the Church here is slowly but surely growing.

Numerous activities were held to cater to the various age groups. While the little ones were kept amused and entertained in children's games, the youth found satisfaction at the

bowling alley. The beach outing brought the brethren together for wholesome fun and relaxation. The highlight of the activities was the traditional fun show, which saw the children and youth of the membership showcasing their many gifts and skills to keep the audience mesmerized. There were a couple of solos and even a duet interspersed among the comical sketches that were presented. Admittedly, there is currently no lack of talent in the Church! Other activities included a speech club, and a marriage seminar conducted by Mr. Moses.

The hallmark of the Festival was the intense and heartfelt fellowship of the brethren. There was not a day when groups of Church members were not seen together engrossed in a casual or in-depth discussion of some sort. Many seemed to sense the seriousness of the times we live in and all are looking forward to the establishment of the Kingdom of God here on earth. May our Father in heaven hasten that day.

—John Soosay

Hikkaduwa, Sri Lanka

Peace. Beauty. Joy. Those three words describe the coming Kingdom of God and Feastgoers in Sri Lanka had a fore-



taste of that at the Amaya Reef Resort in Hikkaduwa at the southern end of the Gold Coast along the western seaboard. Located just north of the UNESCO World Heritage site of Galle and 99 kilometers from Colombo, it was idyllic, with golden sands, rolling white surf, warm blue sea and feathery green coconut palms.

Mr. Zig Svalbe, elder from Melbourne, Australia, was the minister in attendance along with his wife, Jennifer, and one visitor from the Melbourne congregation, Deanna Firth. Notable activities were the "Family Day" of fun and frolic which was hugely enjoyed by children, young adults and adults alike, and the Senior Citizens' luncheon at which the young 'uns got an opportunity to minister to the old folks. That evening there was a fully interactive Leadership Class—an important step in preparing members for their future responsibilities. Qualities that were highlighted were humility, teachability, obedience to Church government, zeal, focus, love for the brethren, mercy and kindness.

Saturday evening was the "Family Dance," and was good fun with competitions and some fantastic dancing. On Sunday evening the Talent Show provided an opportunity for mem-

bers to display their versatility in song, dance, music, and drama that had everybody participating in one way or another. The talent show got off to a scintillating start with six girls dancing to a lilting tune. A song by the little 'uns—"Uncle John Comes from Jamaica"—was heart-warming. This was followed



by a violin recital of two items. A dramatization of a parable of Jesus in modern garb nearly brought the house down and there was hardly a dry eye in the audience! The song: "Don't worry, be happy" by a quartet of men had everybody in stitches. Two poems, "Summer Days," and "Trees" composed and recited by Deanna Firth, a dramatization of the "Carpenter's Work Song" and a skit by the ladies were the highlights of a wonderful evening's entertainment—short and utterly sweet.

All of the messages given emphasized the coming Kingdom, our preparedness, and important facets like the crucial role of the family. These were powerful, inspiring, educational and stirring, as this little flock prepares itself for that future which promises peace, joy, and beauty wrapped in a cocoon of love.

—John B. Muller

Albany, Western Australia, Australia

The beautiful historical township of Albany, nestled in the southern corner of Western Australia, was one of two sites where God chose to place His name for the Feast of Tabernacles this year in Australia. Sixty brethren were in attendance with the majority of those coming from Perth, and others coming from South Australia and Victoria, to visit this largest of all the Australian states.

We were incredibly blessed to receive powerful and encouraging messages from the Regional Director in the Australasian area, Mr. Bruce Tyler, and our local Perth Associate Pastor, Mr. Mal Jennings. Two sermons in particular were "meat in due season." One given by Mr. Tyler regarding our marriage to Christ was very interesting—showing how we, as the bride, need to be ready for Christ's return. Mr. Jennings spoke on how we need to hold fast to our Crown, and never give up. Both these sermons complemented the messages from Dr. Meredith and the theme of focusing on the "big picture."

The highlight activity of the Feast was the incredible Tree Top Walk, located 54 minutes from Albany. Many of

the brethren mentioned that the drive there consisted of spectacular millennial views. God blessed us with fine weather—the heavy rain stopping just in time for us to enjoy the 40-meter-high walkway through the tops of the beautiful Tingle trees. Much fun and many laughs were had at the organized Talent Show and Games evening. For the first part of the evening, a few of the brethren put together an entertaining show of musical and talented acts—emceed by Mr. Steven McKenzie. This was followed by a selection of enjoyable games that kept everyone on their toes.

Old friendships were rekindled and new ones made, as is usually the case at the Feast. God's Spirit was evident in the friendly fellowship and willing service of the brethren. Albany 2008 truly was a Feast that will not be forgotten.

—Steve and Kate McKenzie

The Entrance, New South Wales, Australia

For a third year God placed his name in The Entrance, a picturesque seaside town overlooking the Pacific ocean and located about an hour north of the New South Wales capital of Sydney. This year approximately 170 excited and



enthusiastic brethren from around Australia kept God's Festival at the Forrester's Beach Resort, about five minutes out of town. We also had a number of international visitors join us from Singapore, New Zealand and the United States.

From the beginning it was plain to see the warmth and excitement exuded by God's people, as old friends caught up and new bonds of friendship were forged. It was also truly gratifying to see a number of brand new members attending their very first Feast of Tabernacles.

Apart from being well fed physically, there was also an abundance of fine spiritual food provided by the ministry throughout the Festival. The brethren received wonderful teaching and admonition from the Festival Elder, Mr. Michael Gill, the Festival Coordinator, Mr. Robert Tyler and for the latter part of the Festival from Mr. Ben Whitfield, pastor of the Wyoming, Utah and Colorado areas in the U.S. Subjects covered included "Picturing the Kingdom of God," "True Vision," "Peace in Our Time," "God's True Church," "Are You Thankful?," "Obedience and Blessing," "Through Obedience and Faith We Enter God's Rest" and, "Our Job in the White Throne Judgment Period." All of the brethren were thrilled to view the "Behind

the Work” video which was truly uplifting, inspiring and informative.

Many social activities were conducted, including a seniors’ lawn bowling afternoon, a singles’ get-together, a family barbeque and fun day, an ice skating afternoon and a movie evening. Besides these organized activities brethren took many opportunities for fellowship in the local restaurants and in their private accommodations.

For the majority of the Festival we were blessed with clear sunny skies and warm days, punctuated towards the end by some powerful thunderstorms which rolled through late in the afternoons. Incredibly, the day after the Festival was over the area experienced its coldest day in 45 years accompanied by gusty winds and heavy rain!

Everyone left this year’s Festival on a high with their spiritual batteries recharged and full of excitement and anticipation at once again planning and preparing for next year, when we can again be reminded of God’s awesome plan and purpose for mankind and tomorrow’s world.

—Michael Tyler and Ian West

Batu, Indonesia

This year’s Festival was different from previous years, since we were keeping the Festival in the city of Batu. Geographically, the city lies on much higher elevated ground (680 to 1,200 meters above sea level) than the city of Tumpang where we kept the Festival in previous years. Often, Batu City is called the Switzerland of East Java because it is surrounded by mountains and panoramic resorts of waterfalls, fruit gardens, and theme parks. The climate is cool and fresh, especially in the morning and evening, so it is good for the children, who can enjoy the freshness of mountain air.

There were 20 of us; 16 adults and four children keeping the Festival this year. We stayed in one of the villas right down the slope of one of the mountains, so almost every day we enjoyed the beauty of the mountain, and the wonderful city lights down below during the night.

During eight days the brethren were fed with daily sermons, three Bible Studies about biblical health laws and nutrition, the travels of the apostles, and other exciting activities like Bible games, a talent show and sport and games. Besides watching Festival films from previous years, the brethren also watched a film about Nazi Germany and what they did to the Jews. It was indeed a very informative film that described what may happen in the years just ahead, before the wonderful World Tomorrow.

The Feast fever is still here, and we are hoping that the Kingdom will come soon so that we can be all together forever, which we get a foretaste of during the Feast.

—Arius Nusantara

Taupo, New Zealand

Eighty Kiwis were joined by visitors from the U.S., Australia and Ireland in celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles in Taupo. The Festival occurs in the spring in the Southern Hemisphere, and the fields and forests are flooded with fresh green growth.

Feastgoers were challenged to meet and fellowship with all the brethren present. To add interest, there were a dozen “mystery Feastgoers” to find. These included, for example, a man who finished ninth in the New York marathon and another who served for eight years as a paratrooper in the U.S. Army (both New Zealanders). This search allowed easy entree to many enjoyable conversations.

Each service was enhanced with a noteworthy delight—special music contributed by talented singers and musicians who had prepared a range of items to honor God and to teach His truth.

Three visiting ministers preached timely, uplifting messages. Mr. Ben Whitfield traced the Feast through the ages and showed that our observance prefigures what God has eagerly anticipated since creation. In another sermon he warned us of the coming antichrist and how we could avoid being swept up into religious confusion that will strongly prevail before Christ’s return. Mr. Henry Cooper from Ireland emphasized that mankind’s ways have failed and that we are training to bring “another way, another approach” to world government in God’s Kingdom. He also reviewed the past history, troubled present and glorious future of Jerusalem. Mr. Dan Love of Australia showed that we are now preparing the spiritual temple to which Christ will return and that we must, unlike many today, take personal responsibility for how we live our lives.

The Taupo site is situated in beautiful surroundings with many opportunities to enjoy God’s creation. Many Feastgoers spent an afternoon at Wai-o-Tapu thermal reserve, where they could view sparkling silica terraces, strikingly colored pools, bubbling mud pools and sizzling hot springs. Young people enjoyed a challenging evening at an indoor wall climb where they tested nerves and muscles, while Seniors cruised the Waikato River and thrilled as they crossed the roiling waters below the Huka Falls. Other Feastgoers were able to visit a lion park, snowboard, fish for trout, tour a sobering military museum, climb a local mountain and generally enjoy each other’s company.

How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to come together before God, to learn more of His truth and practice living His ways in harmony.

—Kinnear Penman



Wewak, Papua New Guinea

Fifty-nine Feastgoers attended a very enjoyable Feast of Tabernacles in Wewak on the northern shores of Papua New Guinea. The weather was perfect even though we were in the monsoon season of rainy days and nights. God was kind to us.

We had two new families attending the Feast this year with us, and some former Church members also requested to be in attendance. There was some interest shown by the public in regard to our keeping the Feast in this town. A number enquired about the Festivals and other Biblical topics.

One of the many highlights of the Feast was the baptism of two new members into God's family. We learned many new Church hymns and had Bible discussions after the services all throughout the Feast days. The social activities were enjoyable and all members left the Feast looking forward to being back again next year.

The brethren commented that this Feast was truly inspiring and enjoyable because they learned new things from the messages given from the Church's DVD sermons and the "Behind the Work" film. We pray that the Feast next year will be even more inspiring.

—Peter Devis

Huatusco, México

The Eternal gave us a beautiful site in Huatusco, Mexico to celebrate the 2008 Feast of Tabernacles. Huatusco, which has a good climate, is situated on the side of a mountain. During these eight days we heard many inspiring sermons and sermonettes. A special treat was the children's choir.

Among the 122 in attendance were brethren from the United States who helped to translate the sermons. Family activities during the Feast included: a Children's Fiesta, rafting for the youth, a Mexican Night (where Mr. Antonio Mora demonstrated his ability to dance the tapatio, a typical Mexican folk dance), a ladies breakfast, a karaoke bonfire; a biblical marathon, and a trip to the Veracruz Harbor. We are thankful to God for the physical and spiritual abundance we enjoyed together, and look forward to preparing for next year's Feast!

—Gabriel Ortega

Carlaca Quindio, Colombia

One hundred ten of God's children arrived at the Karlaka Hotel in Carlaca Quindio, Columbia to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day. This site is in the heart of the Colombian coffee plantations, and has lush green mountains, fresh air, and pleasant temperatures. Living Church of God members from the United States, Puerto Rico, Switzerland, Venezuela, Bolivia and Colombia rejoiced

in the presence of the Eternal and His Son Jesus Christ during these eight days, and enjoyed unforgettable fellowship. We heard inspired sermons and sermonettes, along with special music by the Church's Youth. Among the fellowship activities were visits to the Coffee Park, Butterfly Farm, a couple of talent nights, and opportunities for dancing, singing and poetry. Our days were filled with great physical and spiritual blessings from our Heavenly Father!

—Edgar Guerra

Panajachel, Guatemala

God chose the marvelous site of Panajachel for the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Last Great Day in Guatemala. The site is located in front of Lake Atitlan, which has been nominated as one of the seven wonders of Creation. The lake, which is surrounded by volcanoes, has one of the most beautiful landscapes on earth, and our days had pleasant temperatures with a nice breeze during the night.

In Central America, October is normally a month with non-stop rainfall and this year was no exception. Hurricanes and excessive rainfall caused great damage and affected roads near the site, and the Interamerican Road was closed several times because of the mudslides. On opening night we prayed to God to give us good weather. God heard our prayers, by giving us a window of good weather just on the Feast site itself, while the surrounding regions had constant rainfall. Thanks to this, outdoor activities were possible without any setback!

Worth mentioning is that during the day of a planned activity by the lake, it rained constantly throughout the services. We waited for God's intervention, which came precisely during the closing prayer, when the rain suddenly stopped and the sun came out. We were then able to enjoy a wonderful afternoon by the lake, along with a lunch at the hotel located by the river side. From there, we traveled up the mountain and arrived at the town of Santa Cruz, where the Perez Ralda family live.

Sixty-three brethren from Guatemala, Costa Rica and California were in attendance, and as we said good-bye we were very thankful to our Father and His Son Jesus Christ for giving us a most profitable Feast!

—Sergio Roca and George Schaubeck

Tobago

Seventy-five brethren, including 11 from overseas, enjoyed a most memorable Feast in the beautiful Caribbean island of Tobago. Trim's Meeting Hall in Crown Point, where services were held, is at the centre of numerous hotels, guesthouses and restaurants, and within walking distance of some of the most beautiful beaches. It was spacious, comfortable and beautifully decorated.

Services were well coordinated and ran smoothly. The choir performed well and special music was at its best. From the very first evening of the Feast, the atmosphere was per-



meated by a spirit of enthusiasm and humble service that only increased as the Feast drew on. All the brethren came together with zeal and an excitement that was wonderful to behold.

Feast activities included a Children's and Youth picnic, a dinner and dance, and a Family Fun Day. Excellent weather along with activities that were well spread out, provided an opportunity for brethren to plan their own activities as well.

The Children's/Youth activity at historic Fort Bennett was a fun-filled adventure. The coordinator did a remarkable job of defining the activity and involving both the youth and the younger children. Well-stocked party bags, treats and lots of unique and well-planned games for all, including a very exciting treasure hunt, resulted in the adults partaking with equal excitement.

This was followed by the Hawaiian-themed "Aloha" Dinner and Dance, where the dress, décor and dinner were each elaborately yet appropriately reflective of the colorful culture of this Pacific paradise. The meeting hall was transformed into a wonderland of color, intermingled with all the decorative elements that allowed for tasteful authenticity (no grass skirts or surf boards were allowed however). With flavorful food, melodious music, dynamic dancing and amazing ambience, this Hawaiian evening was a definite highlight for many.

The Family Day at Canoe Bay was as much fun as ever. Brethren played, romped, swam and just had a wonderful time. Other impromptu events such as the highly enjoyable Talent Show, and a Sabbath afternoon activity of Bible-based board games, only added to each day's enjoyment. The unscheduled Talent Show provided much laughter and bonding.

Everything ran smoothly and our heavenly Father truly protected His people. The overseas brethren were made to feel very welcome and as one said, "This place is a paradise. Why didn't I visit this Feast site before?" We truly had a foretaste of the Millennium.

—by Fitzroy Greeman

Orap, Vanuatu

God's Feast of Tabernacles was observed in Vanuatu by 61 brethren who gathered near the village of Orap, on the island of Malakula. The warm tropical weather with the ocean breeze and light rain made it very easy to enjoy the millennial setting. Throughout the Feast a family atmosphere was very evident with plenty of laughter, singing, and joyous celebration. The local brethren exhibited a fine example of Christian love through their friendliness, hospitality and the willingness to serve one another. Vanuatu members were joined this year by visitors from overseas—the Molnar family from Canada.

In preparing for the Feast of Tabernacles ("Lafet Ol Wansaed Haos" in Bislama) the local brethren built temporary dwellings to accommodate their families using materials from the jungle—boughs, leaves and vines. Overseas visitors were accommodated in sturdier huts built for that purpose.

Meals were eaten together in the shade of a roofed dining area. The plentiful food showcased the agricultural abundance of the island and was prepared in the local traditional style.

Services were conducted in a mix of French, English, and Bislama (the official language of Vanuatu), reflecting the rich cultural heritage of the country. Messages were inspiring and focused on preparing for the Kingdom of God and Tomorrow's World. Sermons presented by Mr. Jerry Sam and Mr. Gary Molnar covered topics such as "Relying on God" and "How Real is the Kingdom of God to You?" Local men delivered sermonettes, and DVDs from Headquarters completed the biblical instruction.



Group activities included a relaxing picnic at the beach, which was enjoyed by all. The highlights of the Feast were the Island Night and Music/Fun Nights which gave everyone a chance to listen to music, sing, dance and enjoy Christian fellowship.

Local members especially enjoyed having international Feastgoers in attendance with them and look forward to sharing the Feast with other guests in future years.

—Gary Molnar

Abraham and Isaac:

Would You Do What Abraham Did?

By Dexter B. Wakefield

“**B**y faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son” (Hebrews 11:17).

Do you remember the dramatic account of this incident in Genesis 22:1–19? God told Abraham to take his son Isaac up to a certain mountain—and there to make of him a sacrifice and burnt offering—just as one would offer a lamb. But God was not asking for the sacrifice of a young animal from Abraham’s flock; He was asking for Abraham’s son—his only son of promise!

How did Abraham respond? He obeyed the voice of God, and only at the last moment did God spare Isaac’s life, stopping his father from completing the act of sacrifice.

Over the years, countless theologians, ministers and believers have agonized over the meaning of this incident. At first glance, it may look more like an example of blind, unreasoning action than like an example of faith. Why would God have told Abraham to perform such a seemingly horrible act?

Understanding Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac will teach us about faith and obedience, and can lift from us the heavy burden of doubt regarding what we would do—and of what God would have us do, and why.

To begin our study, we need to understand the background and context of the event, so we can understand Abraham’s faith and action. First, we should remember that there are *conditional* and *unconditional* promises. If you promise to do something conditionally, you are only required to do it if the other party fulfills the condition that was set. However, once the condition has been met, you must perform your promise unconditionally. In a conditional promise,

there is often an “if” and “then” stated or implied in the promise.

Conditional and Unconditional Promises

God made a *conditional* promise to Abram: “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am Almighty God; [if you] walk before Me and be blameless. And [then] I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly’” (Genesis 17:1–2).

Later, because of Abraham’s obedience, God made him a promise *without conditions*. “In Isaac your seed shall be called.” If God was going to give Abraham “exceedingly” many offspring, they would have to come through Isaac. God had specified Isaac as the heir of the Covenant blessings of Abraham, and given Ishmael a different promise (Genesis 21:12–13). Abraham had no other children at that time.

Then, God tested Abraham. You can read the full account in Genesis 22:1–19. The Apostle Paul explained the meaning of the test. “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense” (Hebrews 11:17–19).

If Isaac had been killed and remained dead in the grave, the promises could not have been fulfilled. But Abraham believed God—he had faith *about the promises*. So, Abraham knew that—no matter what God was asking him to do—it would not result in God breaking any of His promises. Abraham knew that God had promised that “in

Isaac your seed shall be called,” so he knew that, somehow, Isaac would have to be spared, protected, resurrected or in some way made able to survive to fulfill God’s promise. Indeed, even though Isaac’s ordeal was an antitype of Christ’s sacrifice, he survived and was in a figurative sense “resurrected” to his father Abraham, as the true type of Christ that he was (v. 19).

So, we can see that Abraham’s obedience was not blind. He believed God, and *acted* on that belief. In an important sense, members of God’s Church do that every time we keep the Sabbath. We cannot perform a scientific test to determine which day of the week is to be kept holy; we only know the day because God in His word tells us that it is the seventh day. We believe Him, and by ceasing our labors act on His commandment. In doing so, we are greatly blessed. “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (James 2:17–18). Abraham’s faith was counted for righteousness—as is ours—and we see that he displayed a *living, active faith*. Abraham obeyed God *because* of his faith. Like Abraham, we need a living, active faith.

Abraham’s faith and obedience did not suddenly appear from nowhere. He had developed his relationship with God, and he chose to obey because of his experience in that deep and real relationship. “And the scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called *the friend of God*” (James 2:23). Abraham knew God’s power; he had seen what He did to Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham also experienced God’s faithfulness by seeing Sarah become pregnant

in her old age, just as God had promised. He knew that God *could and would* do what He said.

People, particularly atheists trying to justify their position, sometimes mistakenly define faith as “belief without evidence.” Abraham’s faith was “belief based on evidence”—as is ours. So there is no conflict between Abraham’s faith and his obedience. Abraham obeyed *because* of his faith in what God had promised.

Why God’s Command?

Why did God command Abraham to sacrifice Isaac? Paul explained to the brethren in Corinth, “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). God told Abraham to act out a type of an event that would be fulfilled centuries later—the sacrifice of Christ.

Christ is “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8), and God’s plan for mankind existed long before this event at Mt. Moriah. But through this event, God’s plan of salvation would be *put into operation*, and through it all the world would be blessed. God’s promise became unconditional. So this historical account in the Old Testament is filled with meaning for the New Testament Church.

Looking in detail at Genesis 22 can help us better understand what God was doing. “Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to *the land of Moriah*, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you’ (Genesis 22:1–2).

Scripture goes on to describe the event unfolding. “So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and

he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and *we will come back to you*’” (Genesis 22:3–5).

Notice that Abraham said, “*We will come back to you.*” This means he knew that both he and Isaac would return to the two servants who had accompanied them.

Isaac, as a type of Christ, carried the wood of his sacrifice up the mountain, just as Jesus did centuries later. Like Christ, He had faith in God and trust in his father, but unlike Christ he did not yet know the details of what was to occur. “So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, ‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ Then he said, ‘Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’ And Abraham said, ‘My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering’” (vv. 6–8).

Indeed, God provided a ram for offering in Isaac’s stead, though it would be centuries later when He provided the true fulfillment by offering the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

Abraham built an altar and placed the wood, then bound Isaac on the wood. In doing so, the picturing of Jesus on His wooden “sacrificial altar” was complete. “And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ So he said, ‘Here I am.’ And He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.’ Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was

a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son” (vv. 10–13).

God then made the promise unconditional. “Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: ‘By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son... *In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed*, because you have obeyed My voice’” (vv. 15–16, 18).

How great was this promise? Describing His love of the unity of His family, God said, “It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; *for there the LORD commanded the blessing—life forevermore*” (Psalm 133:3). Truly, through His command to Abraham, God pictured the progress of the plan of salvation up through the death and resurrection of Jesus, our Passover, the Lamb of God.

Lessons We Can Learn

Abraham chose to obey because of his faith, and his belief in what God promised. By ourselves, we do not always choose what God would choose—we must strive to obey His will instead of our own in order to make the right choices. God converts us inwardly, and as we are converted, our will—our power to choose—becomes more and more like His.

This is one reason why God’s word warns of the dangers of personal willfulness. People can be tempted to develop an attitude of fault-finding and criticism, because such an attitude helps justify willfulness. Willfulness is simply a matter of preferring one’s own will—one’s own choices—rather than God’s. Faith, by contrast, leads us toward obeying God’s righteous instructions—and obeying means that we subordinate our will to His. As our relationship with God grows, so does

our obedience to Him—and so does our faith in what He says.

By believing and acting—by showing living faith—Abraham became the father of the faithful. Scripture shows us that, like Abraham, each of us must both believe *and* act. We are doing this when we obey God, overcome sin and grow in the stature of Christ. Abraham obeyed God, and Isaac obeyed his father, just as Jesus did. If we are to be children of God, we too must obey our Heavenly Father. To do so requires *living faith*.

Paul instructed the Galatians: “Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’ So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.... For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:7–9, 26–29).

That promise, as we saw above, is “*Life forevermore*.”

Question the Question

In the beginning, we posed the question, “If God asked *you* to kill *your* child like He did Abraham, would you do so?” Some in God’s Church, wanting to be completely faithful, have agonized over that question.

We should always be careful about tempting ourselves by posing hypothetical questions. Consider that Satan may want you, in effect, to tempt yourself (and to doubt God as well as your own faithfulness) by asking yourself what you would do in that impossible

situation. Remember, when God says that something *will* happen, it is *not possible* for it not to happen. God made unconditional promises to Abraham that included “life forevermore” for His children. There was no possibility that this would not occur—and Abraham recognized this!

When we are confronted with a gnarly seemingly-impossible-to-answer question, what is a good response? We should question the question! Is it *possible* that God would ask you to sacrifice a child as He asked Abraham? *Biblically, we can see that the answer is: “No!”* Still, some might reason, “Well, God can ask anything He wants.” However, according to His own word, He would never do that. Remember, the promises began with Abraham, as we know from Genesis 12. The gospel was preached from the foundation of the world, but the plan of salvation was *put into action* with Abraham. There are not two plans of salvation.

Through their actions, Abraham and Isaac pictured Jesus Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection. God arranged the whole event for that purpose. Abraham knew that God had said, “In Isaac shall your seed be called,” as Paul explained in Hebrews 11. He knew there was no possibility that Isaac would not somehow live on, because he knew and believed God’s promise, and trusted in His plan.

Abraham’s consent to sacrificing Isaac was a one-time event that God arranged for a specific reason—and *it is now a done deal!* The conditional promises became *unconditional*. Furthermore, since then, Christ has died and has been resurrected.

As a side note, it is vital that we fully understand that we should not listen to just any “voice” that claims to be from God, or that tells us to do something contrary to His Law—such as killing someone. So how was the example of Abraham entirely different in that way?

Abraham believed the voice of God because he had *personally heard that same voice*—experienced that same personality—many times! For Abraham genuinely “knew” God and had walked and talked with God in the person of Jesus Christ, the “Rock” of the Old Testament (1 Corinthians 10:4) in a way *none* of us ever has. When told to sacrifice His son by One he genuinely *knew* as the Creator of the universe, Abraham did not wonder whether this was God’s voice speaking to him. For that same Supreme Being had *already* spoken to Abraham and had interacted with Abraham many times in a way that you and I have never experienced. Therefore, Abraham’s experience was *entirely different* from a mentally unstable person just obeying a “voice” speaking to him or her to do something terrible.

Unless you think that God is going to abandon His promises and the plan of salvation that He put into motion long ago—and reinstitute a whole new plan around *you*—then, according to God’s word, there is no possibility that God will ask you to do what He asked Abraham to do. So, if we ask, “What would we do if God asked us to do what Abraham did?”, we can answer clearly: “*It’s a specious question. God wouldn’t ask this of us!*” We save ourselves a lot of difficulty if we understand God’s word—and take Him at His word!

Abraham’s faith led him to obedience in making a very difficult choice. He believed—for good reason—what God had told him about Isaac, and he acted on that belief. Abraham was willing to subordinate his will to God’s, and we can be grateful that he did!

We need to believe what God has said. We need to *believe* who He is, what He is doing, what He says is right and wrong and what action we need to take. Then we must *act* on it—submitting our will to God’s. Like Abraham, all God’s children need *living faith!* ■

There Is More Work to Do!*(Continued from page 2)*

Mr. McNair who did, in fact, remain faithful to the true commandments of God—*honoring* God and honoring Mr. Armstrong in his own way until the end of his life. Mr. McNair certainly did that. And I pray that God will have mercy on his family and loved ones, and help all of us to remember and honor what Christ did through him for so many years.

I hope that *all* of us will genuinely commit ourselves with increasing *zeal* to the cause of Christ, as we see the tremendous prophetic events occurring all around us. With our American financial system *coming apart*, the Europeans are continually talking about the need for Europe to “take the lead” more than ever before! The Europeans are *turning away* from America’s leadership—and so is much of the rest of the world. America’s recent elections show that its people are choosing the “liberal” way of life, and that the nation is increasingly approving of abortion and homosexuality, and condoning the lack of individual responsibility in personal finances and other areas of daily life. We see that China is increasing in power and beginning to replace the U.S. as the leader in the Western Pacific. We see that the nations of Central and South America are turning away from the U.S. more and more, and are ripe for a takeover from the coming “Beast” Power that is beginning to rise in Europe. We see that the British people, like the Americans, are increasingly choosing the path of liberalism and moral degradation. Britain is being “absorbed” by the European Power—yet we can expect that its people will at some point either *rebel* and leave, or be “pushed out” from that growing centralized European power under Roman Catholic leadership.

Our Father in Heaven is **not pleased**. As a result, He will definitely bring upon us the loving chastisement that He describes over and over in the end-time prophecies about the “House of Israel.” *All of us*—Israelite, Jew or Gentile—need to realize this. For, within God’s Church, we are neither Jew nor Gentile, bond or free, but we are **all** “spiritual Israel” and are members of the household of God! We need to deeply love one another and *serve one another*. We must work together to help each of our brethren to prepare for the time when we will be neither male nor female, neither black or white, but **Spirit-born** sons of God in the very family of God—assisting Christ in **ruling** this earth and bringing about a genuine degree of *peace* and prosperity that has never before been experienced by the world as a whole!

President-elect Barack Obama does not understand or share our spiritual goals, and neither does Senator John McCain. But we should *pray fervently* for Mr. Obama in the

office of President of the United States! We should ask God to guide him and lead him according to His will—and to direct him to preserve peace and order so that we may worship God in honesty and godliness and without fear! Remember the Apostle Paul’s inspired instruction, “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Timothy 2:1–2).

So, let us all *pray* for the new President of the United States—and for *all* in authority. And let us *pray* for one another and do everything we can to genuinely *give ourselves* to God to be used in His service in preparing for the **only** genuine solution to this world’s problems. For President Obama cannot—nor could a President McCain—bring about the kind of change that only **God** can bring through Jesus Christ and the coming Kingdom of God that will be set up under Him in a *very few years*! Let us be *stirred* by this realization, and by the responsibility we will soon have in serving under Christ in the genuine **government** of God to be set up on this earth, based on the revealed Truth and on the *laws of God*. **This** soon-coming government will be able to bring about the genuine peace and prosperity and **joy** for which the entire world longs—and which it will experience after Christ returns as King of kings.

Brethren, as this Work grows in power, as we *reach out* to other nations and some of us are even brought to testify before kings and rulers, as the Beast Power in Europe finally coalesces, as the King of the South arises—and as our own nations, sadly, continue to come apart *because of our sins*—you and I need to be *awed* and *thrilled* to be part of the **only solution** that will ultimately come about. For Christ *really is coming soon*. As you watch world events unfold before your eyes, this should become increasingly clear. It should also be evident that **if** we genuinely believe in God and His word, we should do all we can to “lay up treasure” in heaven, by fervently **doing our part** in the Work the Father is doing to prepare the way for His Son’s return to this earth. So, let each of us give our lives as “living sacrifices” in Christ’s service, and recognize that we are, in fact, part of the final “crusade” to *prepare the way* for the ultimate solution to mankind’s problems.

With Christian love,



Local Church News

Ordinations

Mr. Damian Weekes was ordained a deacon on March 29, 2008, by former Caribbean Regional Pastor Mr. Paul Shumway and elder Mr. Fitzroy Greeman. He serves in Trinidad and Tobago and assists Mr. Greeman in Georgetown, Guyana and in Barbados.

Mr. Roy Dyke was ordained a deacon on Sabbath, August 2, 2008, by former Caribbean Regional Pastor Mr. Paul Shumway and Area Pastor Mr. Lascelles Fraser. He serves the congregations in Kingston, Ocho Rios and Mandeville, Jamaica.

Mr. Delroy Palmer was ordained a deacon on Sabbath, August 2, 2008, by former Caribbean Regional Pastor Mr. Paul Shumway and Area Pastor Mr. Lascelles Fraser. He serves the congregations in Mandeville, Kingston and Ocho Rios, Jamaica.

Mr. David Mwanzia was ordained a deacon on Sabbath, September 6, 2008, by Regional Director Mr. Rod King and elder Mr. Simon Muthama. He is a long-time mem-

ber of the Church in Nairobi and serves the brethren there.

Mr. Robert Coates was ordained a deacon on Sabbath, September 27, 2008, by Area Pastor Dr. Scott Winnail. He serves the brethren in Pensacola, Florida.

Mr. Isaac Williams was ordained a deacon on the Feast of Trumpets, September 30, 2008, by Area Pastor Dr. Scott Winnail and elders Mr. Joseph Brown and Mr. Gilbert Baust. He serves the brethren in Thomasville, Georgia.

Mr. Dan Love was ordained an elder and *Mr. Norman Crouch* was ordained a deacon on the Feast of Trumpets, September 30, 2008, by Australasia Regional Director Mr. Bruce Tyler and Mr. Dayrell Tanner, Area Pastor of Sydney, Brisbane and the Philippines. They serve the brethren in Brisbane, Australia, filling a great need in this steadily growing congregation.

In Loving Memory

Mr. Anastacio Catamco died on February 8, 2008, at his residence in Namnam, San Fernando, Philippines. His widow, Pablita Sausal, survives him. He was 85 years old. He had served the brethren in the Philippines as an elder for several years and will be very much missed.

Mrs. Edith French of the Baton Rouge, Louisiana congregation died on September 28, 2008. Poor health had prevented her from attending services for an extended period. She was preceded in death by her husband, Lucien, daughters Donna Weber and Geraldine Lombardo, and son John (J.L.) French. She is survived by son Sam (Sonny) French and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Anniversaries

On October 4, 2008, *Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Hill* of the London, England congregation celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. We all join in sending our heartiest congratulations on this milestone.

On October 4, 2008, the Walterboro, South Carolina congregation surprised their pastor and his wife, *Mr. and Mrs. Bill Whitaker*, with a 50th wedding anniversary celebration after services. The congregation presented the Whitakers with flowers, gifts, cake and a special meal for all.

Commentary

Economic Crisis, Leadership and Prophecy

By Wallace G. Smith

The ongoing economic drama playing out in America is fascinating, but only in the way that one might find a train wreck fascinating.

On our television screens we see politicians who supported allowing families that were not credit worthy to get large loans, who supported light regulation of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and who turned a blind eye to the outrageous compensation given to the executives of those companies. Only now we see those politicians lamenting the credit crisis, crying out for more regulation, and complaining about outrageous compensation given to executives.

On the other side of the aisle, we see the same politicians who were bragging a few years ago that the financial boom America was experiencing was due to their policies and approach to free market systems, now wringing their hands at a problem that is just as related to their policies and approach as the boom was.

Everyone is busy pointing fingers at others, while conveniently forgetting (at least publicly) his or her own sordid role in causing the current mess.

And while pointing out corporate greed is quite popular these days (though various shades of greed did not seem to be a problem to either party just a few years ago), no one seems to have the nerve to tell the American public that its own willingness to borrow insanely over the last few years—agreeing to mortgages of 110 percent of a home's value, for example—is a part of the problem. Perhaps this is partly because the American economy now depends on the willingness of debt-laden, materialistic American citizens to become even more debt-laden and materialistic.

All of this brings to mind an incredibly deceptive commercial from a few years ago. It pictured a wife trying to explain to her husband about the wonderful options now open to them by borrowing against their home equity.

Some of you may remember it, too. It started with the wife holding a clear pitcher of water, and saying to the husband something like, "This is our home equity." Then she got several clear glasses and began to fill them with the water from the pitcher, saying with one glass, "This is our daughter's college tuition," then moving to another glass, "This is the vacation we've been wanting" and so on. The husband's eyes brightened as he caught the materialistic "vision."

Instead, what if the husband had responded, "Well, honey, how did that water get into that pitcher in the first place? Have you thought of that? You know, now that you've filled up all of these glasses, I can't help but notice that we have an empty pitcher. How are we going to fill that pitcher again?" He would have done his family a lot of good, and given his wife an important education.

Regrettably, that commercial reflected the approach of a nation. And now, the nation's pitcher is empty.

Scripture prophesies of America facing problematic debt in the end times—and not just debt, but debt to foreign nations (Habakkuk 2:6–7, Deuteronomy 28:43–44). It also points to a disastrous lack of leadership in the end times (Isaiah 3:1–3, Ezekiel 22:30). If you do not see shades of these prophecies in today's headlines and news clips, I would say you are not really looking.

The above is adapted from one of the many commentaries, discussing vital topics facing our world, available at the www.lcg.org and www.tomorrowworld.org Web sites.