

# Living Church News

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## Will Just Any Church Do?

Dear Brethren and Friends,

It has recently been reported that at least 318 churches and “splinter groups” have split off from the Worldwide Church. It seems that every Tom, Dick and Harry has decided to appoint himself as a “spiritual leader” of a church or little group. Some ask: “Is there anything WRONG with this? Didn't the early Christians meet in ‘house churches?’” What does God's inspired Word tell us about this approach?

Scripture makes it very clear that the “house churches” described in the New Testament were NOT “independent” groups led by self-appointed leaders who were out of harmony with the Apostles at Jerusalem, for the Apostle Paul commanded the new Gentile church at Thessalonica: “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 2:13–14).

Notice two key points in the above passage. First, these new Christians “received” the teachings of Paul as the “Word of God.” They did NOT say to Paul—who had been directly trained by Jesus Christ: “Well, we have our *own ideas*, and we don't want to follow *any man*.”

Ah, but such little groups *always* DO end up “following a man” (or a woman), only this person is usually the individual who decided to appoint HIMSELF as the “leader” and started his little group in the first place!

Second, Paul commended the Thessalonians on their willingness to “imitate” the “churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus.” So, in fact, all of the faithful churches in Apostolic times followed the lead of the *Jerusalem Church of God* where most of the Apostles resided for many years. The Bible makes this *very* clear!

Notice that the true Church was started *at Jerusalem* on the Day of Pentecost under the leadership of Peter and the other Apostles who had been *directly trained* by Jesus Christ (Acts 2). Later, when the Apostles heard of Philip preaching down in Samaria, what happened? “Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come

down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:14–15).

Later, when the Apostle Paul had been converted and started preaching, what did he do? Did he try to start a separate church—in *competition* with the church at Jerusalem? NO. He immediately went up to Jerusalem *to ally* himself with the leading Apostles there and with the Headquarters Church! For God inspired Paul to write the Corinthians: “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Corinthians 1:10–13).

The UN-inspired actions of hundreds of *self-appointed* “teachers” have resulted in MASSIVE division among God’s people! But God tells us to “speak the SAME THING.” And He tells us that there should be “NO DIVISIONS” among us! Besides these clear biblical instructions, what *else* is WRONG with men and women getting “a new idea” in their heads and appointing themselves as spiritual “teachers” and raising up little church groups here and there? *Every* Christian should try to do this, right?

WRONG!

Throughout the Bible, God makes it clear that *He* chooses or “appoints” His ministers. Yet these self-appointed teachers have, in effect, *appointed themselves* as MINISTERS—for that is exactly how they are functioning! But Jesus told *His* ministers: “You did NOT choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you” (John 15:16).

God also tells us in the book of Hebrews: “And NO MAN takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was” (Hebrews 5:4). So those who would “appoint themselves” as leaders or spiritual priests—or as “ministers” as we call them today—should be VERY careful, as they are taking unto themselves what is contrary to the biblical example!

## HOW God Selects His Ministers

Throughout the Bible, God reveals His mind and His approach to many things. We are told: “Let this MIND be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). Does the New Testament show us how God normally selects the spiritual leaders in His New Testament, Spirit-led Church? It *certainly* does!

Obviously, Christ was directly chosen by God the Father. Then, *after praying all night* for guidance, Christ directly “chose” 12 of His disciples to be the *Apostles* (Luke 6:12–13). Then, we find that the

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# Do We “Get It”?

## Editorial

By Roderick C. Meredith

**F**or quite a number of years before his death, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong would look out over the Headquarters congregation and say, “Brethren, I think that many of us *just don’t get it!*”

Mr. Armstrong sensed that many of God’s people just “went along for the ride.” They believed in keeping “Saturday instead of Sunday.” They realized that the Ten Commandments were not done away. They realized that God was using Mr. Armstrong in a special way.

But most of these folks failed to understand that genuine Christianity—genuine *conversion*—really does involve a total SURRENDER of one’s mind, heart and will to God. It involves really surrendering your life to Christ to let Him LIVE His life in you through the Holy Spirit. As Paul said, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, KJV).

I recently received a letter from a former member of the Worldwide Church who has returned to the Truth and who now attends with the Living Church of God. Notice his renewed ZEAL for the Truth:

“Last July [my Living Church of God minister] directed me to the 32-lesson *Ambassador College Bible*

*Correspondence Course*, and I’m just completing Lesson 25. That’s been a blessing as well. But, then, so is the *Tomorrow’s World* magazine, the TW telecast with you and Mr. Ames, the *Living Church News*, the *Bible Study Course* (my second test was just returned — I missed ‘I!’) and all the booklets I’m studying as well—along with the sermons posted to the Web and

His Way of life is the only way that produces good results. I can readily see why Mr. Armstrong called the Bible ‘the foundation of knowledge!’

“But I particularly wanted to say ‘THANK YOU!’ for the series of Bible Study Commentaries which has just run on the Web site with you going through the book of

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the 40+ sermons I borrowed from the ‘host’ up this way that were recorded during the ‘Global’ days, as well as, of course, the many booklets published by Living, the 58-lesson *Correspondence Course* (which I’ll be starting soon) and older sermons given by Mr. Armstrong.

“When Mr. Armstrong used to look out over the congregation and say, ‘Many of you folks JUST DON’T GET IT!’ I was definitely one of those folks! God is so merciful and loving—and

Matthew! I hope and pray everyone, and I sincerely mean everyone, will read and study the Bible using that as a help. It is absolutely fantastic!

“Now I was in your freshman Bible class in 1965–1966, going through the *Harmony of the Gospels*, and I’ve gotten so much more out of this series there is no comparison! Of course now I’m trying with all my heart to surrender to God and Christ

**Do We “Get It”?**  
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# Is There a *Real* Place of Safety?

By John H. Ogwyn

**A**s prophecy unfolds over the next few years, what is ahead for the members of God's Church? For decades, we have anticipated the coming together of the Beast power in Europe—coupled with the decline of British and American power and a growing crisis in the Middle East, centered on Jerusalem. Your Bible prophesied these events, and now we actually see them happening! Though watching these developments can be exciting, it can also be somewhat frightening, as we know that before Jesus Christ's return these fulfilled prophecies will ultimately plunge the world into what the Bible calls the Great Tribulation—a time of trouble worse than any other in human history (Matthew 24:21). What do these future events portend for you and your loved ones? Will you have to go through horrors like the Holocaust?

When discussing end-time events, many Church members have for decades talked about going to a “place of safety.” Others have countered that God can protect us wherever we are. Does Scripture *really* speak of a “place of safety”? If so, who will go there? While some have seemed sure that they were going to Petra, others have been just as adamant that people will be protected in their own homes, or in different locations and through other possible scenarios.

Can we really know the answer to such questions? What does the Bible really teach on this topic? As we draw closer and closer to the end of this age and the horrifying events that Scripture tells us will occur in the years just ahead, understanding this subject becomes all the more important.

Note one of the most common objections raised by those who believe there is no specific place of safety. They say: “God can protect you right in your own home, He does not need to bring everyone to some particular place.” The answer to this is that *of course* God can protect us anywhere and in any way that He chooses. After all, He is God! The proper question is not “What *can* God do?” but rather “What does Scripture reveal that He *will* do?”

## The Source of Deliverance

Is there anything wrong with wanting to escape the events of the Great Tribulation? Jesus Christ Himself gave the answer to that question just days before His crucifixion. Sitting on the Mount of Olives, talking to His disciples about the terrible events that would signal the end of

this age and His return as King of kings, Jesus admonished them to pray and to remain ever alert and watchful. He told them that, by doing so, they might be accounted worthy to escape those things, and to stand before Him at His return (Luke 21:36). Clearly, Christ knew that His followers would desire to escape the terrible calamities to come—and He told them that it was possible to do so.

Through the ages, God has wanted His people to look to Him as their Deliverer. Ancient King David learned this lesson very deeply. Though anointed, while still a teenager, to be the future king of Israel, David spent most of his twenties as a wanted man with a price on his head. King Saul, motivated primarily by fear and jealousy, sought to hunt him down and kill him. What did David learn during those years of hiding and being hunted by enemies—and how are those lessons relevant for us today?

Scripture shows David's feelings in the aftermath of these trials. “Then David spoke to the LORD the words of this song, on the day when the LORD had delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. And he said: ‘**The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer**’” (2 Samuel 22:1–2). The essence of Bible teaching about an end-time place of safety for God's people is that our *real* protection comes from God—not from any physical location. He is our Rock, our Fortress and our Deliverer—both now and during the future troubles.

Psalm 46 also provides a direct prophecy of end-time events and the protection available for God's people. “God is our refuge and strength,” we are told, “a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea” (vv. 1–2). Notice the prophetic time setting of this Psalm. It is set in a time when the nations will rage and kingdoms will be moved and shaken (v. 6). This is the time when God will finally make wars cease on this earth (v. 9)—a time when God will have brought desolation by His judgment (v. 8). This poetic prophecy of the events leading to the coming of the Messiah emphasizes that God is our refuge, and that we need not be afraid even when surrounded by calamitous, earth-shaking events.

Clearly, Christ made plain that some would be accounted worthy to escape this most terrible time of trouble in mankind's history (Luke 21:36; Matthew 24:21–22). He gave His disciples two key comparisons that can help us understand this subject. In Luke 17:26–27, Christ compared the time before His coming to the time of Noah. He

made plain that in spite of Noah's work of warning the world, people ignored the message and pursued their everyday activities. They were unaware their world would soon come crashing down. They went about their own business and pleasure right until Noah and his family entered into the ark—their place of safety. After Noah was delivered, judgment was poured out upon the world.

Christ drew a second parallel, describing Lot and his family being delivered from Sodom (vv. 28–29). Again, the population at large was oblivious to God's intervention in world affairs and continued to pursue their own business and pleasure until God poured out His judgment.

The first common thread through these accounts is that the world was oblivious to God's impending intervention and judgment. The second is that God delivered those faithful to Him, and took them to a place where they would be protected. The third is that after the deliverance of His faithful ones, God poured His judgment upon a God-rejecting and corrupt society.

Now look closely at Luke 17:30–37. Do these verses describe the time of Christ's actual return, or do they describe God's people going to a place of safety? Comparing these verses to Christ's words in Matthew 24:17–22, we see that Luke is describing a time when God's people will flee for their lives before the onset of the Tribulation—not the moment of the resurrection. No one has to be warned, at the moment of the resurrection, to avoid going back and getting personal property out of his house! This *will*, however, be a temptation when we are being faced with leaving our homes and going to another physical location. This is the importance of the reminder to remember Lot's wife—she was unable to turn her back on her “world” and not look back. Her attachment was too great.

### **Taken to a Place**

Revelation 12 describes the interaction between Satan and the Church of God. The true Church had its beginnings with the Church in the Wilderness (mentioned 12 times in the Old Testament as the Congregation of YHVH or the Congregation of Elohim), and continued as the New Testament Church of God. Pictured as a woman, the Old Testament Church is described as bringing forth the Messiah. Satan sought to destroy Christ, but was unsuccessful in his attempt to devour Him immediately following His birth, though he stirred up Herod as his instrument in an effort to accomplish this. Ultimately, the Messiah was caught up to God's throne, and awaits His return to this earth. Following Christ's ascension to Heaven, described in verse 5, the story shifts back to the woman, symbolizing the true Church. We next read of the Church fleeing into the wilderness, away from the popu-

lated areas of the Roman Empire, where she was fed of God during the medieval period.

Beginning in Revelation 12:7, we enter the end-time sequence of events. A final war in heaven results in Satan's expulsion. Knowing that he has only a short time left (v. 12), he launches the final end-time persecution of the true Church, which results in the Great Tribulation. In Revelation 12:14, we learn that the woman—the Church—is then “given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.” Clearly, the Church is taken to a place where God will supernaturally nourish and protect it during the final three-and-a-half year period before Christ's return.

This ties in with Revelation 3:10, in which Christ promises the Church at Philadelphia that He would protect it from the “hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world.” By contrast, in Revelation 3:16 He warns the Church at Laodicea that He would spew it out of His mouth. This is the “remnant” (KJV) or “rest of her offspring” against whom Satan makes war in Revelation 12:17. This remnant is part of the true Church, because it keeps the commandments and has Christ's testimony, but it is tepid and lukewarm, not zealous and on fire. As a result, Christ will spew these individuals directly into the Tribulation to wake them up and bring them to repentance!

The Bible shows a clear contrast between two groups of God's people in the end-time. To one group, Christ says “keep the word of my patience” (Revelation 3:10, KJV) and go through open doors (v. 8) to preach the gospel. The other group is self-absorbed and lukewarm in its approach toward God and His ways. This distinction determines whom God will nourish in “her place in the wilderness” while others will be confronted with the Great Tribulation.

The prophet Zephaniah, whose name means “The Hidden of the Eternal,” spoke of the end-time and described those whom God will hide. “Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the LORD's anger” (Zephaniah 2:3). Some, therefore, *will* be the hidden of the Lord.

Psalm 91 describes that those who will dwell in “the secret place of the most High” will be protected, only *seeing* the calamities that are occurring. The disease epidemics and frightening warfare stalking the world during the end-time will not be allowed to devour those whom God is protecting. Having made the Eternal God their refuge and fortress through faith, these dedicated servants of God will receive His protection during this hellish time.

Scripture makes clear that God promises His zealous end-time people protection from the Tribulation. But why

have so many in the Church over the years thought that the place where God will protect His people might be Petra? Does the Bible mention this noted location and, if so, what does it reveal?

In three specific references, the Bible seems to associate Petra with God's end-time place of protection for His people, but these scriptures are all somewhat vague and can be understood in more than one way. If these verses do not refer to Petra, though, it would seem that God really has not given us any indication of the location where He will nourish His people during the final three-and-a-half year period.

“Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits, let the **inhabitants of Sela** sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory to the LORD, and declare His praise in the coastlands. The LORD shall go forth like a mighty man; He shall stir up His zeal like a man of war. He shall cry out, yes, shout aloud; He shall prevail against His enemies” (Isaiah 42:11–13). This verse describes the time when the Messiah will come in power and subdue the nations. It mentions the inhabitants of Sela singing and praising God at that time. Sela, as marginal references in many Bibles show, is the Hebrew name for the location better known today by its Greek name, Petra. Who are these end-time inhabitants of Petra who will be rejoicing at Christ's coming?

Isaiah 33 also focuses on the events surrounding Christ's second coming. Note verse 10: “Now I will rise,” says the LORD; “now I will be exalted, now I will lift Myself up.” During that troubled time when the sinners will be afraid (v. 14), those who walk righteously “will dwell on high; his place of defense will be the fortress of *rocks* [Hebrew *Selah*, or *Petra* in the Greek]; Bread will be given him, His water will be sure. Your eyes will see the King in His beauty...” (vv. 16–17). Is this a reference to the location of God's end-time faithful?

Another reference is in Isaiah 16. Here God tells the Moabites, who rule the area of Sela or Petra (v. 1), to shield His outcasts. “Let My outcasts dwell with you, O Moab; be a shelter to them from the face of the spoiler. For the extortioner is at an end, devastation ceases, the oppressors are consumed out of the land. In mercy the throne will be established; and One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness” (vv. 4–5). The events described in these verses refer to the time immediately preceding Christ's return. Who are the ones that God describes as “My outcasts” in this passage? Is it a reference to His end-time faithful?

## Who Will Have God's Protection?


While Scripture clearly shows that God will protect His faithful and zealous people from the onslaught of the Great Tribulation, it does not make plain all of the details about which we often wonder. Most of us would prefer that there were clear, unambiguous references to the location and the details pertaining to this place where God's people will be nourished and protected from Satan's wrath. Why has God not chosen to make the physical details more clear?

There is a vital reason. Because we are physical creatures, it is much easier for us to become excited over the physical rather than the spiritual. We must all understand that none of us will be able to deliver ourselves from the end-time calamities that will come to pass. God is our Rock, our Refuge and our Deliverer. He wants us to get our minds on Him and to learn to depend on *Him*, not simply on those things that we can see.

In Malachi 3:16–17, God inspired His prophet to record: “Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. ‘They shall be Mine,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.’”

God is taking note of those who really reverence Him; they are wrapped up in doing the will of God and in finishing His Work, just as Jesus Christ was (cf. John 4:34). God takes note of their conversations encouraging one another, and He is writing a book of remembrance. When this world is on the verge of plunging into the most hellish time in human history, God will spare those whose names He has recorded.

While the details of how and where God will protect His people are fascinating, we must all keep in mind that in the ultimate sense our protection does not come from any *place*—it comes from *God*. If we remain alert and watchful, continuing to pray and walk with God, we can be accounted worthy to escape the things that will come to pass. Those who will go through the Tribulation are those whom God has not been able to stir up and bring to repentance in any lesser way.

We need not be frightened of the times to come. Rather, we can put our confidence in God, learning to trust Him and serve Him with our whole hearts. Then we can truly say that God is our refuge, and our high tower—He is our Rock! 

# What Does It Mean to Be God's Chosen People?

By Douglas S. Winnail

**W**hat comes into your mind when you hear the phrase: “God’s chosen people”? Do you think of the Jews, or the nation of Israel or some exclusivist group with a better-than-thou attitude? When you hear someone say “I am one of God’s elect” or “We are God’s people,” how do you react? Do you feel a sense of awe and excitement—or perhaps suspicion and a bit of sarcasm? Do you feel sorry for such poor, misguided people? Through the ages, many individuals, groups and even nations have felt “chosen by God” to lead or dominate others. They have often felt compelled to force their religious ideas on their neighbors, and even to conquer the world. The history of civilization is a sobering and bloody saga of human beings attempting to function as “agents of the Lord.” It is not surprising that the idea of a “chosen people” sets off alarm bells in the minds of many today.

But is the concept of a chosen people just a crazy idea—a myth that all too frequently becomes a nightmare? Is it merely a notion of human vanity, or is there real substance to the idea? Is it relevant to Christians today—even vital to your salvation? Just what does this idea have to do with *your* life, and how does it relate to *your* future? We need to understand what the Bible reveals about this vital subject, because many false and misleading ideas have been promulgated over

the years. Scripture provides an exciting perspective, which can have an incredible impact on your life when you see how God’s plan fits together.

## Origin of the Idea

The concept of a chosen people occurs repeatedly from Genesis to Revelation. It is nothing to be ashamed of or embarrassed about. God Himself is the author of the concept. The idea of a chosen people is an important part of God’s plan for mankind. The Bible reveals that while God is the Creator of all mankind (Genesis 1:26–27), He chose *for an important reason* to work with one man (Abraham) and his family. God made an agreement—a covenant—with Abraham, with *conditions* and *promises*. In return for Abraham’s obedience, God offered a series of amazing promises—not only blessings and future national greatness for his offspring, but that through Abraham’s seed the whole world would be blessed (Genesis 12:1–3). The Lord established an everlasting covenant with Abraham “to be God to you and your descendants” (Genesis 17:7). The rest of Genesis is the story of this promise expanding to Abraham’s family, with the greatest portion of physical blessings eventually coming to the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48; 49).

The Bible clearly indicates that God used this *same method* of choosing, and offering conditions and promises, as He continued to work with ancient Israel. Moses records: “For you are a holy [set apart] people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has *chosen you* to be a people *for Himself*, a special treasure above all the peoples of the earth” (Deuteronomy 7:6). The Israelites were promised blessings *if* they obeyed God and followed His commandments (7:12–15). They were told: “You are the children of the LORD your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead. For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for Himself” (14:1–2). Because God chose them for a special purpose, the Israelites were forbidden to disfigure their bodies with scars or tattoos, or to adopt other practices common to surrounding pagan nations (see Deuteronomy 12:29–32; Leviticus 19:28; 21:5). They were also told that God had spoken directly to *no other nation*, nor chosen any other to be His own people (Deuteronomy 4:32–40). But just *why* did God call Israel to be His chosen people?

## Chosen for a Reason

Many people today, who do not understand the subject, wrongly ridicule the very idea of a *chosen*

people. Regrettably, many who believe in the idea also lack a proper perspective. Critics have called the concept “exclusivist” because it has led many to assume they were better than other people. In fact, the ancient nation of Israel was *not* chosen because it was the most intelligent or most powerful nation on earth. God chose Israel when its peo-

When God chose to work with the nation of Israel, He said: “if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people... you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5–6). Priests are people who *teach others* about God and His laws. God chose the Israelites—and gave them

the peoples... [and] proclaim the good news of His salvation... [and] declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among *all* peoples” (1 Chronicles 16:7–24). The prophet Isaiah wrote: “But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend... you are my servant, I have chosen you... you are My witness” (see Isaiah 41:8–9; 43:10; 44:8). Because they were to play an important role in God’s plan, the Israelites were warned: “Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you” (Deuteronomy 4:23). God repeatedly told the Israelites that they would be blessed for obedience and reap curses for disobedience to His laws (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). They were not to alter, improvise or compromise God’s instructions, but to faithfully follow and teach the commandments of God to their children (Deuteronomy 4:1–10; 6:1–9).

**Abraham was *chosen* and *blessed* because he *believed* God—he took God’s promises and conditions at face value and acted on them (Genesis 15:6). God was a teacher to Abraham and, as he *learned* important lessons, he then *taught* his family God’s ways (Genesis 18:17–19).**

ple were humbled as slaves in Egypt, and were “the *least* of all peoples” (Deuteronomy 7:7). God chose them because He had made a covenant with their forefathers: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (7:8). The Israelites were also told: “It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their [other nation’s] land, but because of the *wickedness* of these nations” (Deuteronomy 9:5). To understand why God gave the land of Canaan to His chosen people, read about the Canaanite religion, which included ritual fornication and human sacrifice. To be chosen by God as His special people is not a basis for vanity or feelings of superiority, but it does involve an incredible responsibility.

Abraham was *chosen* and *blessed* because he *believed* God—he took God’s promises and conditions at face value and acted on them (Genesis 15:6). God was a teacher to Abraham and, as he *learned* important lessons, he then *taught* his family God’s ways (Genesis 18:17–19).

His laws—so that as they learned to live by those laws, they would see the results His way brings and they would become a *model nation* for others to follow (Deuteronomy 4:1–10). God intended His chosen people to be lights to the world, demonstrating a better way of life. He wanted the world to see Israel’s example, and the blessings that come from living according to His laws. This was—and still is—God’s plan. This is why God revealed Himself—and His laws—to Moses, explaining the Holy Days, tithing, marriage, foods, sanitation, commerce, government, agriculture and even environmental management (see Deuteronomy 4:40; 5:29–33; 6:1–3). The notion that these laws were given to the Israelites to punish them, or that they are irrelevant today as part of an outdated old covenant, is a lie and part of Satan’s great deception.

God did not hide the fact that He chose the nation of Israel for a special purpose. David understood that Israel was *chosen* to be God’s *servant*, to “make known His deeds among

The Bible shows that the terms of this agreement applied not only to Moses’ day, but to *future* generations of Israelites (Deuteronomy 29:14–15). Just as Abraham, Sarah and their offspring were chosen by God and had to make a choice to follow God or their own reasoning, each generation in Israel had to make this same decision. God plainly recorded in Scripture: “For this commandment which I command you today, it is not too mysterious for you... I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore *choose life*, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice...” (Deuteronomy 30:11–20). To be chosen by God as His servant, and as a witness—an example—to the world, is an incredible opportunity and a sobering responsibility. It also requires a *choice* on our part: whether



to obey God's instructions, or to follow our own reasoning and desires.

### More People Chosen

Contrary to what many believe today, Abraham and the nation of Israel were not the only people with whom God chose to work in the past. God *chose* Saul to be the first physical king of Israel (1 Samuel 9:16–17). While people saw Saul as a tall, handsome man, God chose him because he was humble, from the smallest tribe of Israel (Benjamin) and from an insignificant family (9:1, 21). God promised Saul an enduring throne if he obeyed Him (12:14). However, Saul lost his throne when he forgot his initial humility and began to act presumptuously, disobeying God (1 Samuel 13–15). God then *chose* David to reign after Saul (16:1–16). David was not perfect, but was a man after God's own heart—he believed God, loved His commandments and shared God's vision—so God made a special covenant with him, that his throne would be established forever (see 2 Samuel 7:12–17; 1 Kings 11:34; Acts 13:21–23). God then *chose* Solomon to rule after David (1 Kings 1:13, 30) and gave conditional promises based on obedience to His laws (1 Kings 2:1–4). However, after a good start (1 Kings 3) Solomon drifted off course, letting his attraction for women and worldly pleasures replace his love for God (1 Kings 11). As a result, his son Rehoboam lost most of his kingdom. Jeroboam was *chosen* by God to be king and offered an enduring throne for obedience, but he, too, failed to trust God and used his own reasoning to change the laws of God (1 Kings 12:25–33).

In each of these cases, God *chose* individuals with whom He was willing to work. Each man was chosen to lead the children of Israel—God's special people. Each man was offered specific and personal promises, condi-

tioned upon obedience to God. In most situations, the person God chose failed to appreciate the unique nature of the responsibility that was offered.

These case studies in leadership are not outdated little Bible stories, no longer relevant to Christians' lives. Paul wrote: "All these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for *our admonition*, on whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Corinthians 10:11). We need to learn from these examples.

### Chosen People Today

The New Testament reveals that God, today, is still working out the same plan with the same methods. Jesus *chose* 12 disciples to become Apostles (Luke 6:12–13), and gave them specific instructions, or conditions: to follow His example (Matthew 4:18–20), to obey the commandments of God (John 14:15) and to preach the Gospel of the coming kingdom of God to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and to the world (Matthew 10:6–7; 28:19–20). They were also offered a reward for following Christ's instructions—the opportunity to reign over the 12 tribes of Israel in the coming kingdom (Matthew 19:28). God *chose* Peter to first preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 15:7). Paul was called "a *chosen vessel*" to preach the gospel "before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel" and to be a "witness to all men" (Acts 9:15; 22:15)—essentially the same mission God gave to ancient Israel (see 1 Chronicles 16:8–24). God *chose* the Apostles to fill specific roles in His plan, which they understood and faithfully fulfilled. They also understood the nature of their reward (see 2 Timothy 4:6–8; Revelation 5:10). But the Apostles were not the only people chosen by Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote to New Testament Christians that "just as He [God]

*chose* us in Him [to be Christians] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:4–5). In other words, God has a predetermined plan to call individuals to become His children—and the New Testament Church is comprised of those being offered that opportunity now. Individuals chosen to qualify during this part of God's plan are called "firstfruits" (Romans 8:23; James 1:18; Revelation 14:1–5). Their reward will be the first resurrection and the chance to reign with Christ in the kingdom of God (Revelation 5:10; 20:4–6). Paul wrote further: "God from the beginning *chose* you for *salvation* through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth... therefore... stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught" (2 Thessalonians 2:13–15). Paul was referring to a future time when individuals *chosen* to be firstfruits will be deceived and begin to fall away because they have lost their love for the truth of God (2:1–12). They will lose their reward (Colossians 2:18)—just as Solomon's son lost most of his kingdom—unless they repent. Many today are facing this exact situation.

The New Testament explains that God is not calling the wise and mighty of this world, but just as He chose to work with the Israelites when they were slaves in the land of Egypt, "God has chosen [under the New Covenant] the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise... that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:26–29). Just as God chose Saul when he was humble and David when he was a simple God-fearing shepherd, God

### What Does It Mean?

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# What Is a Philadelphian?

By Robert J. Thiel

**W**hat is a Philadelphian? This article will review the biblical passages about the Philadelphian Church and examine when it began, what its traits were, why a remnant still exists, how to determine who that remnant is—and why this is important to know.

Scripture describes the Church at Philadelphia: “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, “He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”: I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 3:7–13).

Jesus says here that He “has the key of David,” and He talks about doors. References to the “key of David” and doors are used together in one other Bible passage: “I will commit your responsibility into his hand. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; so he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he shall shut and no one shall open. I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, and he will become a glorious throne in his father’s house” (Isaiah 22:21–23). This suggests, as Dr. Meredith noted in his “Ambassadors for Christ” sermon earlier this year, that the “key of David” has something to do with governance and something to do with a throne. How could that relate to the Philadelphia era of the Church?

## When the Philadelphia Era Began

A review of literature on the “Sardis” era of the Church demonstrates that there never was truly effective governance over the body (see *True History of the True Church* by Dugger). In his *Autobiography* (all quotes from the 1986 edition), Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong wrote: “Ministers were to be employed, and under orders from lay members. This is essentially the concept of what we call democracy: government from the bottom up. Those being governed dictate who shall be their rulers and how their rulers shall rule them. The most perplexing subject in all the Bible to me was this matter of church government. I never did come to clear understanding of the BIBLE teaching on the subject until after Ambassador College was formed” (pp. 411–412).

Note that when the Church of God Seventh Day (CG7) split over governance in 1933, Mr. Armstrong did not go with the side that had the most votes, but cooperated with the side that lost the vote (*Mystery of the Ages*, pp. 558, 561). Once he understood God’s form of governance he wrote: “The Church is organized under theocratic government, hierarchical in form” (*Mystery of the Ages*, p. 246).

“From the year 1931, exactly 1,900 years (a century of time cycles) from the foundation of the Church, this small remnant of the original true Church of God began to take on new life as the Philadelphia era... This era of the Church was to produce fruit...” (*Mystery of the Ages*, pp. 289–290). Then, “after 3 1/2 years of intensive study and training, Christ ordained me to preach this same Gospel of the Kingdom in all the world as a witness to all nations (Matthew 24:14). This ordination took place at, or very near, the Day of Pentecost, 1931” (*Autobiography*, p. 428).

Mr. Armstrong had preached before then, but “by this time my whole heart was in it” and he was able to do his first extended campaign (*Autobiography*, pp. 426, 430). In 1933, he refused to accept any salary from the Oregon Conference of CG7, and on October 9, 1933 he began proclaiming the gospel over radio, which he considered to be a door opened by God and “the start of the present work” (*Autobiography*, pp. 506, 507, 525, 529, 530). He felt “though we did not know it then, that a new era of the Church was dawning” (*Autobiography*, p. 526).

Mr. Armstrong found that since God promised David: “Your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16) and “David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel” (Jeremiah 33:17), that this had been fulfilled throughout history through what became the British throne. Mr. Armstrong considered this identity to be part of the “key of David.” By 1937, because of his writings on the biblical Holy Days and the identity of the U.S. and British Commonwealth in prophecy, CG7 rejected Mr. Armstrong—so it appears that from sometime between 1933 and 1937 the Philadelphia era of the Church became completely separate from CG7.

Although some Protestant theologians feel that the Revelation 3:8 open door has to do with the entrance to the New Jerusalem (see *Nelson’s Study Bible*, p. 2,170), Mr. Armstrong saw that it referred to public proclamation of the Gospel. “God had set before it [the Philadelphia era] an open

He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed My sheep’” (John 21:17).

A trait of Philadelphians is that they love the brethren and will sacrifice to do so. While some may argue that this only means taking care of those already in the Church, this is inconsistent with Matthew 28:18–19 as well as Jesus’ words in John 10:16: “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”

Philadelphians love others, not just themselves. As Mr. Armstrong wrote: “This era of the Church was to produce fruit” (*Mystery of the Ages*, p. 290). As Jesus taught: “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:35). Philadelphians will give their all to proclaim the Gospel.

Philadelphians have “a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name” (Revelation 3:8).

**A trait of Philadelphians is that they love the brethren and will sacrifice to do so. While some may argue that this only means taking care of those already in the Church, this is inconsistent with Matthew 28:18–19 as well as Jesus’ words in John 10:16: “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”**

door. It is recorded in 2 Corinthians 2:12 and also Acts 14:27 how Christ opened the door for Paul to go into other countries and preach the gospel” (*Mystery of the Ages*, p. 290). Paul used a similar analogy when he wrote: “Meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ” (Colossians 4:3). Interestingly, right after Jesus declares to the Philadelphians, “I know your works,” He says: “See, I have set before you an open door” (Revelation 3:8). Thus, Jesus ties the works of the Philadelphia Church to an open door.

“Also a door was to be opened for this leader and/or the Philadelphia era of the Church to fulfill Matthew 24:14: ‘And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached to all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come’” (*Mystery of the Ages*, pp. 290–291).

### **What Are the Traits of a Philadelphian?**

*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* shows that *Philadelphia* means “love of brethren” or “fond of brethren.” When Jesus used the term *phileo* with Simon Peter (translated as “love”), what was Peter to do to show this type of love? He was to do the work. “He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because

They are not part of an especially strong church (or a large church by the world’s standards). They have kept God’s word without watering it down. They have not denied Christ’s *authority* (which is essentially how *Strong’s* defines the word translated as “name”).

The Philadelphians accept that “Christ is head of the church” (Ephesians 5:23), and accept authority within the Church: “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ” (Ephesians 4:11–15).

As Mr. Armstrong wrote: “The government of the kingdom of God is of necessity government from the top

### **What Is a Philadelphian?**

*continues on page 14*



# International Corner...

## Caribbean Report

—By Jonathan McNair

Our new Caribbean telecasts have really produced fruit. For example, in Barbados, we have had an average of 45 calls every week, with some weeks edging close to the 100 mark.

Another exciting note is the recent interest from the island of Grenada. Nine households now have requested literature after seeing the program from the station in Trinidad. We may have a new church in Grenada before long.

In Kingston, Jamaica, we have had to organize a new meeting place for the congregation. With attendance averaging approximately 60 people every week, we have outgrown our present location. The new hall we are in the process of renting should be even better for our needs. We will be able to have mid-week Bible Studies, Spokesman Club and other church activities there, since we will have sole use of the hall.

Our members have been working hard to prepare for the Feast of Tabernacles. We will be having local Feast services in Jamaica, Tobago, Guyana and Barbados. If you are interested in joining your Caribbean brethren, please contact the representative listed in the March-April 2001 *Living Church News*, or get the latest, updated information from the Church Web site at <http://www.livingcog.org/members/fot/default.htm> (remember to connect with username: *member* and password: *galatians220*). There

is no better way to get to know your brethren than by spending the Feast together!

On a very serious note, Mr. Michael Lowe, a member in Barbados, was in a very serious car accident recently. The car was so mangled that he had to be extricated from the car. Miraculously, his injuries are much less serious than they could have been. He has recovered with only dislocated toes and a broken hip. Please pray for a complete recovery for Michael.

## European Report

—By Douglas Winnail

The Pentecost period was an active time for the Living Church of God in Europe. Presiding Evangelist Dr. Roderick Meredith and his wife visited London for the annual board meeting of the Church in the UK. Dr. Meredith conducted a mid-week Bible Study in London before heading on to Paris, where he conducted Sabbath services.

On Pentecost, Dr. Douglas Winnail conducted services in Dublin. Members from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland were in attendance, as was a visiting family from Canada. Dr. Winnail has relocated to Ireland to become the Regional Director of the Living Church of God in Europe.

As a result of efforts in recent months, the Living Church of God is now legally registered in the UK, Ireland, France and the Netherlands. This enables the Church to operate and conduct necessary business in these countries

and provides the foundation for further growth.

Numerous avenues are being explored to preach the gospel in Europe. The *Tomorrow's World* program has been broadcast from the Isle of Man. The program is currently carried on Radio Star based in Northern Ireland. A magazine advertising program has been active in the Republic of Ireland for some time offering booklets, tapes and *Tomorrow's World* magazine. Efforts are underway to expand advertising in the UK and other countries in Europe. Living Church of God Web sites are now available in the English, Spanish, Dutch and Czech languages. Plans for the Feast in Arklow, Ireland and Port D'Albret, France are proceeding well.

## New Zealand Update

—By Kinnear Penman

The Work in New Zealand has recently been able to achieve great postage savings through concessions offered by NZPost. When mailing the *Tomorrow's World* magazine, the cost reduction is 40 percent below standard charges.

To be granted these concessions, we must comply with certain requirements. The address labels need to conform to printing standards that enable the addresses to be read by machine. The reply card for a subscription to the *Bible Study Course* must be pre-addressed, and mail must be supplied to NZPost in Postcode (i.e. Zip Code) order.

For the small New Zealand church, the several hundred dollars we save with each issue of *Tomorrow's World* magazine is a great boost to our budget and is equivalent to adding a couple of new tithe-payers to our ranks.

Evangelist Bruce Tyler and I have just completed a very successful 11-day tour of the North Island of New Zealand, visiting members and co-workers. Several of the people we met have, until now, been attending services of our former association, but are very supportive of the way the Living Church of God is fulfilling the commission Christ gave His Church. These folk will now be fellowshiping with us. It seems that, scattered throughout New Zealand, there are still people in our former association who hold to the truths they were taught decades ago. The Living Church of God is willing to provide these scattered folk whatever spiritual service we can, within our means.

Mr. Tyler and I were also delighted to be able to invite to services several completely “new” people, whose contact with God’s Truth has come about through the *Tomorrow's World* program, which is broadcast on a nationwide network at the very favorable time of 8:30 a.m. Sunday. Many we visited, including a member of the New Zealand Parliament, dearly want to attend services and make a commitment to a new way of life. As a result of our visits, we believe that the Living Church of God is on the verge of some substantial growth here in New Zealand. Interestingly, most interest in God’s Truth seems to be among people of non-British descent. In the past, God’s Church in New Zealand was overwhelmingly populated by descendants of British colonists. But the work of the Living Church of God is receiving much interest from

Maoris (New Zealand’s indigenous people) and various Pacific Island immigrant groups such as Tongans and Samoans.

We all read the *Tomorrow's World* magazine. But have you heard of “The Digest”? That is what we informally call an eight-page, black and white edition of the *Tomorrow's World* magazine that we prepare and print here in New Zealand. This was initially conceived for use in the Pacific Islands, but we also supply it to our office in Guyana.

In many “third world” areas, it is very easy for a quality, full-color, free publication to attract thousands of subscribers. Costs to the Church can soar rapidly. Because “The Digest” is black and white, we believe it will only attract subscribers who are actually interested in the content of the articles. Since it is just eight pages, it can be folded into a standard business envelope and postage costs are thereby halved. I choose, and sometimes slightly edit, articles suitable for the readership. My son Joshua compiles the articles into the required format, and a local printer does a good, professional printing job for us. Members in Vanuatu, Fiji, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea place the magazine in markets and stores where it is quickly picked up by passers-by. Subscribers who also enroll in the *Bible Study Course* are, after they have completed the Lesson Four test, transferred to the regular *Tomorrow's World* mailing list. Some isolated subscribers are later offered audiotapes of *Tomorrow's World* soundtracks—we send them four programs each month. Thus the gospel and God’s Truth are proclaimed to other nations within the limited financial means of the New Zealand church.

## Southern Philippines In Turmoil

—By Rod McNair

The following is an excerpt from a recent report of one of our ministers in Mindanao, in the Southern Philippines: “A lot is happening here in the Philippines since the overthrow of the President [in January 2001]. Killings occur almost every day all over the country. Many groups were formed just to create trouble and to weaken the government of Gloria Arroyo... There were four mayors already gunned down.”

“The other day I heard the announcement over the radio that a new republic was installed in Southern Philippines, the Islamic State or the Muslim Republic which composed thirteen provinces from the former Autonomous Region granted to the Muslims... The governor of Lanao del Norte called up a conference of all religious leaders in the province. I was invited, and there were seventeen ministers of different churches. The theme was Peace and Order. I personally talked to the governor for almost twenty minutes on this issue. Her husband [a Muslim], the congressman of the province, was listening... Their message is to seek cooperation from the religious sector to help maintain peace and order in this troubled time. I understand that ambush and bombing in public places will happen again to paralyze the government. Ministers’ lives will then be in danger again.”

Since May 7, when this report was written, ambushes in Salvador and grenade explosions in Iligan City have come perilously close to some of our brethren—in one case missing one of our elders and his son by only a matter of seconds. We continue to request prayers for God’s protection for His people in the Philippines, as in other dangerous parts of the world, in this turbulent time. ☐

**What Does It Mean?***(continued from page 9)*

has likewise “chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love him” (James 2:5).

In fact, Christians have an even more intimate relationship with God than did the Israelites. Christians are God’s children—they have received the gift of the Holy Spirit after repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38; Romans 8:9–17). God is looking for individuals after His own heart, who want to serve Him, who value His laws, who are willing to follow His instructions, who share His vision and who are willing to be examples to the world (see Deuteronomy 10:12–13; Isaiah 66:2; Matthew 22:37). God has a *special purpose* planned for those who develop these qualities—they are to be priests and kings (teachers and leaders) in the coming kingdom of God (Revelation 5:10). God’s method is the same today as it always has been. This is why Peter echoed Moses when he

told New Testament Christians: “But you are a *chosen* generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own *special people*, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people, but are now the *people of God*” (1 Peter 2:9–10; see also Exodus 19:5–6). This is why Christians are called “the elect” (Matthew 24:31; 1 Peter 1:2).

The Bible reveals that those God has chosen to be His people throughout history are to be lights to the world. Those who prove faithful in this responsibility will receive the opportunity to rule with Jesus Christ in the coming kingdom of God, where they will teach God’s laws and His way of life to all mankind.

To be “chosen by God” is not a crazy idea. It is nothing to be ashamed of; it is a fundamental teaching of Scripture, an incredible privilege and an awesome opportunity. We need to remember that Jesus told His disciples: “You did not choose Me, but *I chose you* and appointed you that you should go

and bear fruit” (John 15:16). When you realize that God has *chosen* you to understand His truth, to participate in preaching the gospel and to prepare for the kingdom, you have an important choice to make. You must decide whether you will obey God—keep His commandments, follow His instructions and share His vision—or whether you will instead follow your own human reasoning and “do your own thing.” You will need to have the proper priorities (Luke 10:38–42), so that you “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” in all that you do (Matthew 6:33). Your response will determine whether you will be among those *chosen* to be in the first resurrection, to rule with Christ in the kingdom of God (see Revelation 17:14; 20:4–6).

The concept of a chosen people is not a crazy idea or an outdated notion. It is a fundamental part of God’s plan for the salvation of mankind. You can play an important role in that plan, when you understand what it means to be one of God’s chosen people! ☐

**What Is A Philadelphian?***(continued from page 11)*

down. It cannot be ‘government by the consent of those being governed’... Revelation 3:12 indicates that those of the ‘Philadelphia era’ will be pillars in the Headquarters Church... What I am showing you here is that Christ’s gospel of the kingdom actually includes all this knowledge here revealed—even the whole universe will be ruled by us, who, with God the Father and Christ, become the kingdom of God” (*Mystery of the Ages*, pp. 49, 347, 362).

Philadelphians are given a warning: “Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Revelation 3:11). Mr. Armstrong wrote that he restored to the Church of God *at least* 18 truths that the previous era had lost (*Mystery of the Ages*, p. 251). Philadelphians are the ones who hold to those truths (as well as all other biblical truths)—including governance—and will be able to have a crown and to rule!

Philadelphians have “kept My command to persevere” (Revelation 3:10). Holding fast to Truth, *while*

*putting a priority on proclaiming the Gospel*, is what sets the Philadelphia Church apart.

**Why Is There a Philadelphia Remnant?**

The Laodicean Church is the last one mentioned in the book of Revelation (Revelation 3:14–22). As the last, it is the one that will be the most dominant at the time of the end. The word “Laodicea” can be rendered “the people rule”, “judgment of the people” or the “people decide.” Laodicea is characterized by a rejection of the governance accepted by the Philadelphians, and by a general lukewarm attitude. Laodicea places emphasis on self (as opposed to proclaiming the Gospel), thus it also waters down the Truth—and so is “rebuked and chastened” and counseled “to buy from Me gold refined in the fire” (Revelation 3:18–19).

Because Laodicea is dominant at the end of the age, Philadelphia cannot be predominant then. However, a remnant of Philadelphia must still exist. We know this because Jesus told the Philadelphians: “Because you have

kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly!” (Revelation 3:10–11). The Philadelphians are the only ones promised protection! The remnant of the Philadelphians are “given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent” (Revelation 12:14).

Although Mr. Armstrong wrote that he was able to fulfill the first portion of Matthew 24:14—“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations” (*Mystery of the Ages*, p. 291)—he appointed other television presenters to take over for him if he died prior to the second portion of the verse, “and then the end will come.” He also wrote: “But Christ said to His Philadelphia era Church, that because we have but little strength, He would OPEN THOSE DOORS TO US (Revelation 3:8)” (*Letter*, Nov. 19, 1976). Philadelphians need to keep preaching to the world until the end comes, since they will be around until the end comes.

### **How to Determine Who the Remnant Is (or Is Not)**

By attempting to heed Jude’s admonition “to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), the remnant of the Philadelphia Church will hold fast to the Truth that was restored in that era. The remnant of the Philadelphia Church will continue to attempt to go through whatever doors are open in order to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom as a witness. They will also proclaim the Ezekiel warning to the physical descendants of Israel, even if this remnant does not have as many “talents” as it once had (Matthew 25:15–28). It will keep the biblical form of authority within the Church—the same form of governance that will be used in the Kingdom of God. Remember, though: just calling oneself (or one’s church) “Philadelphia” does not guarantee that one actually *is* Philadelphia. Some who claim to be Philadelphia are not.

The Living Church of God cannot claim that all its members are Philadelphia, but we do believe we are a uniquely Philadelphia remnant. Can one find a larger or more effective “corporate body” which retains the Truth as taught by Mr. Armstrong, without adding non-biblical “revelations” or diverting its members from making their top priority the Great Commission of proclaiming the Gospel as established by Jesus Christ? No! One can expect that Philadelphians, who care about doing an *effective* Work *and* holding fast to the Truth, will naturally support the Living


Church of God. Of course, simply attending with the Living Church of God does not make one a Philadelphia; individual members must do their part, and must not allow their lives to be cluttered by the cares of this world so that they themselves become lukewarm (Laodicean).

With all the confusion and misreporting that has occurred in the last several years, we can appreciate that there are Philadelphians outside the Living Church of God. However, this is not an excuse for zealous Christians to become “independent.” Mr. Armstrong wrote that the first “purpose of the Church” was to proclaim “the coming kingdom of God to the world... The ‘loner’—the ‘individual Christian’ who wants to climb up into the kingdom some other way than by Christ and His way through His Church—is not being trained in Christ’s manner of training, to rule and reign with Christ in his kingdom!... The person who says, ‘I will get my salvation alone, outside of the Church’ is totally deceived” (*Mystery of the Ages*, p. 270).

### **Why Is This Important to Know?**

Some say that knowledge of Church eras is unimportant, and believe that it makes no difference in how Christians live or act. Is this the correct attitude? It is not coincidental that many who de-emphasize Church eras also water down key truths restored by Mr. Armstrong—in some cases no longer even considering it their top priority to proclaim the full Gospel as a witness. This may help explain such an attitude—but does it excuse it? Seven times (Revelation 2; 3) Jesus warned: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (e.g. Revelation 3:13). Why would He repeatedly say this if these messages were not important?

Jesus promised the Philadelphians more than just physical protection. He also said: “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name” (Revelation 3:12). Who in God’s Church does not want to receive these promises?

Those God has called can decide whether or not to accept and teach the truths restored to the Philadelphia Church. It is up to them—but the spiritual and physical costs of not accepting *and* teaching the Truth appear quite high. A Philadelphia holds fast to true doctrine, does not deny Christ’s authority, keeps His word, goes through those doors that Christ opens and perseveres to the end. A Philadelphia hears “what the Spirit says to the churches.” 

**Do We “Get It”?***(continued from page 3)*

and His instructions to us, and live by His every Word. I just want you to know how deeply [I] appreciate your efforts, your commitment, your zeal and love in giving us—and the world—God’s truth. I also appreciated your message regarding ‘Our Mission as a Church’ in the current *Living Church News*.”

Brethren, many of us have lost that zeal for the Truth. And even in the LCG there are “dabblers.” They don’t try to saturate their minds and hearts with the pure Truth coming

the Truth and usually contradict each other in the process. You must PROVE where Christ is primarily doing His Work today and “put your heart” into that Church.

As the man quoted above related what he was now doing, you also should ZEALOUSLY study the Bible and the literature from God’s true Church. You should make your religion a genuine WAY of LIFE. You should not foolishly “get side-tracked” by following the ideas of false prophets and worldly ministers and teachers who often *do not even CLAIM* to teach the Ten Commandments as a way of life.

Yet some will extol what they feel are “good ideas” in the teachings of these Commandment-reject-

people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? *To the LAW and to the testimony!* If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is NO LIGHT in them” (Isaiah 8:19–20).

Notice that God says there is “no light” in these lawless teachers! Do you DISAGREE with God and want to follow these Commandment-rejecting teachers anyway? Remember how the “Apostle Jesus loved” clearly warned us: “He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a LIAR, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4).

What is God telling us in the above scriptures? Do Commandment-rejecting ministers and teachers know ANYTHING? Yes,

**God’s Word tells us, “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is LIGHT and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). In God is complete “light”—no darkness, no compromise and no “watering down” of the Truth whatsoever.**

directly from the Bible and from those God is using to really preach His message to the world. Rather, they “dabble” in this idea and that—creating their own spiritual “smorgasbord” of often conflicting religious ideas and concepts.

Again and again in His Word, God WARNS us about being “wishy-washy” and uncertain about Him and His ways. The writer of Hebrews tells us, “But without FAITH it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). So you cannot please God without real FAITH. Somewhere along the line, you and I *must* COMMIT. We cannot just “dabble” with various ideas and with various teachers who often “water down” much of

ing ministers and teachers, and allow themselves to get “side-tracked” into studying their material or hearing their messages on tape—often spending *several hours* a week listening to those who REJECT God’s Commandments! Subtly, slowly but surely, these weak and misguided individuals in God’s Church have their thinking skewed into the direction of Protestantism, sentimentalism, New Age thinking or whatever.

As Mr. Armstrong would say, “*They just don’t get it!*”

From one end of the Bible to the other, God tells us NOT to follow those who *refuse to obey God’s Law*. Isaiah was inspired to write, “And when they say to you, ‘Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,’ should not a

of course they do. But NOTE CAREFULLY: these people do NOT have the true spiritual “light” because—as John says—they do not “know” Jesus Christ. They may know *about* Christ. But to truly “know” Christ—to be *truly acquainted* with Him—one must actually SURRENDER one’s life to KEEP all ten of the Ten Commandments as 1 John 2:4 indicates. Then, and ONLY then, does one have the “mind of Christ” to understand and explain the full TRUTH about any spiritual matter.

Experiencing what it is like to fully keep God’s Commandments, to have Christ LIVE within oneself and to “walk with Christ” over a period of years is the ONLY way to prepare to fully and properly explain God’s Word and its principles. Lacking this, lawless ministers



and teachers will tend to “skew” people’s minds away from a full understanding of the biblical principles about marriage, child rearing, personal relationships, being fully honest on the job—about EVERYTHING. They may be totally sincere. But without Christ living in them through His Spirit, they can only give PART of the answer to these problems. They will therefore give WRONG advice, or very incomplete advice at most. As Mr. Armstrong said, “Putting just a ‘little’ cyanide in an otherwise good glass of water or juice is enough to kill.” Think about it!

God’s Word tells us, “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is LIGHT and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). In God is complete “light”—*no darkness, no compromise and no “watering down”* of the Truth whatsoever. But Adam and Eve ate of the tree of “mixed” fruit—*partial* good and MUCH bad—which caused the entire human race to be CUT OFF from God!

THINK! Any “good ideas” on marriage relations, child rearing, personal success—or whatever you might learn from Commandment-rejecting ministers—is information you could *also* learn from articles in the *Reader’s Digest* and other non-religious publications. But from those non-religious sources, you would NOT be getting the information mixed with a false Christ and a “watered down” approach to God—an entire approach to religion that is *distorted* and is certainly DISPLEASING to God.

To learn *real* spiritual Truth—the FULL TRUTH—you must go to those faithful teachers who are preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God based on God’s LAW. The Apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders, “For I have not shunned to declare to you the WHOLE COUNSEL of God” (Acts 20:27).

Brethren, with all my heart I am also trying to declare to YOU the “whole counsel of God!” Please do NOT allow Satan to cleverly “side-track” you into following ANY “watered down” version of religion—whether from a weak, misguided minister in some church of God fellowship, or from some lawless, yet well-meaning, religious teachers of this world.

An example of this problem was conveyed to me in a recent letter from one of our dedicated members:

“On a more serious note, would you please ask Dr. Meredith to address the issue of the ‘Promise Keepers’ association? This is an extremely ecumenical group that is devoted to downplaying doctrine and truth in favor of a ‘feel-good, pseudo-Christian brand of love.’ It is one of Satan’s clever ‘Trojan horses’ that he is using to unite his churches under one banner, and they make no bones about worshiping the trinity god. The reason I’m making this request is because I have heard from another member in an LCG congregation (located far from New England), that a couple of members of his church are actively promoting PK amongst other LCG members, to the point where it is causing some consternation in the congregation. The local pastor has just recently been informed of this, so hopefully that particular problem will be resolved on the local level. I’m suggesting that Dr. Meredith mention the issue of PK in a future letter, sermon, or article in the event that other


churches are experiencing similar problems. This type of spiritual cancer needs to be nipped in the bud early.”

As this man writes, the so-called “Promise Keepers” organization appeals mostly to the emotions of mainly Protestant men. Its leaders do NOT teach obedience to the Ten Commandments—nor do they attempt to keep God’s Sabbaths, His Holy Days or teach abstention from fighting and killing in war or many of the other things indicated clearly by God’s spiritual Law.

Without careful thought, a sincere Christian could easily be “swept up” in the emotion of these meetings and “feel good” about himself. Yet he would be, in effect, *worshiping* with and validating the beliefs and practices of those who—though perhaps sincerely deceived—would argue and debate and perhaps even FIGHT against any attempt to teach *all Ten* of God’s Commandments as a way of life!

That is why the living Christ tells us repeatedly in His Word, “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12). Also, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

That is why Christ tells us NOT to merely “believe” in HIM, but to *believe and practice* His teaching, His DOCTRINE (Luke 6:46). Again, His beloved apostle warns us, “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the DOCTRINE of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds” (2 John 9–11).

And again, brethren: “Do we really get it?” 

## Will Just Any Church Do?

(continued from page 2)

Apostles were guided to “appoint” various deacons (Acts 6:3–7) and *elders* (Titus 1:3–5). And notice that in His instructions to “appoint elders in every city,” the Apostle Paul gave Titus an entire list of *qualifications* for this office!

First, these spiritual leaders were to be “above reproach” and NOT “self-willed,” not given to wine or greedy for money (v. 7). Many of these self-appointed teachers *consistently* displayed “self-will” in our former association. They were not usually “good team players.” Some were PUT OUT of the Church by God’s Apostle himself. From their past behavior—their “fruits”—it is apparent that many of these men *always* wanted to “do their own thing.”

Later, among other qualifications, Paul states that any elder should be “holding fast the faithful word AS HE HAS BEEN TAUGHT, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict” (v. 9).

From my own personal observation of a number of these men, it is apparent that they are NOT holding fast the Truth *as they have been taught*. Many have gone off into aberrant doctrines regarding counting the Holy Days, teaching the use of Hebrew names for God, contradicting Mr. Armstrong’s teaching on “born again” and the nature of God and more.

Without thinking things through, some Church members have felt their “feelings” were hurt because of some correction or misunderstanding with the ministry or other brethren, and feel they can become a “big shot” in some little group of their own—or one headed by a close friend. What they utterly FAIL to realize is that in “branching out” in this way they are, in fact, causing DIVISION in the body. And they are definitely hurting the opportunity for God’s Church to do a truly powerful Work of preaching the Gospel to “all nations” (Matthew 24:14).

In addition, these teachers are demonstrating to the living Christ that they are *self-willed*, that they will NOT submit to God’s government and His Church and that, like Lucifer, they might later literally *fight* GOD *Himself* if given the power to do so! These independent teachers are, perhaps without realizing it, undermining the entire New Testament concept of the “unity of the spirit” and of “one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling” (Ephesians 4:3–4).

“So,” some will challenge, “what makes YOU any different from these independent teachers?” There is an ENORMOUS difference. Just as the Apostle Paul described his background, training and experience in defending himself against false ministers and their criticisms and accusations (2 Corinthians 11:1–6), let me

explain mine. God has HUMBLED me many times, and allowed personal suffering to correct me. I thank Christ for His deliverance and guidance in my life, because of which I can serve Him, and you brethren, more effectively.

Unlike so many self-appointed teachers, I was directly taught and trained for decades under God’s end-time Apostle, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. I was NOT just “one of his students.” Rather, after the death of his first son, Richard David Armstrong, he appointed me as Second Vice President of the Church and Ambassador College for a period of some 12 years. Mr. Armstrong told me a number of times: “Rod, if anything should happen to me and Ted, *you* would be in charge of this entire Work!”

During those years, Mr. Armstrong instructed me a number of times to become well-acquainted with all of the departments in the Work so that I could have the overview of the entire organization. He invited me into many private meetings with businessmen and with our radio and television station representative, Milt Scott, so that I would be familiar with how to handle this part of the Work if I needed to. And, of course, during those years I was a member of the Board, of the Executive Committee and of virtually every decision-making body in the organization.

I was trained for three years at Ambassador College under Mr. Armstrong, who at that time taught ALL the Bible classes. Then I spent a number of additional years in graduate school under Mr. Armstrong while I was also teaching a number of undergraduate classes in theology.

Later, as Christ guided my life, I became the only person who ever served as Deputy Chancellor over each of the three campuses of Ambassador College.

As it turned out, I have personally taught Bible classes to more students at Ambassador College than any other individual. Also, I was made Superintendent of Ministers over the United States churches for 11 years. I had vast experience in working with our churches and field ministry—plus pastoring several churches personally over the years. So the living Christ certainly trained me extensively and gave me many valuable experiences to prepare me for what I am doing now.

After Mr. Armstrong’s death and the beginning of the most awful apostasy in God’s Church in modern times, I finally came to realize that—with all the training I had been given—I HAD to stand for the Truth and “revive” the Work of God. I felt that I would be turning my back on everything I stood for—on Christ, on God and on Mr. Armstrong as well—if I did not act. So, in FAITH, my wife and I stepped out to once again “preach the Truth” and “do the Work.” The rest is history.

## Watch the “Fruits”

Jesus said that one should look at the “fruits” when evaluating any minister or any work. What are the “fruits”—or RESULTS—of all these *self*-appointed teachers and the hundreds of little groups scattered here and there?

I have already indicated a number of these “fruits.” In summary, these hundreds of little “splits” make the Church of God a laughingstock to many in the outside world! Mr. Armstrong used to decry the hundreds of denominations and sects in “mainstream Christianity.” But now *we have done the same!*

With all these little splits, headed primarily by untrained and unqualified self-willed men, we cannot and DO NOT “all speak the SAME THING” as the Apostle Paul commanded. By dividing and confusing God’s people, these self-willed teachers have made it MUCH *more difficult* to do a really POWERFUL Work of preaching the Gospel.

Note this vital instruction given to us through the Apostle Paul: “Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?” (1 Corinthians 6:1–3). We are to “judge” people in the church just as Paul judged the fornicator in 1 Corinthians 5:1–5.

But today, if we in the Living Church of God find a continual fornicator, a drunkard or an absolute rebel and have to disfellowship him, he can just “run down the street” and be welcomed by some “splinter” group that welcomes almost *anyone*—and may in fact be *entirely* opposed to genuine Church government!

Meanwhile, the members of these little groups are often taught many other unbiblical and confusing ideas and doctrines. They are usually NOT being truly prepared to be kings and priests in Christ’s soon-coming government on this earth (Revelation 5:9–10). They are certainly NOT “overcoming” as Christ commanded and learning to submit to *His* government and help carry on His Work and proclaim the Gospel to “ALL the nations!”

And the self-appointed “leaders” of these groups will certainly have to ANSWER to the living Christ for the disorientation, the confusion and the DIVISION they have caused in the Body of Christ. So who IS God really “leading” to do His Work today?

He is leading those men and women who have been willing to follow the biblical teaching and pattern set before them by Christ’s END-time Apostle. Such individuals have NOT tried to “reinvent the wheel.” Rather, they are sincerely continuing the Work that Christ did through Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong over a period of 52 years. They are preaching the Truth “as they have been taught.” They are following, in principle, the way Christ guided Mr. Armstrong in doing a worldwide Work of preaching the Gospel. And they are practicing a genuine hierarchical form of government as the Bible directs and so showing FAITH in Jesus Christ to lead His Church as He always has. Therefore, they are—in *all these ways*—preparing properly for the soon-coming government of God to be set up on this earth.



**P.S.** Brethren, I have been asked to remind ALL of you Living Church of God members to attend *our own* Feast sites. We are even adding three additional sites this year for your convenience—in Ocean City, Maryland, in Florence, Oregon and in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Messrs. John Ogwyn, Carl McNair, Richard Ames and I will each speak at *three* different Feast sites—rather than two as in past years—so that you will have a strong speaking schedule at every major site. My wife and I will begin the Feast at Ocean City to kick off the new site. We will then travel to Panama City, and we will spend the final weekend at Lake of the Ozarks. At Living Church of God Feast sites, you will be receiving the kind of stirring Feast sermons and strong meat that Christ certainly wants you to have at the end of this age. So be sure to attend God’s commanded Feast of Tabernacles with the Living Church of God! Thank you in advance for your response and your loyalty.

# LYC 2001 Pre-Teen Camps

## Texas: New Skills and New Friends

June 10–15 was an exciting week for nearly 40 children between the ages of seven and 12. Mostly coming from Texas and Louisiana, these young people, along with six teenage counselors and 17 adult staff members, spent the week at Fort Parker State Park near Mexia, Texas. There was a wide range of activities, from archery, canoeing and softball to Christian living classes and an evening story time.

Mr. Gerald Weston, who oversees the Living Church of God youth program, provided guidance and support for those directly working with the Texas camp. Evangelist John Ogwyn, Southern Regional Pastor, served as camp director and was assisted by Mr. David Crockett of the Gladewater congregation. Mr. Jonathan McNair, Pastor for the Living Church of God congregations in Louisiana, helped teach several of the classes as well as serving as “Dorm Dad” for the boys. Mrs. Elaine Haughee served as “Dorm Mom” for the girls.

The state park provided a beautiful setting on Mexia Lake for the wide range of activities. We leased the group camp facility and had an air-conditioned headquarters building, which served as our dining hall and main activity center, and contained a full institutional-style kitchen. In addition, there were dorms for the campers and the

staff, as well as playing fields and a beautiful wooded setting with hiking trails.

The day began with morning exercises led by Mrs. Shirleen Solomon, who also served as camp nurse. This was followed by breakfast and a brief “morning motivational” given by Mr. Ogwyn. There were two classes for the campers in the morning, and three in the afternoon. Classes included fishing, orienteering, kickball, softball, archery, canoeing, volleyball, ping-pong, arts and crafts, baking and Christian living. After supper there was an opportunity for indoor games, such as Pictionary, then all gathered around before bedtime for a story read by Mr. Crockett.

Mr. Derek Forrestier, from the Houston congregation, is a certified archery instructor and provided the equipment needed for that class. Before the week was over, some of our budding “William Tells” were not only able to hit their target, but even to pop a balloon affixed to the target!

When the week ended, everyone was tired from a full schedule of activities, but already eagerly anticipating doing it again next year. The pre-teens had learned new skills and made new friends, all the while having a lot of fun in the process.

—Gerald Weston

## Missouri: “Let’s do it again!”

“Let’s do it again next year,” was the sentiment expressed by many of the 41 campers, ages 8 to 12, who converged at Camp Sherwood Forest in Cuivre River State Park from June 11–17. Camp was patterned after the successful Living Youth Camp for teens, which is held in Michigan each summer. One week of carefully planned and organized recreation and educational activities gave campers a significant positive emotional, intellectual and spiritual

experience. The camp sought to supplement parents’ own teaching of their children, and to help encourage young people toward God’s way of life.

The camp motto was: “All things are to be done decently, in order, without confusion, and in peace.” Three fundamental rules guided camp life: 1) Do not hurt yourself; 2) Do not hurt other people; 3) Do not hurt things. The campers were encouraged to lift standards—to

look sharp, feel sharp and be sharp! Staff sought to give each camper individualized personal attention, to help each child achieve some measure of success every day.

Days began with 15 minutes of “Morning Motivation”—intended to get the campers and staff off to a good start for the day. Camp Director Gerald Weston covered such subjects as: “To have friends you must be friendly” (Proverbs 18:24) and “It is the truth that will set you free”



Texas



Texas



Missouri



Missouri

(John 8:32). He also showed that if you correct a wise man, he will be wiser still (Proverbs 9:9); and that life is made up of choices, either good or bad (Deuteronomy 30:19). One morning, he explained that ticks are takers and that no one likes a taker. During Morning Motivation, dorms also had the opportunity to lead the other campers in songs that they had composed, reflecting events and goals of the camp.

Following Morning Motivation and breakfast, each day offered a full range of exciting activities, including arts and crafts, archery, baking, Christian living, canoeing, first aid, flag football, fitness for life, fishing, and manners. Evening activities included “Play-Doh Pictionary”—in which campers sculpted object for their dorms to guess—and an intense game of “Bunko” accompanied by nail-biting, shrieks, groans and shouts of “Bunko!”

Most activities took place in the main camp, but fishing and canoeing—new activities for a number of campers—were five minutes away at beautiful Lincoln Lake. A good number of bluegill and small bass were caught. All fish were safely released, since there was no time in the schedule to clean them.

Each day’s activities ended with Evening Reflection in the Recreation Building, with Mr. Karl Beyersdorfer leading the campers in singing hymns and Mr. Weston reading a short inspirational story to conclude a busy day. Before going to sleep, the counselors of the three girls’ cabins and four boys’ cabins dis-

cussed with their campers the day’s successes and shortcomings.

The weekly Sabbath began with a Friday night Bible Study conducted by Mr. Beyersdorfer, in which he gave guidelines about when we should point out an error to someone and when we should not. On Saturday afternoon, the St. Louis congregation made the drive up to Camp Sherwood Forest to join the campers for afternoon and evening activities. During the Sabbath service, Katrina Beyer led the LYC Pre-Teen Choir in a performance of “Remember Your Creator.” Mr. Weston gave a sermon using the Bible to illustrate positive and negative peer pressure.

Staff was made up of parents, other interested older adults, young adults and teens. The camp was a bit understaffed, which meant that everyone’s contributions were very much appreciated. Among the hardest working and most appreciated were Margie Reed and her helpers in the kitchen, who were up early and worked late during what turned out to be the hottest weather yet of the year.

Young people who were not able to attend this year can begin planning for next year’s pre-teen camps in Missouri and Texas. We hope also to open two additional pre-teen camps. Adults and teens who would like to serve as staff are also asked to remember next year’s camps. Be sure to read the *Living Church News* for announcements of these camps.

—Randy Gregory

## Wedding Anniversary Wedding Anniversary

### Petersons Host 50th Wedding Anniversary Celebration

Ron and Jean Peterson joined family and friends to celebrate 50 years of marriage at the Bartow Civic Center in Bartow, Fla. on July 1, 2001. The event included a buffet dinner, a musical show performed by the family and a dance with music by the Charlie Raymond Big Band and the Apple Blossom Vocal Trio. Approximately 325 family and friends attended this event.

Ron is the son of Lloyd and Jennie Peterson. He grew up in Liberty, Ill., and served in the Navy during the Korean War. Jean is the daughter of Basil and Alma Fountain. She grew up in LaBelle, Mo. and was employed by Haldeman and Son Seed Company in LaBelle.

The couple have seven children, all of whom attended the event. They are Rhonda Clore and family of Paris, France, Robin Morelli and family of Lakeland, Fla., Reginald Peterson and family of Davie, Fla., Rick Peterson and family of Big Sandy, Texas, Teresa Westwood and family of Chandler, Texas, Brenda Wendling and family of Berne, Ind. and Jeffrey Peterson and wife of Lakeland, Fla.

After returning from the service, Ron started his own company, JERG TV and Appliance (1954–1965), in Liberty, Ill., which moved to Quincy a year later. He began working at that time also at the Square Deal Auction selling used TVs

and appliances. He began his own auction and furniture store in 1965 after selling JERG. Ron worked as an auctioneer for about 35 years and ran an auction and jewelry business until he retired. Ron and Jean moved from Illinois to Florida in 1968.

Jean, in addition to rearing their seven children, assisted Ron in his business as bookkeeper and cashier. She supported Ron not only in his work, but also in his involvement with music and the Church.

Music has been a big part of their family history. Ron performed in public from the time he was three years old. He sponsored the Norge Western Jamboree on WGEM TV starting in 1960, which later became the Possum Holler Opry. Ron continued the tradition of music by starting a family country western music show, Country Shindig, in Kissimmee, Fla. in 1977. Ron has also served as choir director for the St. Petersburg, Tampa and Lakeland congregations, as well as serving as song leader. He was ordained as an elder in 1996.

Ron and Jean are now retired and are living in Lakeland, Fla. Ron's mother also lives in Lakeland and is 92 years old. Ron and Jean continue to be actively involved in the work of the Church.

### Birth

Andrew Jeffrey McNair was born on June 19, 2001, to Rod and Dana McNair, weighing 7 pounds, 13 ounces at birth. His father pastors Living Church of God congregations in Sacramento, California and Reno, Nevada and serves as Regional Director for the Philippines.

## Fond Farewell

On May 5, 2001 the Alaskan congregations got together in Anchorage to bid adieu to Val and Lolita Martin, who are returning to the Philippines. After services, the Alaskan brethren presented Mr. and Mrs. Martin with two Bibles signed by every member in Alaska. Soon afterward, Mr. Martin stood up to speak to the brethren, offering a heartfelt farewell to all. The

brethren then enjoyed a pot-luck meal and many hours of fellowship.

Mr. and Mrs. Martin have been longtime Church members, first in the Worldwide Church of God, then Global and now in the Living Church of God. Val Martin began attending Bible studies in 1973. Two years later, he and his wife were baptized on the same day.

They moved from the Philippines to Florida, then moved from Florida to Alaska in 1993. After eight years of making our fellowship in Alaska pleasant and fruitful, the Martins are retiring to the Philippines, where they have family and have plans to serve the Church. They will be residing in the town of San Manul in San Mateo, Isabela.

## Alaskan Ordinations

Alaska has been blessed with two recently ordained deacons; Mr. Andy Grozier and Mr. Shane Franke. The ordinations were conducted on May 19 by church elder Mr. Gary Ullerick in the Anchorage home of Mr. Grozier. Members of the Homer and Anchorage video groups combined for Sabbath services that day and held a pot-luck afterward.

Mr. Grozier, who lives in the Anchorage area with his wife Viola and two children, works as a real estate broker and stevedore. He was baptized by Mr. James Turner in 1990. Mr. Franke, who lives on the Kenai Peninsula with his wife Kim and four children, works as a home contractor. He was baptized by Mr. Dean Wilson in 1986.

## IN LOVING MEMORY

Mrs. Joann Ownby, 56, a deaconess from the Sonora, California, congregation, died on Wednesday, May 16th, from an aortic aneurysm. She is survived by her husband, Mr. Gary Ownby (a deacon from the Sonora congregation), and by five children, 14 grandchildren, two sisters and a brother.

Mr. and Mrs. Ownby were in the San Diego area helping the Church with the semi-annual letter at the time of her death. She was known as a selfless server, and was respected by all who knew her. Her funeral was well attended by brethren from several fellowships. We will miss her dedicated presence until the resurrection.

## Internet Video Bible Studies

For brethren with Internet access, the Church is continuing a series of Internet Video Bible Study programs posted on the official Church Web site: [www.livingcog.org](http://www.livingcog.org). Already finished are an eight-part series on Joshua and Judges, given by Mr. John Ogwyn, and a 32-part series on Matthew, given by Dr. Meredith. A seven-part series on 1 and 2 Peter is currently underway, given by Dr. Douglas Winnail. Next in the series will be a study on Philipians, given by Dr. Jeff Fall.

For those without Internet access, audiotapes of each series will be made available, and sent to each local congregation's tape library. So, even if you do not have a computer, you can take advantage of this ongoing series of online Bible Study programs.

# Commentary

## Life's Real Goal

By Richard F. Ames

Ambitious people commit their full energies to advancing their personal agendas. They will lose sleep, drive themselves and stop at almost nothing to achieve their goals. Many will use any deceitful tactic, lie or evil to get their way. And for what? Is their all-consuming purpose worthwhile? Will it benefit the character and quality of life of others? What is the *real* goal for which all of us should be striving?

The Bible eloquently speaks of man's vanity. Vanity in one sense is self-centeredness and selfishness. In a broader sense it is the uselessness, futility and short-term indulgence that goes nowhere and ends in death. The Psalmist stated it this way: "Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity" (Psalm 39:5, KJV). The NIV phrases it: "Each man's life is but a breath." The NKJV states: "Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor." Certainly, without God in the picture—without the long-term view of eternity—human beings accomplish nothing of eternal value. They die having lived their whole lives in vain!

The parable of the rich fool in Luke 12 reveals the vanity of making one's life-goal the accumulation of physical possessions. The fool was so prosperous that he focused only on his own rewards. "So he said, [in Luke 12:18-21] 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Christians know that *God's* way should be our goal in life. We look forward to the return of the Savior to save the world from itself and institute lasting peace and prosperity for all humanity. In the meantime, we follow His precepts, particularly Luke 4:4: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" In our commitment to life's *real* goal, we cannot allow ourselves the false luxury of worldly distractions. Jesus warned us in Matthew 13:22 about the "cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches [which] choke the word, and he [the individual called by the gospel] becomes unfruitful."

It is time for all Christians to renew their commitment to wholeheartedly seek the Kingdom of God above everything else in life (Matthew 6:33)—and to resist the many distractions and detours leading to vanity. As Jesus said in Luke 21:36: "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." We anticipate the Second Coming of Christ to this earth and His triumphal establishment of the Kingdom of God over all nations. We can be a part of that Kingdom for all eternity. That is life's *real* goal and purpose. Is it yours?

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*This commentary can be found on the Church Web page, [www.livingcog.org](http://www.livingcog.org), in the Commentary Library, along with many other commentaries on key topics facing our world.*