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## After God's Own Heart

Dear Brethren and Friends,

Do you want to be more like King David of Israel—the “man after God’s own heart” (Acts 13:22)? Through most of my Christian life, King David and the Apostle Paul were my main biblical “heroes”—apart from Jesus Christ Himself. As I have grown older, I have added Abraham and the beloved Apostle John to this list. But that is another story. Over the years, I have studied King David’s life, and have preached several sermons on *why* he was a man “after God’s own heart.” We have published a couple of fine articles on this as well.

Now, however, in this “Dear Brethren” letter, I want to zero in on just *one often-neglected aspect* of David’s relationship with God. We in the very Church of God should earnestly be trying to grow closer and closer to God *in every way*. Through fervent prayer, and through God’s Holy Spirit, we should all strive to achieve a deep closeness to God and to our Savior, Jesus Christ. We should try to obey *fully* what the Son of God Himself stated was the “great commandment of the Law.” For Jesus said: “You shall love the LORD your God with *all* your heart, with *all* your soul, and with *all* your mind” (Matthew 22:36–37).

There were two primary ways by which King David obeyed this fundamental command. First, as we all know, David sincerely **loved** God’s Law and meditated on it constantly. We read David’s words on this in Psalm 119:97–99: “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation.” And again: “I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes forever, to the very end” (v. 112).

*No wonder* David will once again be “king over all Israel” under Jesus Christ in Tomorrow’s World! *No one* has had more direct experience in administering God’s Law and His form of *government* over an entire nation than has King David. Christ’s soon-coming government will be fundamentally based on God’s commandments, and on the “statutes,” as they are spiritually understood and administered under the New Covenant. Christ’s government will also be *hierarchical*—with those in authority *appointed* to their offices. There will be **no voting** and *no politics*, but rather a deep faith that *Christ* will install the right people in each office. That is why it is *vitaly important* that we in God’s Church today learn to *teach* and *practice* God’s form of government in the Church—looking *in faith* to our living Head, Jesus Christ, to guide and orchestrate the government in *His* Church. For if we do not even have the faith *now* to trust

Christ to lead His Church, *how* can we expect to have any significant responsibility in His soon-coming government?

The other “key” manner in which David expressed his profound love for God was in his attitude of being *deeply thankful, appreciative and worshipful* before God in a manner beyond what most men in human history have ever exhibited. The Psalms of David reveal, in a remarkable way, what David was thinking and feeling—while he was literally “fleeing for his life” from King Saul, while he was desperately sick or emotionally distraught, or when he realized the *awfulness* of his sin in the matter of Uriah and Bathsheba. These are the thoughts and feelings of one of the greatest men of God ever. They are worthy of our deep and prayerful study and consideration.

When David had to flee from his rebellious son, Absalom, he wrote: “LORD, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. Many are they who say of me, ‘There is no help for him in God.’ Selah. But You, O LORD, are a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head. I cried to the LORD with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill. Selah” (Psalm 3:1–4). When David was finally delivered from Saul, he wrote this prayer of exultation: “I will love You, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies” (Psalm 18:1–3).

Later in this magnificent psalm of praise, David described the *glory* and the *power* of the God he served. “Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, because He was angry. Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth; coals were kindled by it.... The LORD thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice, hailstones and coals of fire. He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, the foundations of the world were uncovered at Your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of Your nostrils” (vv. 7–8; 13–15). Here, David pictured his God as literally *shaking* the earth, and pictured God’s voice as *rolling thunder*. Those of you who have lived in parts of the earth where violent lightning and thunderstorms literally *shake the earth* can grasp the awesome power of God that David portrayed in his psalms.

His absolute worship of the great God, and his deep awe of God’s power, gave David great faith and courage. When Goliath, the giant, came powerfully striding toward David, “cursed David by his gods” (1 Samuel 17:43), and threatened to destroy him, the valiant young man was imbued with remarkable faith and courage. For David’s mind was **not** on himself—that is the “key”—but on the awesome power and majesty of **God**. So David cried out, with a great confidence, toward the giant Philistine: “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied... that all the earth may know that there is a **God** in Israel” (vv. 45–46).

David’s absolute faith that the wonderful God he served would “take care of things” helped prevent him from executing King Saul

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# Strive for Excellence

## Editorial

By Roderick C. Meredith

In our modern world it is often considered fashionable to be “cool.” Young people sometimes pride themselves on not appearing to be “trying too hard.” Yet that is exactly the *opposite* of what our God wants us to be and to do! In fact, most of us in God’s Church may need to “try harder” than those endowed with more natural ability and who have perhaps been afforded more opportunities for higher education and opportunities to learn the social graces than most of us.

Why?

Because, as God clearly states in several different ways in His Word: “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:26–27). In God’s Church, we should deeply love and appreciate one another and the various gifts that we have—even though we may know that very few of us are truly rich or endowed with great natural ability. Instead, because we are more like “most folks,” we may be more humble and not have the same temptations to vanity and to resisting the Truth as have those with so much more ability. There are not now, nor have there ever been, very many Winston Churchills, Albert Einsteins, Margaret Thatchers or Teddy Roosevelts in the Church of God. These magnificently gifted peo-

ple will have their opportunity in the Great White Throne Judgment.

But, today, we are called to become full sons of God. We are called to emulate Jesus Christ. We are instructed: “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:15–16). And to achieve this awesome goal, we are commanded by our Savior: “But *seek first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

*Nothing* must be allowed to come between us and our transcendent goal. It must always come *first*. Moreover, because we are not the “great” of the world in natural ability, social standing or material wealth, we will need to put forth *greater effort* and to exercise greater *zeal* in our quest to fulfill God’s purpose for our lives. *But this is nothing unusual!* For nearly every top athlete, top corporate executive or top world leader has been willing to put forth “extra effort” in order to achieve his or her goal. You young people in the Church, especially, need to realize this and be inspired to accomplish great things—for you *can do so* with God’s help and earnest extra effort on your part!

In his very inspiring biography of Winston Churchill, Robert Lewis Taylor describes the drive and unceasing energy that Churchill poured into the effort of leading his nation during the critical days of World War II. Taylor writes: “The burdens of leadership take an incalculable toll in the passage of six war years, but Churchill seemed never to tire. He traveled thousands of miles, he worked each night until everyone else had gone to

bed, and he arose refreshed to hurl the oratorical thunders that rallied a people from despondency and defeat” (Winston Churchill: *The Biography of a Great Man*, p. 363).

Here was a man who did not even begin his career as Prime Minister until about the time in life when most men were ready to retire. Yet, because his supreme goal was to enable his nation to survive Hitler’s onslaught and win the war, Mr. Churchill drove himself to accomplish an agenda that would have staggered most men even half his age!

Each of us must apply the examples of Sir Winston and others to our *spiritual* growth and accomplishment. For our God wants us to go “all out” in serving Him and in doing His Work! During this Laodicean era, God specifically warns us all: “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth” (Revelation 3:15–16). Then God tells us: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be *zealous* and *repent*” (v. 19).

God appreciates those who go “all out” to serve Him. The Apostle Paul was inspired to write to the Colossians: “And whatever you do, do it *heartily*, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23–24). And Solomon was inspired to tell us: “Whatever your hand finds to do, *do it with your might*; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wis-

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# Dealing with Trials

By Douglas S. Winnail

**W**hy is life so difficult at times? For a child blessed with a loving and nurturing family environment, every day is a new adventure, and almost every new experience generates excitement. As we mature beyond childhood, we entertain bright hopes and dreams for the future. However, as we grow older, life often darkens and becomes a series of problems—and these problems usually come at the most inopportune moments, when we least expect or want them! We may even make cynical comments like: “cheer up, it could get worse”—then find that after we cheer up, things really do grow worse!

Why do we experience trials and problems? Are there reasons that life can become so difficult? Each year, millions seek help from psychiatrists, psychologists, ministers and counselors as they attempt to deal with trials. Others turn to friends and neighbors for advice. Sometimes this advice is helpful, yet often one person’s advice conflicts with another’s. Not surprisingly, many use alcohol and drugs as a means to cope or escape from problems—which only leads to more problems. Many do not realize that the Bible contains positive advice and practical, proven guidelines to help us not only *deal* with trials but even *avoid* many problems.

## Why Trials?

People often consider life’s trials the result of “bad luck” or of sad circumstances beyond their control. People with problems are sometimes ridiculed as ignorant, or as having made stupid decisions. In some cultures where superstitions prevail, trials may be viewed as the results of curses placed by one’s enemies. People with a “religious” perspective may conclude that a trial is a punishment from God, or that God may be trying to “send a message”—but find themselves unable to understand the reason for the punishment, or the message God is sending. In our problem-filled world, many simply shrug off trials as one of the uncomfortable, inevitable and miserable aspects of life.

For a person wrestling with a serious trial, the common explanations are seldom helpful and provide little comfort or consolation. Most people simply do not understand why trials occur in this life, or how to deal with them effectively when they arise. However, our Creator reveals in Scripture some important perspectives on why trials occur, and provides some helpful principles

for dealing with serious human problems. David understood this when he wrote: “Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). One of the benefits of knowing God’s Truth is that it sets us free from the doubt and ignorance that plague so many in the world today (John 8:32). Another benefit is that when we experience trials and problems with a proper perspective, we can have greater peace of mind and can even use trials in a positive way that will help us grow (see James 1:2–4). The Bible reveals at least five reasons why trials occur.

- Jesus explained that *time and chance* happen to many people (Luke 13:1–5). Just because something bad happens to a person does not necessarily mean that he is evil or has committed a great sin. Accidents happen. Storms, floods, fires, earthquakes and other natural disasters affect large numbers of people all the time. Sickness strikes millions every year. Everyone eventually dies. This is a normal part of the human condition in this world.
- The Bible also emphasizes that *we reap what we sow* (Galatians 6:7; Jeremiah 2:19). One of the fundamental lessons we must learn in life is that there are consequences for every decision we make (Hosea 4:9). We reap the benefits of good decisions, and we pay—sometimes dearly—for bad decisions. Sadly, in our misguided world today, many professing Christians claim to “love the Lord”—yet ignore His laws, do as they please, and are surprised and dismayed when problems arise.
- One unique biblical perspective that most psychological counselors ignore is that human beings have an *adversary*—Satan the devil (1 Peter 5:8). The word “Satan” literally means *adversary*. This powerful, evil spirit being acts like a roaring lion, seeking whomever he can devour and destroy by whatever means he can. If he can use trials to discourage and disillusion us, he will! He will seek any opportunity available to deceive us, mislead us, or divert us onto doctrinal tangents and personal missions that feed our vanity and ultimately destroy us (1 Timothy 5:14). Satan’s goal is not only to keep the Truth from the world, but to keep those who are called from being in the Kingdom of God. Whenever he can, he will use trials to further that goal.

- Another biblical perspective is that God *allows us to be tested* to help us *grow* (1 Peter 4:12–13; Hebrews 12:5–11). Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Job, Daniel, Jeremiah, the prophets, the Apostles—and indeed *every* individual with whom God has chosen to work—has had to face trials and learn how to deal with them. You and I will not be exceptions to the rule. Jesus told His disciples: “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). He was indicating that by looking to Him, and following His example, we can also overcome trials that we encounter.
- A sobering biblical perspective is that *God fashions severe trials* and even disasters, to teach powerful lessons to those who are willfully disobedient. God told Jeremiah to warn the rebellious nation of Israel what would occur if it did not repent of its evil actions: “Behold, *I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you*” (Jeremiah 18:6–11). God instructed Ezekiel to deliver a similar message to Israelites who rejected His laws: “My eye will not spare, nor will I have pity; I will repay you according to your ways, and your abominations... disaster will come upon disaster” (Ezekiel 7:9, 25–26). These prophecies will find their ultimate fulfillment in the coming chastisement of our modern backsliding, independent-minded Israelite nations in the years just ahead. Even in the formative days of the early Church, when Ananias and his wife lied, they *died suddenly* to provide a stunning object lesson to those with eyes to see (Acts 5:1–11).

When a trial arises, we face two fundamental challenges if we are going to grow. First, we need to *make the effort* to understand *why* the trial has arisen in our lives. This will help us identify changes we can make in our lives to avoid having to face a similar situation in the future. Second, we must also focus on *learning how* to deal with and overcome the trial we are facing. Unless we address these two challenges, we will not grow as a result of the trial. Again, the Bible offers extremely helpful advice.

### **Biblical Guidelines**

When trials occur, it is a “natural” tendency to think: “Woe is me.” We sometimes want to cry and complain that we do not deserve this negative turn of events, and we look for others with whom to commiserate, who will

help us justify ourselves in our plight. It is also quite common to feel discouraged and to look for ways to ignore, avoid or escape from a trial, or to pray that the problem will just go away! However, we often have no choice but to endure a trial. The question then becomes: how do you deal with a trial, once you have begun to understand the reasons why it has arisen?

How do you avoid or deal with trials that arise by *accident or chance*? Jesus told His disciples, when He sent them into a dangerous world, that they must “be wise as serpents” (Matthew 10:16). Proverbs tells us that a wise person recognizes dangerous situations and takes steps to avoid them (Proverbs 22:3). The bottom line is: stay alert and be careful! Drive carefully, live carefully and be circumspect in your actions. Do not take foolish chances. Do not engage in risky behaviors, such as drunkenness, smoking, gambling or promiscuous sexual activity. Keep sensible hours. Do not stay out late at night, especially on holidays when many accidents, crimes and assaults occur. Watch weather forecasts when you are about to travel. By wisely following these simple, common sense guidelines, you can avoid many trials that might otherwise be attributed to “time and chance.” God’s protection is a blessing that one who obeys His laws can expect to receive (Psalm 91). This supernatural protection is also available for our children (Matthew 19:13–15; 18:10). Jesus’ basic instruction was to act wisely, obey His instructions and not worry unnecessarily about problems.

How do we avoid or deal with trials that are caused by *consequences of our own actions*? The Bible reveals that blessings come from obedience to the laws of God, and curses come from disobedience to those laws (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). Proverbs explains that “when a man’s ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Proverbs 16:7). Life involves making choices at every minute and every hour of every day. The sooner we learn to make wise choices—to obey the laws and instructions in God’s word instead of ignoring, reasoning around or compromising those laws—the smoother our lives will become, and the fewer trials we will bring upon ourselves. The longer it takes to learn this basic lesson, the more difficult our lives will be as a consequence of our own decisions (Deuteronomy 30). This is why the Bible places such an emphasis on parents teaching their children the laws of God from an early age (Deuteronomy 4:1–10; Proverbs 22:6). If we *learn* the laws of God, and if we *remember* and *choose to follow* those laws, we will enjoy the benefits (Proverbs 3:1–2) throughout our lives—and create fewer trials for ourselves.

Much of Scripture was inspired to help us understand the importance of learning to make wise decisions.

Throughout the book of Proverbs, we are urged to observe and learn from the experiences of others, so that we can avoid making the same mistakes (Proverbs 1:20–27). We are advised to “ponder the path of our feet”—to think about the potential consequences of decisions and actions that we contemplate (Proverbs 4:26). Being receptive to advice and instruction—especially from parents—can help us avoid serious problems (Proverbs 6:20–23). Our choice of friends will also bring consequences: “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed” (Proverbs 1:10–19; 13:20; 14:7). Many trials that develop in life come as a result of wrong or unwise choices, often made by individuals who know (or should know) better.

How do we deal with trials generated by our *adversary*, Satan? To effectively deal with this cunning and adversarial spirit being, we need not only wisdom, but also spiritual discernment and spiritual strength. One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is a sound mind capable of spiritual discernment (2 Timothy 1:6–7). We are told that God gives His Spirit to those who *obey* His laws and instructions (Acts 5:32), to those who are willing to be *led* by God’s Spirit (Romans 8:14), and to those who *nourish* that Spirit daily (2 Corinthians 4:16) through regular prayer and Bible study. To battle successfully we must be able to *recognize* Satan’s attempts to deceive, discourage, or derail us through various temptations and trials, and *resist* those attempts by putting on the “whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:10–19; James 4:7). Spiritually protective armor includes knowing and living by the truth of God, showing real love for God and our neighbor, believing God’s instructions and promises, nourishing and being led by the Holy Spirit and being watchful at all times of the dangerous activities of our spiritual adversary. We simply invite spiritual trials when we assume we can discard various pieces of this vital spiritual armor.

How do we handle the trials that *God permits us to have* to help us grow? We must learn to view trials from a *positive* perspective. James wrote that, instead of thinking “woe is me” and running away, we should *rejoice* in trials, because the effort required to overcome them will yield positive fruits (James 1:2–4). To view trials in this manner, we must understand and believe that “all things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28), that our Father knows our limitations and “will also make a way of escape” (1 Corinthians 10:13), and that once He has begun a work in us He will see it through to completion (Philippians 1:3–6). To maintain this perspective, we must remain strong, faithful and focused on our calling and on God’s way of life, and we must “endure to the end” without compromising or giving up (Matthew 24:13; Hebrews 12:1–11). We should be motivated by the under-

standing that rewards go to those who actually *finish the race* (1 Corinthians 9:24–27) and learn to be *overcomers*. Instead of allowing ourselves to become complainers or escape artists, we need to become problem solvers! As we learn to deal with our own trials and solve our own problems, we are preparing to help others with theirs.

But that leaves one more trial—how do you deal with severe trials that *God brings your way*? Most of the severe trials we read about in Scripture came as a result of willful and continued disobedience to the laws of God. Paul warns that God will not be mocked (Galatians 6:7). Not only will He let us reap what we sow, He will orchestrate punishment to teach unforgettable lessons to the disobedient, and also to those bystanders who have witnessed the disobedience (see Ezekiel 5:14–15; Acts 5:11). To avoid experiencing trials of this nature, or to deal with such a situation should it arise, we must be willing to carefully *examine* ourselves—our motives and our actions—in the clear light of God’s word (1 Corinthians 11:27–32). We must be willing to *repent*—to admit where we have been wrong as David did—to ask earnestly that God will forgive us and point us in the right direction (see Psalm 51). There is a way through even these severe trials, but we are playing with fire when we allow ourselves to fall into this situation. We need to remember that God is not playing games. There is a *real* lake of fire for the incorrigible—those who will not listen or learn—and it will be the final destination for such people. This should motivate each of us to be very careful about “doing our own thing”! Instead, we must humbly and diligently seek to obey God’s instructions, heed His warnings, and follow the Christian example and instructions of those whom God has chosen to lead His work. That is what Jesus did and taught. By following His example, we can avoid ever having to face the severe trials that God will bring on those who insist on doing things their own way.

Nobody likes a trial. Trials are not pleasant. Yet trials are part of the human experience. Many can be avoided if we remain alert to potentially dangerous situations, and learn to consider the consequences of any decision we make. We can also avoid serious trials if we seek out—and are receptive to—wise counsel and advice. When we cannot avoid trials, the Bible offers us the encouraging perspective that God uses trials to help us grow, and that He will help us through the trials when we do our part. If we learn how to deal with the problems of life, and we develop the skills and character necessary to overcome trials that are common to all human beings, God will be able to use us to rule with Jesus Christ and to reeducate the peoples of this world in the coming Kingdom of God. The trials we face and overcome in this life can become stepping-stones to an awesome and rewarding future. ☐

# Jury Duty:

## A Christian's Perspective

By John H. Ogwyn

**M**y wife and I pulled into our driveway late one Sunday afternoon, coming home from a church trip, and I took our mail from the mailbox and brought it inside. As I quickly sorted through the mail, a large yellow notice leaped out at me. With dismay, I noted that I had been summoned for jury duty. To make matters even worse, the date for which I had been summoned was Monday, June 3—the opening day of LYC Pre-Teen Camp Texas, which I was directing.

Carefully, I scrutinized the notice to see if I could check some box that would give me an excuse or an exemption. No, I would not be able to get out of it that easily. “Why couldn’t it have been my wife?” I thought. My wife is a Canadian citizen, and is therefore ineligible to sit on a jury in the United States. If she had received the notice, she could have simply checked the box indicating that she was a non-citizen, and mailed it back for an automatic exemption.

Traditionally in the United States, each county’s roster of those called for jury duty was selected from its rolls of registered voters. Because of lawsuits in the last couple of decades, this roster is now made up from those with driver’s licenses. Even so, most jurisdictions maintain a wide variety of categories of people who hold a valid driver’s license, but are exempt from jury duty. In the county where I live, for example, those over 70 years old, those with young children at home, and those who are full-time students may claim exemption. Non-citizens and

convicted felons, too, are ineligible for jury duty. Everyone who does not fit into one of the court-approved exemptions is required to appear in court at the appointed time. The jury duty notice is a legal summons, and failure to appear could potentially result in arrest.

At this point, I had two concerns. One was my general objection to jury service based on religious convictions. The other was that, at the time I was required to appear in court, I needed to be at church camp, about 200 miles south of the court in which I was summoned to appear. After thinking the matter over for a couple of days, and praying about it, I decided to call the District Clerk’s office at the phone number listed on the summons, and request a later date for jury duty. I talked to a secretary and explained that we had a church youth camp going on that week, and I asked if it would be possible to change the date of my jury summons. She was quick to accommodate, and offered me a choice of several alternate dates, one of which I selected. I would need to appear in about six weeks.

This brings to mind the first important lesson I have learned in dealing with a jury summons. Talking to the secretary was not the time to discuss my religious objections to jury duty. There was nothing she could do about that, but she could handle routine excuses or time changes. If you have a *routine* excuse for an exemption, you may find it best to simply use it, even though you also have a religious objection. In Texas, only the judge can grant an

excuse for religious reasons, so I concluded that there was no point in confusing the secretary in the Clerk’s office, and perhaps risking having my routine request for a later date sidelined.

Of course, the later date only postponed the inevitable. The Clerk’s office still required me to appear in court and explain why I could not sit on a jury. During the ensuing month, I gave a lot of thought to the reasons why I should not sit on a jury and pass judgment. I did not know how much explanation I would be asked to give, or what kind of attitude to expect from the judge. Church members over the years have sought exemption from jury service based upon their religious beliefs, even though most states’ statutes do not recognize religious beliefs as a valid cause for exemption. Federal courts have, however, upheld religious exemptions as valid, and the Church Legal Affairs Office can provide you with its “Jury Duty Exemption Request” form, including the details to substantiate your claim of religious exemption. Area Pastors also have access to these forms, from the “Church Administration” area of the Member Resources Web site at [www.cogl.org](http://www.cogl.org).

While many have been excused from jury service for religious reasons over the years, I wonder how many have really understood what the “big deal” was regarding jury duty. Is it wrong to serve on a jury—and if so, why? Can you prove your reasons from the Bible? Scripture enjoins us to be ready to give an

answer to those who ask concerning the hope that lies within us (1 Peter 3:15).

## We Are Ambassadors for Christ

Members of the Church of God have traditionally avoided participation in the military and political affairs of society. This has not only been an issue in our day, but also has been the historic position of the Church, traced back to the first century. What are some of the reasons for this?

When Jesus Christ was on trial for His life before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, He told Pilate that His Kingdom was not “of this world.” Christ went on to add that if it were, His servants would fight to deliver Him from the Jews (cf. John 18:36). Jesus Christ came as the advance emissary of a coming world-ruling government. Because of that, neither He nor His disciples took part in the political and military affairs of this world’s governments. Jesus Christ would not stir His followers into forming an army to fight for His Kingdom, as did other so-called “messiahs” that arose among the Jews from time to time. Those false messiahs represented political factions among the Jewish community, though factions with very strong religious overtones. The coming government that Jesus proclaimed was far different; it was not to depend on the success of human efforts, rather it was to be established by the supreme power of the God of Heaven, and it would sweep away all puny human governments when the time came (cf. Daniel 7:14).

The Apostle Paul explained in Philippians 3:20 that Christians’ citizenship is in Heaven. Our primary allegiance and devotion must be to the Kingdom of God, not to the

earthly government under whose rule we temporarily reside. We are, in fact, *ambassadors* for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). An ambassador is an official emissary of one government to another. We are, in that sense, to properly represent God’s coming Kingdom in the midst of whatever human society we live in. It is proper that we should love our native land, and if we are living a Christian life we will be productive, law-abiding inhabitants of the locale where we reside. In addition, we should show respect and honor to our government, and pray for its officials, as well as obey the laws of society (unless, of course, they directly contradict God’s law), and pay our taxes (Romans 13:1–7). However, all of this being said, we cannot be part of this world and its ways. This includes its political system.

Notice the record preserved by the noted historian Edward Gibbon. Writing of the early Christians, he observed that “Christians felt and confessed that such institutions [worldly governments] might be necessary for the present system of the world, and they cheerfully submitted to the authority of their Pagan governors. But, while they inculcated the maxims of passive obedience, they refused to take any active part in the civil administration or the military defense of the empire” (*The Triumph of Christendom in the Roman Empire*, p. 41).

## Judging Righteous Judgment

While Christians are not to take part in the military and political affairs of this world’s governments, the question of jury duty raises other issues as well. Some have pointed to the Apostle Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 6:2: “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?” Does this verse prove that Christians should sit on juries and render judgment about certain secular disputes here and now? No. Notice the context of this verse. Paul is addressing the issue of Christians taking other Christians to worldly courts in order to resolve disputes. He points out the utter absurdity of those who are preparing to judge the world under Christ not being able to resolve disputes with one another within the Church. It holds Christianity up to ridicule from the outside when fellow believers are “slugging it out” in worldly courts. In context, this has nothing to do with believers sitting in judgment of unbelievers.

There is another very important, but often overlooked, aspect of this issue. After the first resurrection, when true Christians sit on thrones exercising judgment as part of God’s government, what criteria for judgment will be used? The Bible is very clear that our judgment in those days will be based upon the same standard that should guide Christians’ hearts and minds right now—**God’s laws** as revealed in the Bible (Isaiah 2:3–4).

Isaiah 11 gives further information about judgment in tomorrow’s world, telling us that the Messiah will not make His decisions based only upon what things look like or what He has heard. Rather, we are told, He will judge the whole world with righteousness (v. 4). What is righteousness? Psalms 119:172 thunders that **all of God’s commandments are** righteousness. Righteous judgment must be based upon the revealed word of God. When we judge the world under Christ, we will judge the world in righteousness! When we make judgments in our personal lives, or are involved in seeking to settle disputes



between brethren, we are to use exactly the same criteria. God's word defines right and wrong, and tells us how to draw proper distinctions.

Righteousness and faithfulness will be hallmarks of the way that God's government is administered. Decisions will be made with equity—utter fairness (Isaiah 11:4). As Christians, we need to be developing this understanding and approach as part of our character. Serving on a jury in a worldly court will bring us into conflict with these principles.

“How can that possibly be?” you may wonder. “Don't mankind's courts seek jurors who strive to be fair and just?” Certainly, most judges would say that they want jurors who can be fair and impartial, and can render a just verdict. That sounds good, but we need to realize that there is more involved than might appear at first glance. For instance, when I found myself sitting in a courtroom as part of the jury pool and receiving instructions from the judge about what was required of us, most of it sounded good on the surface. As procedures were explained, we were told that our decision was to be made on the basis of what we heard in court. We were expected to render our decision based upon the instructions the judge would give us regarding the law. We were admonished that we must only consider as facts those matters admitted into evidence in court.

There are problems with this procedure, however. To begin with, a juror will *not* be privy to *all* of the facts of a case. In many instances, the opposing lawyers will have already made efforts to have the judge disallow some information the other side seeks to present. Both sides are seeking to win the case for their clients, so each will only emphasize those points that support their side's case. If, using some legal technicality, they are able to prevent

the other side from revealing to the jury certain facts that would damage their case, “so much the better”! In most cases, jurors will never even be aware of this backstage maneuvering. Even after truthful information is presented to jurors in court, the judge will sometimes instruct jurors to disregard that information when rendering their verdict.

The *Texas Uniform Jury Handbook*, which we were given at the start of the jury selection process, instructs: “The verdict must be based **solely** [emphasis mine] on the evidence presented by the parties, the Charge of the Court, and

shall be established.” In the particular case that I would have heard as a juror, the guilt or innocence of the accused turned on the testimony of only *one* witness. Under the laws of the State of Texas this is permissible, and jurors are to make their decision based upon how they weigh the credibility of the witness. However, if I were to judge according to God's instructions, I would be forbidden by Deuteronomy 19:15 to render a verdict of guilty upon the testimony of one alone—no matter how credible he seemed.

To serve as a juror, I would need to agree to use only the rules of evi-

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rules of law provided by the Judge.” Notice the contrast with the instructions of Scripture, inspired by God, regarding circumstances when decisions of guilt or innocence were to be made. Those involved in determining guilt or innocence were required not to rely only on what they had heard, but also to make **diligent inquiry** into the facts (Deuteronomy 13:14). Those judging were only to proceed after they were sure that the facts of the matter had been fully established.

Deuteronomy 19:15 provides important instruction regarding decisions made in judicial matters. “One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter

evidence acknowledged by the court. I would need to agree to be guided by the laws of Texas as explained by the presiding judge, whether or not they conformed to biblical injunctions. I could not make such an agreement as a Christian—one who is obligated to follow Christ's example and make all decisions based upon the word of God.

### **Mercy and Judgment**

There is another very important issue that we have not yet examined. In Scripture, mercy is continually joined with judgment. Jesus Christ instructed His followers in Luke 6:36–37: “Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged.

Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven.” Righteous judgment includes not only the standard of God’s law, but also justice mixed with mercy. You cannot follow Jesus Christ and disregard the importance of mercy.

In John 8, we read of a woman who was taken in adultery and then brought before Jesus Christ by religious leaders in Jerusalem. Jesus was asked to render a verdict and assess punishment. The facts of the case were not in dispute, nor was the penalty that the law required. How did Jesus respond? He considered an *additional* aspect of the case: the *motives* of the woman’s accusers. He stooped down and wrote in the dust for a while, seemingly ignoring the clamor of the crowd. Finally, he stood up (at this point, what He had written must have become visible) and acknowledged both the woman’s guilt and the prescribed penalty of stoning, with the added caveat that the one among the group who was without sin should throw the first stone. Christ knew that the woman’s accusers were hypocrites, and He would neither play their game nor fall into their trap. When her accusers melted away, He offered the woman a fresh chance, coupled with the admonition to “go and sin no more” (v. 11). God allows for repentance and forgiveness.

As Christians, our decisions are to be guided by God’s Word. To agree to be guided solely by man’s law would be to do something that Jesus Christ would never do! Now is not the time for us to be engaged in judging the world. That time *is* coming, however, after Jesus Christ returns to this earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. As Christians, we prepare for that future by learning to make all of our choices upon the basis of God’s revealed will.

While we may need to make judgments in settling disputes among ourselves, and may sometimes impose church discipline upon brethren who persist in sin (cf. 1 Corinthians 5), we cannot impose God’s way on the world around us. That will not be accomplished until God sends Jesus Christ back to Earth. Ultimately, the governments of this world will have to answer to the Creator regarding the extent to which they applied—or failed to apply—His standards of

objection in writing on the questionnaire we had been asked to submit to the court. Finally, we were instructed to go wait in the hallway while a jury was picked. As we rose to file out of the room, I asked the judge if I could approach the bench. She invited me to do so. I then told her that I needed to bring something to her attention, and to the attention of the attorneys involved in selecting the jury. I then simply explained that, based upon my religious convictions, I would not be able to render a

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right judgment. As Christians, our responsibility is to love the people of the world (Matthew 22:39), to set an example for the world, to take God’s message of good news and of warning to the world and to pray for the world—but *not* to become *part* of this world (1 John 2:15).

As I sat with other potential jurors in that Texas courtroom, I knew that I could not in good conscience agree to make the kind of judgment that they wanted me to make. While the judge and the attorneys examined the potential jurors, asking us various questions, I kept waiting for a question that would apply to me. None of their questions dealt with religious objection, though I had explained my religious

verdict in the case. In less time than it takes me to write it, the judge told me that I was excused, and she turned her attention to other matters.

As I walked away from the courtroom to my car, I reflected on the three hours since I had arrived at the courthouse. I had watched man’s flawed legal system in action, and had realized afresh the truth of Jeremiah 10:23: “O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.” The time is coming—in the years immediately ahead—when we will be able to assist Jesus Christ in implementing God’s government on this earth. Then, we will truly have a part in judging the world *in righteousness!* LCN

# Keys to Happiness: Forward from the Feast

By Rod Reynolds

**W**hat is the purpose of human existence? Philosophers have pondered this question for thousands of years, but lacking God's Spirit and rejecting His counsel their answers have been unsatisfactory and incomplete. Winston Churchill, speaking before the U.S. Congress, said: "He must indeed have a blind soul who cannot see that some great purpose and design is being worked out here below" (December 26, 1941). But he, though a great leader, did not know that purpose! Human beings, by themselves, cannot fully discover God's purpose, but God does reveal His purpose through His Word, coupled with the discernment granted through the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:6–14).

Our purpose is to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, and ultimately to be born into the family of God, with the very nature of God (Romans 8:29; 2 Peter 1:4). We will have eternal life (John 3:16)—God life, for, as William Barclay points out in discussing the meaning of *aionios* ("eternal"): "*eternal life is nothing less than the life of God himself*" (*New Testament Words*, p. 37). But what is the point of this? Does God's life have purpose? If so, what is it? What will the divine family be doing for all eternity?

Jesus said: "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). An abundant life suggests a full and happy life—a life of joy.

Scripture reveals one reason why God wants to share His eternal life with us: so that we may enjoy it! "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). "These things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves" (John 17:13).

If you had to choose one word to describe this world, would you pick "happy"? Why is happiness so rare? People certainly *want* to be happy. Philosophers have long recognized a universal human desire for happiness. Even the Declaration of Independence declares "the pursuit of happiness" to be a natural right of man—implying that happiness is something everyone wants.

What are some of the common ways men seek happiness? Money is one of the most obvious. But money, as those who have plenty of it have learned, does not guarantee happiness. Wealth can be a blessing or a curse, depending on how it is used, but by itself money cannot buy happiness.

Many talk of "self-esteem" as the key to happiness and fulfillment, not love for God and neighbor—not sacrifice; not service to others; not righteousness and the pursuit of peace; but simply self-esteem! There is a plethora of books advising people to love *themselves*. This era has been aptly called the "Me generation." We have popular songs like "I Believe in Me" and "I Did It My Way." The dictionary gives "pride" as a synonym for "self-esteem." Malachi prophesied of a perverse time when "we call the proud happy" (Malachi 3:15, KJV). But is pride—self-esteem—really the key to happiness?

Martin E. P. Seligman, president of the American Psychological Association, pointed out in an article titled "The American way of blame," that we have recently seen a cascade of multiple murders in schools by American boys, while in the 1950s there were none. Though there are multiple factors, relating to social changes, in the dramatic increase in extremely violent conduct, one that Seligman identifies is the replacement of discipline with an exaggerated emphasis on self-esteem by parents and educators. "Traditional American child-rearing in individual responsibility has been replaced by a self-esteem movement. This movement tells parents and educators that their first duty is to make kids feel good about themselves. Kids are taught mantras like 'I am special,' and they believe them. Low self-esteem is seen as the cause of teen-age pregnancy, depression, suicide, drug abuse and violence, and so teaching self-esteem is supposed to be a vaccine."

"Unfortunately it turns out that hit men, genocidal maniacs, gang leaders and violent kids often have high self-esteem, not low self-esteem. A recipe for their violence is a mean streak combined with an unwarranted sense of self-worth" (*APA Monitor*, July 1998). Other prominent psychologists have echoed Seligman's observation.

Biblical Hebrew has a word for such selfish concern, self-centeredness and unwarranted self-esteem, manifested either in pride, boasting or self-display. That word, *halal*, is aptly translated as "madness," and also "folly" and "foolishness." Commenting on this word, Gesenius states: "In the sacred writers, the more anyone boasts, the more he is regarded as being foolish; just as, on the other hand, a modest person is

looked upon as wise” (*Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*).

“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6; cf. 1 Peter 5:5). Paul warns: “For I say... to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think” (Romans 12:3). In commenting on the Greek of this verse, A.T. Robertson remarks: “Self-conceit is here treated as a species of insanity” (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*). A phony self-esteem is not the key to happiness.

Some seek self-centered happiness through food, alcohol, sex or the pursuit of activities meant for their own pleasure. But while these may enhance the joy of life, *when used rightly*, their pleasure is temporary at best. God wants us to know a far deeper joy than these can provide.

## The Joy of the Feast

The Feast of Tabernacles portrays a future world of universal joy, rejoicing and happiness. God told His people that the Feast was to be a time for rejoicing (Deuteronomy 16:13–15). The millennial setting pictured by the Feast is characterized by joy and gladness (Isaiah 51:3, 11).

Alfred Edersheim, in his book *The Temple*, points out that anciently “the most joyous of all festive seasons in Israel was that of the Feast of Tabernacles” (p. 212). One of the lessons of the Feast is that God purposes happiness for us. And in His Word He reveals the keys to living a joyful, happy and abundant life.

These keys are given in outline form in the book of Ecclesiastes, although they are discussed in many Scriptures of the Bible. Ecclesiastes is one of the most maligned and misunderstood books in all the Bible. Although the internal evidence reveals Solomon as the author, some critics say he did not write it. Others, while granting that Solomon wrote the book, nevertheless deride it as uninspired. It is a book that commentators generally simply do not understand or appreciate. Yet the message of the book of Ecclesiastes fits hand in glove with the lessons taught by the Feast of Tabernacles. In fact, the Jews traditionally read the book of Ecclesiastes during the Feast of Tabernacles. Whether or not they entirely understand why, this suggests that at some time in the past Jewish leaders did understand the connection between Ecclesiastes and the Feast. Although many commentators regard Ecclesiastes as having a depressing and negative tone, when understood in its proper light, its message is extremely positive and uplifting.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon refers to himself as the “Preacher.” The Hebrew word *kohleth* actually means assembler, one who assembles, and hence preaches or teaches. Israel during Solomon’s reign in many respects

typified the millennium. Solomon’s name means “peaceful.” Israel was at peace during his reign. Israel was also the most powerful and prosperous nation on earth, the only period in ancient history when that was so. In 1 Kings 8, we learn of an occasion when Solomon assembled Israel. At the dedication of the temple a feast was held, followed immediately by the Feast of Tabernacles (vv. 65–66; 2 Chronicles 7:8–10). Moreover, “men of all nations, from all kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to hear the wisdom of Solomon” (1 Kings 4:34). In these things Solomon typified the time when peoples of all nations will be gathered to be taught by the reigning Jesus Christ (Isaiah 2:2–3; Zechariah 14:16).

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon tells of his quest for the answer to the question, in effect: “What is life’s purpose?” The entire book revolves around that theme (Ecclesiastes 1:12–13; 2:3). Though he did some foolish things, and will not have so high a responsibility in God’s Kingdom as will his father, King David, King Solomon was a man of the greatest wisdom. Indeed, on the whole, Scripture shows that Solomon was the wisest king Israel had, or will have, other than Jesus Christ (1 Kings 3:12; 4:29–31; 10:23; Ecclesiastes 1:16). He sought answers to the question of life’s purpose, and he found them. The principles he expounds apply not only to this transitory life but to eternal life as well.

## The Keys

Consider these three basic keys, plus one “master key,” to happiness:

**The first key** to happiness that we find uncovered in Ecclesiastes is what some consider a dirty four-letter word: w-o-r-k. “Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should *enjoy good in his labor*. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God” (Ecclesiastes 2:24; cf. 2:10; 3:12–13). To paraphrase, the answer to the question of life’s purpose has to do in part with your work.

God made Adam and Eve, then put them in a garden and gave them the work of dressing and keeping it (Genesis 2:15). Their survival was assured, but they had work to do that would lend enjoyment to their lives. After they sinned, they were expelled from the garden and the nature of their work changed. “Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.... In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” (Genesis 3:17, 19). And so, for many, life is constant toil, a struggle to survive through hard travail. In Scripture the reward of God’s Kingdom is spoken of as a rest from the toil that has been a curse to mankind.

Yet eternal life will not be a life of idleness, rather a life of joyful, creative work. God Himself is a workman

(John 5:17). His work produces joy both for Himself and others (Psalm 104:31; Job 38:4–7).

The second key to happiness may be stated simply as *enjoying the fruits of one's labor*. “It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage” (Ecclesiastes 5:18). This principle is reflected in the Feast of Tabernacles. “You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in your feast... the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you

Ultimately, the principle of sharing the fruits of one's labor applies to the entire glorified family of God. The family—where ideally each member contributes his share and each lovingly gives to the others—is a microcosm of the divine plan. The principle is also expressed in the Feast of Tabernacles. “And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates” (Deuteronomy 16:14).

God will forever share with His family the blessings of God-life and all He possesses (Revelation 21:7). The divine family will be sharing life and its joys and its labors

**God will forever share with His family the blessings of God-life and all He possesses (Revelation 21:7). The divine family will be sharing life and its joys and its labors through creative work forever. With an eternity to engage in creative endeavor, the possibilities are endless.**

surely rejoice” (Deuteronomy 16:13–15). While enjoying the fruits of our labor at the Feast we are picturing the millennium, when God says: “They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit... and My elect [human beings called by God during the Millennium and White Throne Judgment] shall long enjoy the work of their hands” (Isaiah 65:21–23).


Our “booths,” or temporary dwellings in which we stay during the Feast of Tabernacles, remind us that our physical lives are temporary. This is a major theme of Ecclesiastes, and the message—though universally applicable—is especially suited for the millennial setting, when people will enjoy extended, prosperous lives free of disease, and other plagues and ailments will be rare. In stressing an awareness that this life is transitory, Scripture reveals that our ultimate goal is resurrection to eternal life.

The third key is sharing the fruits of one's labor and the joy of life with others. While having abundance can enhance the joy of life in the proper circumstances, Jesus said that it is even more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). We give when we share our life with another. Solomon relates this principle in terms of marriage. “Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun... for that is your portion in life” (Ecclesiastes 9:9). But the principle of giving applies more broadly to all the members of the family sharing with one another (Psalm 127:3–5), and to extended families, communities, nations and the whole world (Ecclesiastes 11:1–2).

through creative work forever. With an eternity to engage in creative endeavor, the possibilities are endless.

### **The Master Key**

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). None of the other keys are fully effective apart from the fear of God and keeping His commandments. This key is also reflected in the Feast of Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 31:10–13). God's commandments are not a curse or a burden, but together constitute the most vital of all keys to lasting joy. The commandments are designed to promote joy, and are given as a blessing (Deuteronomy 30:15–16; Psalm 1:1–3). Respect toward God and His way unlocks the potential for abiding happiness within the context of creative work and sharing (Psalm 128:1–4).

As we reflect upon the Feast of Tabernacles, let us remember how it portrays not only the joy of temporal life lived God's way, but the joy of life for all eternity, lived in the happiness that comes from our profound worship and love of God and Christ (John 4:24; Zechariah 14:16). The principles we have discussed—work, enjoying the fruits of your labor, sharing with others, fearing God and keeping His commandments—are simple. A child can understand them. But they are as profound as they are simple, and they should inspire us—year round—to more diligently, and happily, follow Christ's Way of life (1 John 2:6; 1 Peter 2:21). 



# International Corner...

## European Update

by Douglas Winnail

The work in Europe continues to sharpen its focus. During June and July we began holding regular monthly Sabbath services in the city of Belfast and in the St. Albans/Bricket Wood area of north London in addition to regular weekly services in nearby locations. I plan to make visits to London, Glasgow, Belfast and Holland approximately once a month during the coming months. During these trips I have taken the opportunity to use various libraries in the UK and Europe for doing editorial research as well as gain information and insights into developments on the European scene.

Plans are underway for additional advertising in Ireland and several UK and European locations during fall and winter. During the first six months of this year we have received about 2,700 responses to the German Web site. Although this represents only a 5 percent increase over the previous six months, those responding have shown a strong interest in our materials. More than 700 booklets (a 33 percent increase) and more than 1,600 articles (a 92 percent increase) were downloaded. This is an encouraging sign.

## South African Update

by Syd Hull

We are receiving more and more visit requests as time goes by. God is giving us more new members now. There are more who are on the verge of coming in. Our *Landbou Weekblad*

and *Farmers Weekly* ads are yielding good responses. Radio Kingfisher is yielding very good responses. This radio station is in Port Elizabeth on the Eastern Cape Coast. They have already played two of our programs and the responses are increasing. God had a church there at one time and He could very well have one there again in the not-too-distant future.

## Kenya Update

by Ernest Owino

Last June, a new congregation was established at Got Kojowi in Western Kenya, about 30 km south of Ndhiwa (our largest congregation in East Africa, with the average Sabbath attendance of 70). The first Sabbath service in Got Kojowi saw over 20 in attendance. In Nairobi, we have had two new visitors, both of whom had never had any experience with the Church before.

In Sultan Hamud, about 120 km south of Nairobi, along the Nairobi-Mombasa Road, another new video group has been formed, with an average attendance of five. Mr. King'oo Muteti is our host there and is truly dedicated to the Truth of Almighty God.

We have some additional developments to report about local translations. By mid-June this year, I began translating *Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?* into Luo, a dialect spoken by more than 10 million people in East Africa, a number of whom do not understand English. With the assistance of Mr. Lucas Ogada of Ndhiwa, we have also translated *Who or What Is the Antichrist?* into Luo, and are current-

ly typing and editing it. A number of interested individuals will possibly soon have their eyes opened through these two booklets. In Kenya alone, we have an average weekly attendance of 125, and with the already-published literature translated into Luo, we expect that this figure will soon double.

## Philippines Update

by Rod McNair

Recent months have seen good fruit in the Work and the Church in the Philippines. In the month of May, the Manila office sent out 256 booklets and 195 *Bible Study Course* lessons. Six hundred fifty-eight people are enrolled in the *Bible Study Course*, and 8.5 percent of them have reached Lesson 18.

Attendance is growing. Our Luzon pastor, Mr. Gorgonio de Guia, reports new people from other associations have begun attending in Manila since Dr. and Mrs. Meredith's visit last April. We are also seeing growth in some of the remote, isolated video groups, such as Polomolok, which reached a record average attendance of 22 for the first time in May. And in southeastern Mindanao, the manager of one of the local access TV outlets airing *Tomorrow's World* decided to cut his fees in half as a contribution to the Work! By the end of the summer, we plan to be on a new radio station in Davao.

We are amazed and encouraged by this continued growth in the midst of ongoing unrest and tension, and even sporadic violence. Many of our members dwell in communities where fear is a fact of life. Some of our members

are approached from time to time by clandestine rebel groups, seeking to intimidate and extort. A relative of one of our members was murdered several months ago by unknown assailants. One of our video group hosts wrote of recent events in his April report: “The month of April was a quivering month for General Santos city folks, the nearest city to the Polomolok church brethren. As I left for Manila on Monday, April 1, KCC Mall, one of the biggest [malls], was reduced to ashes by terrorists just two weeks after Kimball Plaza was also razed. On April 18, Pit Mart was bombed by unidentified men, 15 people died and 60 more were injured, but praise to the Lord that no member was hurt or near the scene during those incidents. May 2, while I was preparing my monthly report, we heard from a newsbreak that an incendiary bomb was found tucked in a displayed jacket in the garment section of Gaisano Mall.... There was panic among customers and employees, but none was hurt.”

In June, one of our member families in Metro-Manila happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time as they were traveling to visit a relative. They found themselves in the middle of a bus hold-up, and wrote about their experience: “The hold-uppers demanded that we give them all our money or else! They shouted invectives, cursed at and threatened all the passengers, hurling insults on those whom they thought would dare to fight back. First they took wallets and jewelry from everyone.... They took all our handbags, dumped the contents in the aisles, taking all the money and valuables they could find. The woman who had a hanky tied around her nose and mouth frisked me thoroughly, and took my watch and wedding ring.... With



Mr. Marcel Ginier

God’s protection and mercy, we reached my sister-in-law’s house at about 10:30 that evening, sound and safe. What a terrible experience! But we know God allowed it to happen for our own good.”

In the Philippines, as in other places around the world, many of God’s people are in difficult straits. Yet God continues to do a Work and feed His flock. Especially as we draw closer to the end, how encouraging and real are the words of David! As Psalm 37:39–40 says: “The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them and deliver them. He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, *because they trust in Him.*”

## Martinique Update

by Dibar Apartian

Many good things happened during my short visit to Martinique in July. First, I officiated at the wedding of a young couple who had been “patiently” waiting several months for my arrival. Then, I was interviewed by two different radio stations. One of them—Radio Caraibes, the largest on the island—used to air *Le Monde a Venir* five times a week, blanketing the whole island. Even though they are no longer airing religious broadcasts, we are hoping that they may make an exception in our case because of the previous popularity of *Le Monde a Venir*. Of course, their new fee may also be beyond our means! On the Sabbath of July 20, about 25 of our French brethren on this beautiful island rejoiced when I ordained as an elder Mr. Marcel Ginier, a longtime member and dea-

con in God’s Church. The following day, to our delight and surprise, 53 new people attended the public lecture I conducted; its theme was “Coming World Events.” Finally, to top it all, as I boarded the Air France airplane to return home, the stewardess, who was checking the tickets and the passports of the passengers, exclaimed when seeing my passport: “Monsieur Dibar, *Le Monde a Venir!*” Encouraged by all these exciting happenings, I am already planning my next trip to Martinique.

## Caribbean Update

by Jonathan McNair

As we move into the busy summer months in the United States, our two associate pastors in the Caribbean have been hard at work. Mr. Hugh Wilson made a profitable visit to Barbados in June. Mr. Wilson is the associate pastor for the congregation in Kingston, Jamaica. He also travels once a month to Barbados. There he serves as associate pastor as well. Eight prospective members have counseled with Mr. Wilson for baptism in Barbados. Another was baptized on June 16.

Mr. Fitzroy Greeman is serving the members in Trinidad as associate pastor, in addition to serving in the same capacity for his home country of Guyana. During his monthly trip to Trinidad, he counseled with four prospective members about baptism, as well as conducting a Spokesman Club.

Our long-term plans for the Caribbean include investigating television coverage for the islands surrounding Antigua. Currently, we have very little prospective member activity in this particular area. Our hopes and prayers are that Dominica, St. Kitts, Nevis and the Virgin Islands can develop from the hub of Antigua. ☐

# LYC 2002

# LYC 2002

By Gerald Weston

Cool nights and pleasant days once again provided the ideal setting for Michigan Living Youth Camp. Campers and staff arrived from the United States, Canada, and even far-away New Zealand for two weeks of fun, fellowship, learning and hard work at Northwoods Christian Camp outside of Pickford, Michigan.

Four boys' dorms and four girls' dorms rotated through a wide range of activities. Every day began with "morning motivation" at 7:45 a.m. Camp director Gerald



Weston led campers and staff in singing several verses of the "camp song," then called on dorms to contribute

new verses inspired by events of the past day. Examples would be: "To wake us up / From in our beds / They knocked our tent / Down on our heads!" Or "We love CI [Campus Improvement] / Although it's tough / 'Cause hauling trees / Will make us buff!" Next a weather report was given, and a few headlines or news stories were read, followed by a proverb for the day.

After "morning motivation," campers proceeded to breakfast before beginning the day's activities. During breakfast, counselors met with Mr. Weston, and with assistant camp director Mr. Lambert Greer, to discuss any problems and finalize plans for that day's activities. The staff ate after the campers, then had a short briefing to make sure "all bases" were covered for the day.

This year a new tradition was added to the program: "First Things First." This meant that the first activity period of each day was Christian living. Campers and staff gathered in five class-sized groups, turned to the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, and reviewed a different commandment each day. The five groups were taught by ministers Gerald Weston, Lambert Greer, Jonathan McNair, Paul Shumway and Rod McNair.

Putting first things first was a major step in a good direction. In the past, most staff members could not participate in these classes since they were occupied with teaching elsewhere, but with all the campers occupied at the same time with Christian living, this freed the staff to

also attend the Christian living classes. The reaction was entirely positive. When asked for any comments about camp, the first thing Michigan Upper Peninsula member Linda Blanchard said was: "I really like Christian living straight across the board for all of camp every morning." Numerous comments by staff members echoed her sentiment. Putting first things first contributed to the exceptional unity and harmony experienced this year, as expressed by high school staff member Sophia Kovanis, from Agoura Hills, California: "There was a feeling of support, unity, and an atmosphere of teamwork."

For the remainder of the day, each dorm rotated

through a variety of activities. On a typical day, a dorm might go from the Christian living class to a soccer class taught by Gary Maney of Cherokee, North Carolina. After lunch, fellowship time, and a rest period, they might proceed to Campus Improvement, where Steve Olson from Kansas City, along with his staff, guided them in the construction of a 16' by 24' storage building. Their next activity might be media skills; Brian Scarborough would divide the dorm into groups to tackle different projects such as preparing a Bible Study for the teen Web site, taking photographs for "Living Reflections," the LYC memory book, or preparing a news brief for the daily LYC Web site update. The last class of the day might be archery, taught by Derek Forrestier from Brazoria, Texas. He and his staff helped campers identify the parts of the bow and arrow, then shot at targets on the archery range. In their second class, they moved to the woods, where they tested their skills on three-dimensional targets.



Other activities included dance, volleyball, soccer, fitness, ultimate Frisbee and music appreciation. A new class this year was "creative skills"—taught by Mr. Lambert Greer. Campers used their ingenuity, and a minimal amount of materials, to construct the assigned projects. Each dorm had to build a means of carrying an egg, water balloon and bag of popcorn by air, land and water. On the final day of camp, the dorms put their creations to



the ultimate test while cheering campers and staff watched. As expected, some models worked better than others, with a few surprises along the way. As Scripture tells us: "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong,... But time and chance happen to them all."



The highlight for many campers was the overnight canoe trip, led by Mr. Paul Shumway and the canoe staff. Campers paddled into the Les Cheneaux Narrows, camped overnight on Government Island, and returned to camp the next day. While there, they were met with a number of challenges that required teamwork and cooperation. The weather also presented some unexpected challenges that helped build faith, courage, teamwork and true bonding.

After the daily activity session, campers returned to the dining hall for another meal. The busy schedule continued into the evening. Every dorm participated in table-topics and dance. Campers had the opportunity to polish public speaking skills during the topics session. Afterwards, they put the steps they learned during dance class into practice. The dances taught this year were the swing, slow dance, electric slide, crocodile rock and polka. Emphasis was again given to the principles of showing outgoing concern toward the other person and not leaving anyone out.

While some campers were enjoying table-topics and dance, others might be spending the night on Government Island, as the remaining campers enjoyed activities of their choice during the evening hours. They also enjoyed another fellowship time, during which they had the opportunity to mix and mingle, and get to know one another in casual conversation.

For campers, each evening concluded with evening reflection. Campers and staff gathered together in the main hall to sing hymns, and to listen to a short instructional story read by Mr. Weston. As campers and staff sang "It Won't Be Long Now," or "By This Shall All Men Know," the LYC end-of-the-day theme songs, a contented drowsiness settled over the camp.

After evening reflection, the adult and high school staffs retired to the lodge for a time of fellowship and relaxation. On most evenings, they sat around eating

snacks, conversing, and playing cards and board games. One night there was a dance. Another evening included a game night, where they played "Name that Tune," and other interesting games.

On Thursday, August 1, Dr. and Mrs. Meredith flew in for the tail end of camp. Before dinner, Dr. Meredith took a vigorous walk with a couple of campers. Later that evening, he and his wife Sheryl enjoyed watching the campers participate in an enthusiastic game of Play-Doh Pictionary. The next day they toured the campus and the activities. On Friday evening, Dr. Meredith and Mr. Weston answered



some of the many Bible questions submitted by campers and staff. Before services on the Sabbath, Dr. and Mrs. Meredith helped serve on the food line, dishing up whipped cream for the strawberry waffles.

A talent show took place Saturday evening, and was by far the best ever. Campers and staff gave performances with the theme of "Heroes." Dorm counselors Stephen Hall and Lisa Wilson concluded the evening with a rousing rendition of "America the Beautiful"—Lisa sang while Stephen played the sax.

Sunday night was the climax of camp. The evening began with a barbecue steak dinner topped off with a delicious cheesecake. The high school workers and other staff members served the banquet in a near-record 12 minutes. Following dinner, there was a short fellowship time before the camp video was shown and Mr. Weston made his final comments, complimenting the staff on a job well done and the camp as a whole for being the best camp ever since its humble beginnings in 1995. He also encouraged campers to become heroes by exercising the courage



to put into practice the lessons learned this year. Campers were urged to remember to "put first things first," "don't leave anyone out," "practice give rather than selfish get," "resist the negative influences of this current age and prepare to rule in the age that will soon be ush-

ered in.” Mr. Weston ended by saying that “now it is time to go down the hill and do some dancing”—something that everyone, including Dr. and Mrs. Meredith, were looking forward to.

Among campers’ comments, summing up their feelings, were the following: “Camp was fantastic! I wish it lasted longer. I hope I’ll be able to come back next year.” “It was great! Thanks, all you staff.” “This year was awesome—‘first things first’ really made a difference!” “It’s my favorite place to be. I love my counselors!” “Overall, I thought camp was very organized and well-prepared. The staff was great and very helpful!” “I like having Christian living first. I also like having a lot of fellowship time.” “Camp was awesome.”

## Texas Pre-Teen Camp

June 2–7 was an exciting week for more than 40 children between the ages of seven and 12. Mostly coming from Texas and Louisiana, these young people, along with three teenage counselors and approximately 20 adult staff members, spent the week at Ft. 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. Southern Regional Pastor John Ogwyn directed the camp, assisted by Mr. David Crockett of the Gladewater congregation.

The state park provided a beautiful setting on Mexia Lake for our whole range of activities. We leased the group camp facility, which had an air-conditioned headquarters building that served as our main activity center and dining hall, 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, followed by breakfast and a brief “morning motivation” given by Mr. Ogwyn. There were two classes for the campers in the morning and three in the afternoon. Classes included Christian living, fishing, kickball, softball, archery, canoeing, volleyball, ping-pong, arts and crafts and baking. After supper there was an opportunity for indoor games such as Pictionary, then all gathered around for a story before bedtime, read by Mr. Crockett.

Mr. Derek Forrestier from the Houston congregation is a certified archery instructor and provided the equip-

ment needed for that class. He even managed to procure life-sized animal mannequins to serve as targets, rather than the traditional bulls-eye style. Before the week was over, some of our budding “William Tells” were able not only to hit their targets, 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.

—John Ogwyn

## Missouri Pre-Teen Camp

At Cuivre State Park, just north of St. Louis, there is a private group camping area called “Sherwood Forest.” Instead of being populated by English nobility and bandits, it was home to a very merry group of 75 adults and youth of the Living Church of God between June 9 and 16. Forty-seven pre-teen campers came from Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma and Wisconsin. The eight or so people (including two counselors) in each cabin became well-acquainted, and participated in activities as a unit for the next week.



Each day began with “morning motivation.” Cabins in turn led the group in singing original camp songs that illustrated some aspect of camp life. After a short motivational talk by the camp director, everyone went to the dining hall for a hearty breakfast. The rest of the day was spent in activities such as Christian living class, archery, arts and crafts, canoeing, challenge course, first aid, flag football, line dance, manners, music, rifle range and “ultimate baby-sitting.”

In the Christian living classes, campers learned the long-term consequences of right and wrong actions in one class, and principles of lasting friendships in another class. In the challenge course, campers worked together to build a moving bridge across a swamp using boards and tires. The challenge was that the bridge was “moving” because there were not enough planks and tires to construct a bridge for the

length required. It was always obvious which cabins had just completed the first aid class because they exited with arms



in slings made of elastic bandages and creative stories about how they sustained their “injuries.” The “ultimate baby-sitting” class included video segments illustrating

challenging situations that can arise when baby-sitting. After each segment, the campers discussed how they would have handled the scenario.

All of the children had singing instruction in the music activity, and what a difference it made! After the instruction, the great majority of campers elected to sing in the children’s choir on the Sabbath. The St. Louis church congregation joined the campers for a Sabbath service with 105 attending.

Each evening had a special activity for the entire group. Evening activities included a mixer game, the beetle game, newspaper fashions, Bible baseball and music night. The music night started with several group dances. Performances from campers and staff members included three solo vocal selections, a piano duet and a singing quartet. Finally, Mr. Bill Oswald, a special guest that night, played songs on his steel guitar and led the campers in a sing-along.

Spending a week at camp with those who share the same beliefs was compared to being at the Feast of Tabernacles. Together, our collective light shines brighter, and both campers and staff were reminded that God’s way of life is very special.

—Randy Gregory

## California Pre-Teen Camp

On Sunday, June 30, 62 campers and staff made their way up the two-lane roads of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, to the California Pre-Teen LYC in central California, located at 6,000 feet elevation. Campers came from around the Church’s Western Region, including the states of Arizona, California, Nevada, Oregon and Washington. From the onset of camp, friendliness abounded and new acquaintances were made by youths and adults alike. An unusual level of peace and harmony seemed to permeate the camp, making it a memorable experience for everyone.

Camp activities for each of the five days began at 8 a.m. with “morning motivation” before breakfast. Classes included Christian living, arts and crafts, fitness and health, orienteering, soccer, manners, flag football and entertainment. One of the mornings featured a three-hour hike up to a peak 1,000 feet above the camp with views of distant,

s n o w y ,  
13,000-foot  
peaks. A near-  
by river gave  
the campers  
an afternoon  
of swimming  
and splashing  
under the  
t o w e r i n g  
heights of  
lush pine



trees, beds of ferns and fragrant mountain azaleas. After the evening meal, activities included a night of Bunko, Goofy Olympics, line dancing lessons, and the grand finale: the campfire program. The class in entertainment prepared the girls’ dorms to perform a song together, which was followed by a song from the combined boys’ dorms. Other campfire program performances included a skit by the staff of a modern portrayal of Balaam and Balak, a humorous song by the kitchen staff, campfire songs with everyone joining in, and a song by the combined boys’ and girls’ dorms. To conclude



every evening, the campers slowed down the day’s activities with evening reflection, including hymns and a story promoting a Christian virtue.

The campers were outstanding in their attitudes and participation, as was evidenced by their unanimous response in a camper survey. One question asked if they would like to return to camp next year. Typical responses were “Definitely” and “Yes, yes, yes!”

The five days were a profitable foretaste of the benefit in working early with young people, as well as building friendships and camaraderie among Church brethren. The staff members were outstanding examples, willing to give for the benefit of future potential members of God’s Family. *God’s way works!*

—Jeffrey Fall

## Strive for Excellence

(continued from page 3)

dom in the grave where you are going” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

When we read of the Olympic champion swimmers rising before dawn to engage in strenuous swim workouts, then driving to their regular jobs and working all day, then returning home again at night for more strenuous training in the pool, we can appreciate the fact that they are willing to put forth *great effort* to achieve their goal. If our true goal is to reflect the zeal of Jesus Christ and “make a difference” by giving our lives today in His service as a “living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1), how vital it is that we demonstrate the same *zeal* that Jesus Christ Himself, the Apostle Paul and most of the other great biblical leaders demonstrated in their service to God.

Because many of us have grown up in “average” families, we may not have seen the examples of outstanding drive and zest that the world’s great leaders exemplify. Yet *we* are called to be truly great leaders—if we truly “overcome” (Revelation 2:26–27). We need to *understand* the reality of the situation and start building the *wisdom*, the successful *habits* and the *zeal* of top leaders. “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 mat-

ters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?” (1 Corinthians 6:2–3).

Remember, a vital part of the Fourth Commandment tells us: “Six days shall you *labor* and do all your *work*” (Exodus 20:9). Jesus told the Jews: “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (John 5:17). Even in this aspect of His human life, Jesus set us an example of zest and accomplishment.

In his very interesting book, *Sam Walton—The Inside Story of America’s Richest Man*, author Vance Trimble describes *how* Walton became fabulously wealthy, even though he was born to “average” parents and lived for much of his life in the state of Arkansas. Over and over, Trimble cites comments from Walton’s friends and associates describing *how hard he worked*. Though not wealthy, his father did teach Sam a wonderful *work ethic*, which enabled Sam later to become America’s richest man. Trimble relates: “Although not personally feeling the worst effects of the Depression, ‘Sammy’ Walton was living up to his dad’s ‘work, work, work’ ethic at Hickman High School. In addition to his man-killing regimen in academics and athletics, he found time for odd jobs and was more and more becoming self-supporting. Rolling out of bed at dawn, he delivered a route for the M.U.

journalism students’ *Columbia Missourian*. Significantly, he also became a part-time helper in a Columbia five-and-ten-cent store” (p. 33). Sam Walton had to *work really hard* to succeed the way he did.

We all admire the Apostle Paul’s passion for Jesus Christ. However, Paul also had a passion for work and for accomplishment. Paul states: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I **labored** more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). Because he did love Jesus Christ, and because he was “not afraid” of *hard work*, the Apostle Paul evidently did more evangelizing, raised up more churches and wrote more books in the New Testament than any other man! What a magnificent **reward** Paul will receive when Christ returns as King of kings.

If we are to become even moderately successful in this life, we will need to learn to use our time and talents wisely. We will need to “go the extra mile” on many occasions. And above and beyond all this, we should learn to go “all out” in *working*, in *servicing* and in doing everything we can with *zeal* to prepare for the Kingdom of God. For Christ Himself said: “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My *reward* is with Me, to give to every one *according to his work*” (Revelation 22:12). ☐

## After God’s Own Heart

(continued from page 2)

while Saul was still “God’s anointed.” Even when Saul was absolutely helpless before David—fast asleep—David did not permit the warrior Abishai to kill him. “But David said to Abishai, ‘Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD’s anointed, and be guiltless?’ David said furthermore, ‘As the LORD lives, the LORD shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD’s anointed. But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that are by

his head, and let us go” (1 Samuel 26:9–11). David would not have had this attitude toward a man who had tried, again and again, to kill him—*unless* he constantly pictured his God, the “Rock” of Israel, as being very real, totally fair and a God who would always “make things right” in the end!

For David *worshiped* and *adored* God.

Out under the stars at night, David exclaimed: “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and

honor.... O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8:3–5, 9).

When David was deeply troubled by sickness and infection, he cried out: "O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure! For Your arrows pierce me deeply, and Your hand presses me down. There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor any health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness" (Psalm 38:1–5). Yet even in the depths of his despondency and pain, David fixed his mind on *God's faithfulness*. "For in You, O LORD, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God" (v. 15).

When David began to profoundly repent of his vile sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah, once again he *fixed his mind* on God and His mercy, and on God's purpose in all our lives: "Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:14–17).

Certainly, David continually focused his thoughts on the love, the mercy and the greatness of God. The entirety of Psalm 103 is a magnificent expression of the love and worship David constantly expressed toward his Creator: "Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies.... The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.... For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (vv. 1–4, 8, 11–14).

Dear brethren, in our confused and utterly materialistic society—where we are daily and almost hourly bombarded with the sounds and images of the television, telephone, computer, radio, traffic outside and perhaps even helicopters whirling overhead—it is often difficult for us to concentrate on the *beauty*, the *mercy*, the profound *wisdom* and the awesome *power* of the great God who made us in His image. Yet, if we are to be like David—the man "after God's own heart"—we will have to so organize our lives that we also quietly, slowly and thoughtfully drink in of God's Word and "meditate on God's Law" as David did.

We must *find time* to go outside and look at the trees, flowers and plants, and the sun, moon and stars that our God and Creator has made. Then, as David did, we must *take time* to pour out our hearts to God in sincere thanks, worship and adoration. We should all be able to say with David: "Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice" (Psalm 55:17).

God our Father, and Jesus Christ our Savior, should *both* be at the very center of our being. They are truly "one"—as Jesus said: "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30). Our hopes, dreams, thoughts and plans should *all* revolve around God and what *He* wants us to do and to be. As *David profoundly understood*, and as the Apostle Paul expressed: "In *Him* we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

In Psalm 104, David described the beauty and the wisdom in God's creation. He described how God stretches out the heavens "like a curtain." He described how God's voice sounds like "thunder." He described how "He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man's heart" (vv. 14–15). David exulted: "O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions—this great and wide sea, in which are innumerable teeming things, living things both small and great" (vv. 24–25).

Then King David of Israel cried out from the depths of his being: "I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; *I will sing praise to my God while I have my being*. May my meditation be sweet to Him; I will be glad in the LORD. May sinners be consumed from the earth, and the wicked be no more. Bless the LORD, O my soul! Praise the LORD!" (vv. 33–35).

Will you and I "sing to the Lord" as long as we have our lives? Will we "sing praises to God" while we have our being? Are our heavenly Father, and our personal Lord who died for us—Jesus Christ, "the Lord God of the armies of Israel"—the *real focus* of our lives, our plans and all that we hope for?

Brethren, let us sincerely pray to our God that we—and *all our brethren in God's Church*—may learn to "seek" God with all our hearts, *walk* with Him, *love* Him and constantly praise and thank and worship Him *like King David did!* Then, truly, we will become a people "after God's own heart." Then, God will bless us, deliver us, heal us and in every way "cause His face to shine upon us" as never before.



## Teens Enjoy Smoky Mountain Trip

Fourteen teens and chaperones from throughout the southern U.S. traveled to the Great Smoky Mountains for adventure—Appalachian style.

Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Maney, and Mr. and Mrs. Gary Maney, hosted the group in Cherokee, North Carolina. Mr. Gary Maney arranged for the group to stay in a community center before they began the backpacking trip. On the Sabbath of June 22, members from western North Carolina joined the group for a service followed by a covered-dish meal. On June 23, the group traveled to the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock

Wilderness Area, just south of the Smoky Mountain National Park. This area is famous for its beautiful views, spring flowers and waterfalls. Lower Slickrock Creek Falls, and Wildcat Falls with its three pools, both provided a cool respite to tired feet and aching backs. After five days of backpacking and camping, everyone thoroughly enjoyed a safe return to Cherokee, and nice, hot showers.

Later, the Maneys treated the group to complimentary passes to “Unto These Hills”—a show retelling the history of the Cherokee Indians in North

Carolina. The next morning, the group traveled to the Nantahala Gorge. The afternoon was filled with a visit to the Cherokee Cultural Village, followed by a fish-fry, provided by the Maneys and other local brethren, and attended by Mr. Martin Fannin, the area pastor. There is nothing like a visit to another part of America to gain appreciation for the beauty of our land. And traveling to visit other congregations always reminds us of the bond that we have with each other throughout God’s Church.

—Jonathan McNair

## July LCG Web Activity Tops June Records!

In the month of July, visitors to the official English-language LCG Web sites—[www.lcg.org](http://www.lcg.org), [www.tomorrowworld.org](http://www.tomorrowworld.org) and [www.cogl.org](http://www.cogl.org)—submitted 1,631 online “Order FREE” forms. Each form allows the requestor to order the literature offer from the current week’s telecast, the *Tomorrow’s World* magazine, the *Bible Study Course* and up to three additional booklets.

Of the 1,631 forms submitted, 615 requested the *Tomorrow’s World* magazine, and 621 asked for a subscription to the *Bible Study Course*. This is an encouraging increase from June’s 1,125 forms, 440 magazine subscriptions and 470 *Bible Study Course* subscriptions. Additionally, more than 3,000 booklets and audiotapes were requested!

The sites recorded their first visits from seven countries in July, including Burkina Faso, Greenland

and Vatican City. A total of 157 countries are known to have visited the Church Web sites since their inception in 1999.

July activity on [www.lcg.org](http://www.lcg.org) exceeded 46.5 gigabytes and 35,500 user sessions (up from 40.6 and 30,500 in June). More than 122,000 page views were recorded on the Church sites (up from 110,000 in June).

In the month of July, our advertising campaign on the [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) search engine received 2,226 “click-throughs” (Google users coming to our sites via our ads). At approximately 14 cents per click-through, with an average of one booklet ordered for every four click-throughs, the cost-per-response is currently under 60 cents! Please continue to keep the Church Web effort in your prayers.

## Birth

Mike and Pam Rude, of the Minneapolis, Minnesota LCG congregation, announce the birth of a baby girl, *Dawn Marie Rude*. Born on June 18, Dawn Marie weighed 5 pounds, 14 ounces, and was 19.5 inches long. Mother and baby are fine, as are father and big sister.

## New **Tomorrow's World** Telecast Season Begins September 22!

WGN: Sunday, 6:00 AM ET

VISION (Canada): Sunday, 3:30 AM & 5:30 PM ET

### Air Date

### Broadcast Title

September 22

World War III and Prophecy

September 29

The World After World War III

October 6

Has Christianity Failed?

October 13

Will Hydrogen Bombs Destroy Our Cities?

October 20

What Happens When You Die?

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The White Throne Judgment

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## *In Loving Memory*

*Betty Alberts*, age 77, a member of the St. Louis, Missouri Living Church of God congregation, died on June 18. She had been in failing health for several months. Her husband of 53 years died in 1999; she is survived by three daughters, nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Coming into the Church seven years ago, she remained faithful to the Truth throughout all the trials and upheavals that have occurred since. Friends say that she had read the Bible from cover to cover ten times. She will be missed by her family and friends, who look forward to seeing her in the resurrection.

*Dick Dalrymple*, a member of the Living Church of God in Buffalo, New York, died of a massive heart attack on May 15. He had served as video host in Buffalo, New York, for several years. Mr. Paul Shumway conducted the funeral on May 20. He is survived by his wife, Jan, and will be deeply missed by all who knew him.

*Thomas DeBerry* of Independence, Missouri, age 85, died on June 2. Baptized in 1951, he gave more than a half-century of dedicated service to God's people. He is survived by Florene, his wife of 64 years, his sister Audra Robbins, a son and daughter-in-law, a daughter and son-in-law, six grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren, three great-great-grandchildren, one great-great-stepgrandchild and many nieces and nephews. He was a fine example to all who knew him; he will be fondly remembered and greatly missed.

# Commentary

## The Origin of the Universe *By Jeffrey Fall*

Over the last century, debate has raged regarding the origin of the universe. Has the universe always existed? If not, when did it come into existence—and how did it come into existence?

If there was a moment of time when the universe came into existence, logic alone would tell you that a creator was involved. When we look at a well-designed painting, we inherently know that it has not always existed. Scientifically, one could have the wood frame dated, as well as the pigments in the paint, and it would quickly become evident that there was a specific time when the painting was brought into existence. A painter must actually have painted the canvas.

In the last decade, the Hubble telescope has provided dramatic new evidence that the universe has not always existed. The universe is rapidly moving apart, and is constantly expanding. Most scientists now believe that the universe exploded into existence some 14 or more billion years ago.

This evidence of the creation event, which some scientists call the “big bang theory,” is mounting year by year. Science now confirms that there has been no past eternity of matter! Amazingly, even Albert Einstein laid the foundation for understanding that matter has not always existed, with his famous “general theory of relativity.” This well-accepted principle of physics was used to demonstrate mathematically that the universe had a beginning, and that all matter came into existence from outside the physical realm, outside the laws of physics.

In Hebrews 11:3 we read: “The worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that the things which are seen [the universe] were not made of things which are visible [matter].”

The Bible clearly states that the universe was not made from pre-existing matter. That fits precisely with

the evidence in astronomy and physics. So, if the universe was not made of pre-existing material or matter, how did it come into existence? Science cannot answer this, but God tells us His method of creation: “He has made the earth by His power” (Jeremiah 10:12). God created the earth—and all the universe—from His power, or energy. Nuclear physicists have known for years that energy can theoretically be converted into mass and, conversely, that mass can be converted into energy. This is how the mass of a nuclear bomb is released into energy.

So, in the creation event—what some scientists call the “big bang”—the Creator God brought the universe into existence by His power or energy. This becomes the missing ingredient that explains what astrophysicists are observing in the universe.

There is one more crucial bit of amazing information about the creation and origin of the universe, which we can find in God’s word and which has recently been proven in astronomy and physics: “It is He who sits above the circle of the earth... who stretches out the heavens like a curtain” (Isaiah 40:22). The Hebrew verb translated “stretches” is in the present tense. In other words, God is still stretching out the universe. This fits precisely with what has been observed by the Hubble telescope: the universe is still rapidly expanding.

In the same verse, we read that God “spreads [the heavens] out like a tent to dwell in.” Here, in the Hebrew, “spreads” is in the past tense. God’s Word indicates that in the original creation event, He stretched out the heavens, and that the universe is still being stretched out in continuing expansion, as seen by the Hubble telescope.

Amazingly, science is finally catching up in understanding with the Bible concerning the origin of the universe.