

Living Church News

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Inside:

Practice Servant Leadership	3
Study the Bible!	4
Understanding Mankind's Suffering	7
Revelation: Background To a Mystery	11
International Corner...	14
Feast Roundup 2003	18
Local Church News	23
Commentary	24

Are You Prepared for Persecution?

Dear Brethren and Friends,

How spiritually strong are *you*, really? With escalating hate and violence against America and its allies around the world, we all need to strengthen ourselves for the tough times ahead. And as God's Work grows and our impact grows on this God-rejecting world, *religious* persecution will also be an increasingly obvious part of our lives. After describing the end-time wars, earthquakes, famines and disease epidemics, Jesus said: "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many" (Matthew 24:7–11).

When the going gets tough, will *you* be one of those who turn aside to a seemingly easier path—perhaps influenced by some false minister? If we who are God's true servants are indeed to be "hated by all nations," it will be easy to grow discouraged. It will be natural to look for an *easy way out!*

But somewhere on this earth will be the true Philadelphians (see Revelation 3:7–13) who will "hold fast" to what they have been taught (v. 11) and will have a zeal to go through the "open doors" to preach the gospel to the world. Being with this "little flock" will seem, to many, the most *unlikely* place to be. For its members will suffer a great deal of indignation and persecution from the world and even from the *religious leaders* of this world—just as Jesus, Peter and Paul did.

Jesus Himself warned: "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (John 3:19–20).

We in the Church of God have the opportunity and the responsibility to preach the Truth with power. And that Truth—the "light"—will *infuriate* large portions of this present society! We will preach heartfully about the need to obey the God of the Bible and keep *all ten* of the Ten Commandments—including God's holy Sabbath. We will occasionally need to point out particularly vile sins of this world—such as practicing sexual perversion (Romans 1:24–27). And we will continually lift up our voices as God commanded: "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet;

tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins” (Isaiah 58:1).

So we will be called a “cult.” We will be singled out collectively and individually for ignominy and persecution.

Therefore, dear brethren, we will truly need to “feed on the Bible” and be genuinely close to God in active obedience and living faith. We must always remember Jesus’ own words: “Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man’s sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets” (Luke 6:22–23).

In addition to this religious persecution, we will also be affected—along with our countrymen—by the growing resentment, envy and even hate that increasing millions of people feel toward the United States, Britain and their allies. As most of you know, the radical Muslims are turning the entire Middle East conflict into a war between the entire Arab world and America and its allies. The *Charlotte Observer* (August 21, 2003) described the reaction to the recent truck bomb that destroyed the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad: “The U.N. is just a puppet of the U.S., and anyone who is angry with the U.S. is likely to consider the U.N. a target.’ The hard-line Iranian newspaper *Kayhan* was even more blunt. ‘Destruction and killing the result of Bush’s policies in Iraq,’ ran its front-page headline. Throughout the Arab world and Iran, the bombing was chalked up—tacitly or explicitly, depending upon who was talking—as the result of a blundering U.S. occupation, an organic outgrowth of the untenable instability in Iraq. Moreover, many Arabs argued, the U.S. invasion endangered the United Nations by rendering it irrelevant.”

Finally, it appears that God is using the recent war in Iraq—and its fallout—to begin the process of truly “breaking” America’s power and prestige (Leviticus 26:19). This process may take several more years. This prophecy in Leviticus goes on to indicate that we will be visited with drought and famine. Food supplies will run short, and there will be times of panic in the general population as a people previously unaccustomed to hardship realize that *absolute starvation* is drawing close, even in the United States, Britain, Canada and Australia! Next will come the horrifying *disease epidemics* that will shake our society to its foundations (v. 20, cf. Matthew 24:7).

As untold millions of people in our previously affluent society are scrambling to get enough to eat, and are then moved to desperation by the “incurable” disease epidemics and plagues that begin to strike, how “popular” do you think our warnings will be? People will perceive our predictions of God’s coming wrath—no matter how accurate—as an “attack” on them and on their cherished way of life. Though our own *purpose* will be to give them, in love, a heartfelt *warning* to protect them from future disaster, the vast majority of people will not want to acknowledge their sins, and will furiously reject the warning. Instead, as humans have nearly always done when confronted with an evil report, they will “attack the messenger.”

continues on page 22

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Practice Servant Leadership

Editorial

By Roderick C. Meredith

One of the elements in our Living Church of God commission is: “Learn and practice servant leadership in all our dealings with others.” As you brethren may remember, I detailed these seven elements in the May-June 2001 *Living Church News*.

But are we *doing* this?

In our previous association, some (not most!) of the ministers tended to act in a high-handed way. They often had the deacons and others waiting on them—looking after their children, mowing their lawns, cleaning their homes, etc. And they often would not really listen if someone had a problem, or concern about their approach. A few of these ministers were noted for strongly correcting anyone who “got in their way.” They were, sometimes, “little dictators!”

Then, there were the “super deacons”—again a small *minority*, but noted just the same. They were also high-handed and bossy—constantly showing the great “authority” they had as deacons. So, some of the brethren felt that the ministerial/deacon hierarchy was too heavy-handed and that they did not have a genuine *servant* attitude and that, often, even older members could be unkind or uncaring to the newer or more sensitive brethren.

The Apostle Paul was inspired to tell us: “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves; let each

of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him” (Romans 15:1–2, RSV). If *any* of us are placed in a position of authority within the church, we must always remember that it is for *service*—not to show how important we are. We should often remember to read and meditate on Jesus’ instruction to His disciples along these lines. After Jesus detected an attitude of self-exaltation and competition among some of His dis-

and *serve* our fellow brethren. Often, this will involve exercising *patience* and *humility* when those we are serving sometimes oppose us or sometimes “get their feelings hurt” too easily, or try to undermine us in some way. *Unfortunately, brethren, human nature will always be with us!* But we must learn to sincerely listen to others and try to respond to any reasonable suggestions and even learn from those we are serving.

If *any* of us are placed in a position of authority within the church, we must always remember that it is for *service*—not to show how important we are. We should often remember to read and meditate on Jesus’ instruction to His disciples along these lines.

ciples, He called them to Himself and told them: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your *servant*. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your *slave*—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to *serve*, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25–28).

So the attitude and approach of *service* must be demonstrated in our dealing with others. Each of us in *any* position should try to use that position as an opportunity—*not* to aggrandize ourselves—but to genuinely help, encourage, strengthen

Jesus Christ said that the second great commandment is: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” (Matthew 22:39). We must constantly think on this command if we are to be genuine Christians. If any of us are in positions of authority, we should especially try to be sensitive to the potential, the plans, hopes and dreams of those who work under us. We should try to use them to the maximum of their human potential for the sake of the task at hand. At the same time, we should try to help and nurture them as human beings—not just “use them up” in doing a job to accomplish something we want done. We should try to “get inside their heads” to understand

continues on page 21

Study the Bible!

How to do it, and why it is important

By Douglas S. Winnail

Over the years, the Church of God has emphasized four keys to spiritual growth: prayer, Bible study, meditation and fasting. The Bible reveals that these tools were employed by individuals who were close to God and who were used mightily by God. However, a challenge that many face in learning how to pray, study, meditate and fast is how to put these keys for spiritual growth into a proper perspective.

For people outside the Church of God, prayer, meditation, fasting and even Bible study are often viewed as rituals or routines to be accomplished. Perhaps people have previously learned certain prayers, and repeated them over and over. To some, Bible study may mean reading several verses each day, or reciting a few scriptural passages as part of a worship service. Meditation may include gazing at an altar, or repeating a word or phrase to induce a trance-like state of mind. For Roman Catholics, “fasting” may mean simply abstaining from meat on a specified day. For many Protestants, fasting is little more than something you watch on the news when someone goes on a hunger strike—a relic of Bible history, not something that Christians actually do.

Some have carelessly assumed that prayer, study, meditation and fasting make one a Christian. Christ, however, advised that real Christians will keep the commandments of God and show love for others (John 15:9–17). For many sincere believers, prayer and Bible reading are ways to feel spiritual or to endure a time of crisis. When things go well, these activities seem unnecessary. Sometimes people read the Bible to avoid feeling guilty for not reading it, or to appear spiritual to others!

Individuals who come into the Church from a non-religious background—as do an increasing number of people today—often have no idea how to pray or even how to approach Bible study. Many today do not realize how much Eastern religious ideas have influenced their perceptions of meditation and fasting, and how much those ideas differ from biblical instructions. In this article, we will focus on one of these tools for spiritual growth. We will examine why Bible study is important, and how to actually study the Bible. We will also see how prayer, meditation and fasting relate to Bible study.

The Right Approach

It is fashionable today, especially in some “educated” circles, to view the Bible not as the inspired word of an

Almighty God but rather as a primitive attempt on the part of ancient Hebrew people to formulate some sort of concept of God. This view of the Scriptures has discouraged many today from even looking into the Bible as a source of important, helpful and even vital information. It is amazing how our modern “sophisticated” views contrast with the views of people only a generation ago, and with biblical personalities like David, who is called a “man after God’s own heart” (Acts 13:22). David, as a king, spoke of the Scriptures as “a lamp to my feet and a light to my path... it is my meditation all the day” (Psalm 119:97, 105). David did not meditate by repeating a mantra over and over. He studied, and considered how to apply, the word of God in everyday life. David saw the commandments of God as more valuable than gold (Psalm 119:127), and he realized that those who lived by the commandments would be blessed (Psalm 119:1–2).

Jesus taught Christians that the meek [teachable] will inherit the earth and that “those who hunger and thirst for righteousness [those who study and strive to live by the word of God—Psalm 119:172] will be filled” (Matthew 5:6). David clearly exemplified this attitude. He wrote: “Your word have I hidden in my heart... teach me Thy statutes... open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law... make me to understand the way of Your precepts... the entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever... Your law is my delight” (Psalm 119:11, 12, 18, 27, 160, 174). David had a prayerful attitude towards Bible study—he asked God to help him understand what he read. Daniel not only studied the Scriptures; he also fasted to show God his earnest desire to grasp the scope of God’s plan for His people (Daniel 9:1–3; 10:12).

The prophet Isaiah describes the attitude that God desires in a person, saying that “on this one will I look: on him who is poor [humble] and of a contrite spirit [repentant, desiring to do better], and who trembles at My word” (Isaiah 66:2). The proper attitude for approaching Bible study is respect for the Word of God instead of doubt and cynicism, and a desire to learn instead of criticize. To develop this attitude, we must prove for ourselves (1 Thessalonians 5:21) that the Bible really is the inspired word of God and not just ancient Hebrew literature. With a proper approach to the Scriptures, Bible study can become extremely informative, profitable and exciting. But just why should we study the Bible?

Grow in Wisdom

One of the keys to success in life is learning how to make wise decisions—and how to avoid making bad decisions and foolish mistakes. Sadly, many never develop this vital quality—hence the saying “we grow so soon old, and so late smart.” The God of the Bible, who is described as a loving Father, understands this human frailty and has filled the Scriptures with dozens of practical principles. The book of Proverbs is loaded with information to help anyone who studies its content develop wisdom, understanding, discretion and judgment (Proverbs 1:1–6). Solomon states that “the fear of the LORD is the *beginning* [the starting point] of knowledge... and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). The correct approach to every important subject is found in the word of God, yet fools will despise this approach. We are not born with wisdom. But by studying the word of God, earnestly praying to God for guidance and seeking and listening to wise instruction from older, more experienced individuals, we can *grow* in wisdom (see Proverbs 2). This biblically based approach will lead to a longer, fuller and richer life (Proverbs 3:1–2, 13–16).

Solomon reveals that effective leaders rule with wisdom (Proverbs 8:5). David writes that studying the commandments of God made him wiser than his enemies, and gave him more understanding than his teachers (Psalm 119:98). The Bible warns young people about the dangers of trying to live life in the “fast lane” (Proverbs 7), about the folly and lack of understanding that leads to fornication and adultery (Proverbs 6:32) and about the consequences of pride, gossip, impatience, laziness and even talking too much (Proverbs 11:2, 9, 12; 12:13, 24). The Scriptures repeatedly stress the value of obtaining wise counsel, being willing to forgive, disciplining children and carefully choosing one’s friends (Proverbs 11:14; 12:16, 13:20, 24). Having a transcending vision and purpose for your life is also mentioned (Proverbs 29:18). In fact, it is only in the Bible that the true purpose of life can be found. Considering the *gold mine* of wisdom contained in the Scriptures, it is startling that so many today have been “programmed by society” to ignore studying the Bible!

Develop the Mind of God

We marvel at the ignorance of “educated” people who ridicule anyone who actually tries to live by the commandments of God. But even converted Christians sometimes wonder why it can be such a struggle to make time to study those commandments. However, the Scriptures hold the answer. We are all subject to spiritual influences,

from God and from Satan. Unless we have repented, received God’s Holy Spirit and are making a determined effort to stay focused on God, we *will* be influenced by Satan. The Apostle Paul reveals that “the carnal [physical, unrepentant] mind is *enmity* against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can it be” (Romans 8:7). Unconverted people do not necessarily say that they hate God, but they will argue, twist and try to reason around the very clear intent of the Scriptures, because they simply do not have the mind of God!

This is why Paul wrote to the Philippians: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). Christians with the mind of God will be humble and teachable, and will sincerely desire to follow God’s instructions in the Bible. They will *make time* to study the Bible, and will really strive to live “by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). We cannot live by the Bible if we do not study what is in it! Paul told Timothy to diligently study the Scriptures (2 Timothy 2:15), and said that “all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16). When we read, study and meditate on the Scriptures, and are willing to be led by the Holy Spirit, we will learn to think like God thinks (Isaiah 55:8–9), and we will begin to develop the mind of God (1 Corinthians 2:10–16). Regular Bible study is an important tool to foster this kind of spiritual growth. But there is more!

Preparing to Rule

Bible prophecies indicate that today’s Christians are ultimately called to *rule* on this earth with Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:4–6; 5:10; 20:6). As future kings and priests, we will function as *civil and religious leaders* in the coming Kingdom of God. Jesus told His disciples that their reward would include *governing* cities and regions (Matthew 19:28; 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–19). Isaiah reveals that the saints of God will be *teachers* in the kingdom (Isaiah 30:20–21) and that the laws of God will be promulgated from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2–4) to the whole world (Isaiah 11:9). However, before we can rule by the laws of God and teach those laws to others, we must first *study*—and come to understand and learn to live by—what God has recorded in His word. This is why the Scriptures provide specific instructions about Bible study.

When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, he advised them that they were to learn, remember, obey and not alter the commandments of God (Deuteronomy 4:1–8). Parents were to teach their children about God, and to obey His laws (Deuteronomy 4:9–10). Moses also emphasized that future leaders of Israel were to make *personal copies* of the Laws of God,

and *study them daily*, so that they would be able to rule wisely and in a godly manner (Deuteronomy 17:14–20). This is one reason why David meditated on the law daily (Psalm 119:97). Ezra followed these same instructions before returning to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity, “for Ezra had prepared his heart to seek [study] the Law of the LORD [the Books of Moses], and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10). Ezra is later shown effectively teaching and explaining the meaning of the Scriptures to the people of Israel—in public meetings—as a result of this diligent preparation (Nehemiah 8:1–8).

The New Testament continues this theme. God chose as Jesus’ mother a woman well versed in the Scriptures (see Luke 1:46–56). Jesus, as a result of careful parental training, was able at age 12 to discuss the Scriptures with such skill that He amazed religious leaders in Jerusalem (Luke 2:41–52). He said that we are to live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4). He taught in the synagogues of Palestine (Matthew 4:23) and sent out the 12 disciples and then 70 others to preach and teach “all things I have commanded you” (Luke 9:1–2; 10:1–2;

Matthew 28:10–20). As the church grew, deacons were appointed “who were full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). That wisdom came from studying and meditating on the word of God. Paul mentions that one of the qualities necessary in Church leaders was that they be “able to teach” the Scriptures in an interesting and meaningful manner (1 Timothy 3:2). This is why Paul emphasized the importance of *diligently studying* the Bible, laying a firm foundation and avoiding foolish arguments and irrelevant issues (2 Timothy 2:14–19). Good shepherds must know their subject, and be able to handle difficult issues with wisdom and conviction (Titus 1:7–11). This requires careful study and thorough preparation.

As we see the end of this age approaching, we need to “wake up” and make sure that we are “redeeming [making the most of] the time” that we have at our disposal (Ephesians 5:14–15). If you are willing to put in the time to study the Bible, and learn how to explain and apply the Scriptures, you could be one of the laborers whom God will be able to use to accomplish His important end-time mission. LCM

How to Study the Bible

1. **Take the Bible Study Course**
The *Bible Study Course* published by the Living Church of God is a good place to begin learning what the Bible is all about.
2. **Read booklets and articles**
The Living Church of God publishes many booklets and articles that address specific biblical topics. By studying these materials and the Scriptures at the same time, you can come to understand a variety of important Bible subjects.
3. **Become familiar with the Bible**
 - a. Read the Bible regularly
 - b. Read Bible stories to children—and learn the *lesson* of each story
 - c. Read and outline books of the Bible—learn the content of each book
 - d. Play Bible games (e.g. Bible trivia)
4. **Obtain a Bible dictionary**
Bible dictionaries define terms used in the Bible and provide background information about biblical subjects.
5. **Use a Bible handbook**
Bible handbooks (*Halley’s*, *Unger’s*, *Eerdman’s*, etc) outline the content of each book in the Bible and provide background information as to when the book was written, to whom it was written and other useful material.
6. **Consult Bible concordances**
Bible concordances list words that are used in the Bible. A concordance is a helpful tool to find words and verses where the word is used. A *short* concordance (*Cruden’s*) lists only some verses where a word is used in the Bible. An *exhaustive* concordance (*Strong’s*, *Young’s*) lists every occurrence of a word in the Bible and may also provide the meaning of Hebrew and Greek words.
7. **Use several Bible translations**
Reading the Bible in different translations can be helpful for understanding the meanings of Bible verses.
8. **Read Bible commentaries**
Bible commentaries give more detailed explanations of what Bible scholars think a verse means. Sometimes commentaries can be very helpful—sometimes not. Single volume commentaries often provide very little information.
9. **Use Hebrew and Greek lexicons**
Hebrew and Greek lexicons provide detailed information about how biblical words were used at the time when the Bible was written.
10. **Study subjects and doctrines**
Make a notebook of the main verses that support each biblical doctrine. Find out what the Bible really says by looking up all the verses that mention a particular subject.
11. **Read books about the Bible, Church history and other Bible topics**
Broaden your knowledge by selecting books that go into more detail about subjects related to the Bible. Learn to *evaluate* books by comparing their content and ideas with the Bible itself.
12. **Develop your own program for Bible study**
 - a. Set a regular time and place to study the Bible each day
 - b. Keep your Bible study materials in that place
 - c. Pray before you study—ask God for guidance and understanding
 - d. Map out a program of study for a year—set some goals
 - e. Do extra Bible study on the Sabbath
 - f. Review and meditate on what you have studied
 - g. Practice explaining the Scriptures

—Douglas S. Winnail

Understanding Mankind's Suffering

By Dexter B. Wakefield

Theologians and philosophers cannot figure it out. If God is merciful and good—but also omnipotent—why is there such terrible suffering? The columnist and commentator Walter Lippman wrote: “The greatest of all perplexities in theology has been to reconcile the infinite goodness of God with his omnipotence. Nothing puts a greater strain upon the faith of the common man than the existence of utterly irrational suffering in the universe.”

Another writer, Walter Kaufmann, put it this way: “Faith in immortality, like belief in Satan, leaves unanswered the ancient question: is God unable to prevent suffering and thus not omnipotent? Or is he able, but not willing, to prevent it and thus not merciful? And is he just?”

The last century has seen indescribable suffering. Two world wars left much of Europe and Asia devastated, with tens of millions dead and injured. Despots throughout the last century have engaged in genocide and mass murder of innocents. The evils of war, oppression, racism, disease and natural calamity (to name a few) continue unabated even as mankind struggles to deal with them. If God is merciful, how can these things be?

Sometimes, when people are confronted with the great suffering in the world, they become discouraged. They conclude that there cannot be a God—or that He is indifferent, otherwise He would never allow such pain to happen. How would *you* explain it?

Many “theologians” are essentially philosophers who reason about

God and spiritual matters. Theology—the word means “god-study”—was invented in ancient times by the polytheistic Greeks who believed that spiritual knowledge could be achieved through reasoning. But the one true God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the prophets and the Apostles—said that He *reveals* Himself to us through His word. There are things that we can know only through His revelation—such as right and wrong—and His plan for humanity. What God reveals in His word about the suffering of humanity is most illuminating and encouraging.

The Short Answer

The short answer is as follows: *Humanity cannot have freedom of choice and freedom from suffering at the same time.* God gave mankind free moral agency. Therefore, God can be good, merciful and omnipotent and not always intervene to save us from the consequences of our choices—particularly when those choices violate what He has told us is right and wrong. God permits us to make our choices during this current age in which evil not only exists but also abounds. But how did our world become like this? Your Bible explains.

In the third chapter of Genesis, we read the account of the initial rebellion of Adam and Eve against God: “Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may

eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and *you will be like God, knowing good and evil*’” (Genesis 3:1–5).

We know, from other parts of the Bible (Revelation 12:9; 20:2), that the serpent is Satan—a rebellious angel formerly called Lucifer. It was not because Eve was unintelligent that Satan was able to deceive her. It was because she wanted the fruit. “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate” (Genesis 3:6).

Deciding what is truly right and wrong is the province of God who knows all things. But Satan enticed Adam and Eve with the great lie that they could have the God-like power of determining good and evil for themselves—*without disastrous consequences.* He told them, in effect, that mankind can “socially construct” its own moral laws and no suffering will come from it. Adam and Eve quickly discovered the magnitude of Satan’s deception. In Genesis 3:14–19, God outlined the hardship and suffering that would come as a result of their disobedience. This basic situation has continued for mankind ever since.

Mankind continues to reserve the knowledge of good and evil—

right and wrong—to itself. It builds its institutions and moral systems on the shifting sands of human perception, and to the extent that those systems recognize what God has revealed to be right and wrong, they tend to produce good fruit. But to the extent they violate God's divine moral law—an act called sin—they fail, producing great suffering for mankind (1 John 3:4). Why does God allow mankind to suffer? *In an important sense, the world suffers because it insists on it.* “Natural causes” contribute to the suffering of mankind, but much of the world's suffering has its origin in its spiritual failures.

In the Genesis 3 account mentioned earlier, Satan deceived Eve, but the account makes it clear that Eve accepted the deception because it allowed her to do what she already wanted to do. The Bible says that Satan “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9), and much of its sin operates in that manner. To illustrate the problem, let us imagine a story of a rather unusual store, run by Satan.

Satan's “Little Shop Of Deceptions”

Once upon a time, Satan decided to open a store called, “Satan's Little Shop Of Deceptions,” and he located it on a busy street near a major university. He was leaning in the doorway one day when a learned man came walking down the sidewalk looking very disturbed and frustrated.

“Whoa, Professor,” called Satan. “What seems to be the problem?”

The Professor had been deep in thought, but he stopped, looked up and decided to explain his predicament. Satan continued to lean casually in the doorway as his potential customer approached.

“I have learned a great deal about the world,” explained the Professor, “and there are a lot of very enticing things I would like to do, but this Judeo-Christian moral system is extremely inconvenient to me. It's too restrictive for a man of my sophistication, but I haven't been able to reason a way out of it.”

Satan perked up and said: “Boy are you in the market! Come on in! I've got a great little deception here that will allow you to do whatever you want and still assert moral authority. You're going to just love it!” As he stepped behind the counter in his shop, Satan continued to explain. “What I have for you today is the modern, updated version of a classic deception I sold to a group of ancient Greeks called the Sophists more than two millennia ago. I'll remind you of how it went back then,” he said, and he began to read from a fine book on intellectual history.

“According to Sophists such as Protagoras, man was the measure of all things and his own individual judgments concerning everyday life should form the basis of his personal belief and conduct—not naïve conformity to traditional religion... Claims to the contrary, whether religious or philosophical, could not stand up to critical argument. The ultimate value of any belief or opinion could be judged only by its practical utility in serving an individual's needs in life.”

“Sophists recognized that each person had his own experience, and therefore his *own reality*. In the end, they argued, all understanding is subjective opinion. Genuine

objectivity is impossible. All a person can legitimately claim to know is probabilities, not absolute truth.... Hence, the Sophists concluded in favor of a flexible atheism or agnosticism in metaphysics and situational morality in ethics. Since religious beliefs, political structures and rules of moral conduct were now seen as *humanly created conventions*, these were all open to fundamental questioning and change” (*The Passion of the Western Mind*, Richard Tarnas, pp. 27–29, emphasis added).

Satan continued: “That's the way I sold it back in the good old days of ancient Greece, but my modern, semantically-enhanced version goes like this: “Since there is no God, all moral systems are *socially constructed*—and therefore, they are *equally valid*.” Satan chuckled and added: “I just love that word, ‘valid.’ It always confuses ‘em.” He continued: “If you can convince yourself and others of this principle, then you can make your own rules and still assert moral authority! Your main concern will be your own personal power and you will be a god unto yourself, *knowing good and evil!*”

The professor was overjoyed. “Thanks Satan,” he said gleefully. “I'll put this to work right away.”

Deal With It

What is one way you could deal logically with that deception? It is easy. It is not a question of whether all moral systems have equal *validity*; it is a question of whether all moral systems have equal *outcomes*. They do not—as we can easily observe from history and our daily lives. We—both as individuals and collectively as societies—have freedom

of choice, but depending on what we choose, the consequences may be *good or evil*—for others and ourselves

So, can humanity expect to have freedom of choice and freedom from suffering at the same time? Obviously not. We can observe how wrong moral choices made by individuals and societies affect outcomes and produce suffering. Just because we *intend* for some socially constructed moral system to have good outcomes does not mean that it will. Wrong moral choices bring bad results whether we think they should or not. Notwithstanding what the ancient Sophists and their modern, “sophisticated” descendants believe, *divine law does not need our consent to exist and operate*. It exists objectively. And if true moral law is not socially constructed, mankind must consider that it has an author. A full knowledge of it must be *revelatory*. The good news is that we have a source of knowledge that reveals what is truly right and wrong. But the bad news is that, like Adam and Eve, few want to obey.

“The Real Thing”

What does God reveal to mankind about this matter? His knowledge is much higher than ours. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8–9).

God reveals that his “understanding is unsearchable” (Isaiah 40:28). “For the word of the LORD is right, and all His work is done in truth. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD” (Psalm 33:4–5). “And My righteousness will not be abolished” (Isaiah 51:6). “Also Your

righteousness, O God, is very high, You who have done great things; O God, who is like You?” (Psalm 71:19).

That last question goes right to the point. Concerning being righteous (having the quality of rightness), who is like God? No one, of course, because human beings are neither all knowing nor all-powerful. Yet mankind insists on taking the knowledge of right and wrong to itself, and for thousands of years, the outcomes have been disastrous—both for individuals and for societies. The Apostle Paul cautioned the Church in Galatia: “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction” (Galatians 6:7–8, NIV).

This is not to say that when one of our loved ones suffers from sickness or some of life’s calamities that person always brought it on himself or herself. Far from it. Suffering may be caused by the actions of others—as in automobile accidents—or simply be time and chance occurring in an age where mankind as a whole has insisted on going it alone. But God genuinely cares about our suffering and promises that the current mess humanity has made will not be the status quo forever: “And the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 25:8).

Is God Uninvolved?

The Bible teaches us that in this age God is allowing mankind to go its own way, make its own mistakes and suffer its own consequences. Some people do evil to others intentionally, while others do evil under deception. In addition, the Bible acknowledges that we do not control everything in our lives. Natural

disasters occur, and “time and chance happen to them all” (Ecclesiastes 9:11). But is God uninvolved in the affairs of men? On the contrary! God is *very* involved, and the Bible is filled with many different ways that He is. The following are just a few.

The Bible reveals that God has a plan for humanity. Simply put, He is “bringing many sons unto glory” (Hebrews 2:10), and Jesus is “the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29). But in this age of man’s rebellion, God is allowing the world to learn the consequences of rejecting His way of life—His divine moral law. God said that when we gained sufficient power, we would destroy ourselves unless He intervened. Jesus plainly stated in His Olivet Prophecy: “And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (Matthew 24:22). God said that He intervenes in the affairs of mankind to effect His plan for mankind. That promise is a great source of hope for a troubled world, because when God intervenes, He does it to accomplish what He has promised.

God’s intervention in the lives of those He calls into His Church is another way He is involved. For example, Jesus said: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44). When the Father draws us, he grants repentance and upon baptism, He forgives our sins through unmerited pardon. By Jesus’ sacrifice, “we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14). The giving and working of God’s Holy Spirit is a miraculous intervention in the life of every one of God’s children. It is God’s Spirit that enables us to live as He has instructed and transforms us inwardly as we do so. “For it is God who works in you both to will and to

do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). That is an important and blessed intervention. The capacity for understanding and obedience that God’s Spirit brings is lacking in humanity today, but it will not always be that way. “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh” (Joel 2:28). “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (Ezekiel 36:26–27).

God answers prayer, and He is very involved with us individually in many ways—as in our healing. Paul taught: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*” (James 5:14–16). God *cares* about His children, hears our prayers and leads us out of our trials. “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, *but with the temptation will also make the way of escape*, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). God will intervene to make even our personal trials work for our benefit if we obey Him. “Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And *we know that all things work together for good to those*

who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:27–28).

God says that He may intervene for any member of society solely out of His mercy, goodness and compassion. “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion’” (Romans 9:14–15).

These are just a few of the many Biblical examples of God taking an active part in the lives of mankind, the Church of God as a whole, individual Church members and other members of society. Clearly, God is willing to be very involved in our lives in this age, even as mankind continuously rejects Him.

So, why does God allow mankind to suffer? The short answer is that mankind insists on it. The whole world has long been deceived into thinking it can “socially construct” right and wrong for itself. But it cannot; God says that we lack the competence. The world has chosen the road it is traveling, and for a time must live with the consequences of that choice. There cannot be *both* freedom of choice *and* freedom from suffering as long as the world rejects and denies God. There are bad consequences and evil outcomes, because the outcomes of all moral systems are not the same. This is the result of only one thing. True moral law exists whether the world believes it or not, and that divine law must be revealed by its Author. Sadly, we still live in an evil age, and there is still much suffering in it.


But if we believe and obey God, we can have access to His infinite wisdom, because: “The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple” (Psalm 19:7). In God’s view, even the unsophisticated person who believes Him is wiser than the

worldly professor. But if we do not trust and obey, we are on our own—which is where the world finds itself now.

Certainly, God’s Church has suffered great persecution through the centuries. As Jesus explained: “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:18–19). And in addition to persecution the Church must deal with “time and chance” and temptations and trials “such as is common to man.” But Paul assured the people in the Church that, even in this evil age, “all things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28).

In addition, the Church has the encouragement of knowing that there is a sure hope for the world. “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). God has promised that the day is coming that He will intervene “with a rod of iron” to establish His Kingdom and save humanity from itself.

Paul wrote: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God” (Romans 8:16–19, KJV).

Even as the world suffers, the Church has the blessing of God’s way of life now and a sure promise for the future. 

Revelation:

Background to a Mystery

By John H. Ogwyn

The book of Revelation is, to most people, the most mysterious book in the Bible. While many ideas and interpretations have been advanced as explanations for Revelation, few readers have really understood the background against which this important book was written. Such understanding is vital if we are to grasp the role that God intended this final book of the Bible to play in the life of His Church.

As the first century AD came to an end, it was a bewildering and discouraging time for God's people. Years earlier, after the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the Church of God had begun in a very dramatic fashion on the day of Pentecost in 31AD. Three thousand people were baptized on that day, and in the months that followed the number of the disciples multiplied greatly. God's miraculous intervention was regularly evident.

After about two years, local persecution broke out in Jerusalem. Many of the disciples fled the area, but the early Christian movement continued to grow in scope and power. Over the first 25 years of its history, the story of the Christian Church is a story of growth and excitement. There was persecution, to be sure, but it was mostly local and spotty in scope and duration. New congregations were being raised up throughout Asia Minor, Greece and even in Rome. In addition, various of the original 12 Apostles preached the gospel to remnants of the House of Israel, traveling beyond the Euphrates to the Parthian Empire, as well as to the British Isles. Additionally, the Church continued to grow in the Jerusalem area, so that when the Apostle Paul visited there in the late spring of 56AD, James called his attention to the thousands of Jews in the area who believed the Christian message (Acts 21:18–20).

Then things began to change. Paul was arrested in Jerusalem during that Pentecost season of 56AD, and spent most of the next five years in jail—the last two of those years in Rome. Once Paul was no longer free to travel throughout the Greek-speaking world, serious problems began to surface in many of the Gentile churches. Paul had himself prophesied of this in his address to the Ephesian elders, while he was en route to Jerusalem in the spring of 56 (Acts 20:29–30).

Heretical teachers soon sought to subvert the Christian Church, and to take control of it to further their own ends. Introducing their own “twist” to the Christian message, and motivated by a desire for wealth and power,

they sought a personal following. This is why both Jude and Peter compared such teachers to Balaam of old.

Around the time of Paul's release from Roman imprisonment, this situation was so far advanced that James' brother Jude exhorted Christians to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). This was necessary because some were deliberately distorting the meaning of “grace” to imply that obedience to God's law was no longer necessary. Where just a few years earlier there had been doctrinal unity and evangelistic fervor, now there was increasing strife, confusion and discouragement.

The situation continued to worsen. Around Judea, revolution was in the air. Jewish Zealots were agitating for the overthrow of Roman rule, and the establishment of an independent Jewish state. Jewish Christians faced increasing pressure to align themselves with this “patriotic” movement. Within months of Paul's release, James (the brother of Jesus who served as leader of the Jerusalem Church) was killed by Herod in Jerusalem (Acts 12:1–2). Over the next five years, at the close of Emperor Nero's reign, Roman persecutions against Christians increased. Hundreds of Christians were put to death, primarily in Rome but also in some of the provinces. Increasingly unpopular after the great fire that destroyed much of Rome, Nero sought to divert attention from himself by blaming the Empire's problems on this new “sect.” Before the end of his reign—when Nero himself had to flee Rome in the spring of 68AD—the Roman Empire had executed first Paul and then Peter.

Shortly after the Pentecost of 69AD, the Jerusalem Church fled to escape the soon-coming Roman army. By 70AD, both the Temple and Jerusalem itself lay in ruins, totally destroyed by General Titus and his troops. Virtually all of the original leadership of the Church was dead by this time. In fact, John was the only original Apostle still alive. After 70AD he made Ephesus, located in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) near the Mediterranean coast, his primary base of operations.

In the decades that followed, brethren saw increasing turmoil and doctrinal strife within the Church. By the early 90s AD, the subversive element had been successful in taking control of whole congregations, and many true Christians who remained loyal to John and the original Apostolic teachings were actually disfellowshipped (3 John

9–10). How bewildering this must have been, to those who had been awaiting the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His Kingdom! Jerusalem had been encompassed by armies and destroyed, just as Jesus had predicted shortly before His crucifixion (Luke 21:6, 20–22). However, well over 20 years had passed, and Christ was not back yet. To make matters worse, the Roman government under Emperor Domitian was increasing its persecution of Christians, and seeking to enforce conformity with the state cult of emperor worship, especially in the area of Asia Minor where many true Christians lived.

Then, in 96AD, the elderly John was arrested by the Roman government and banished to the isle of Patmos, off the coast of Asia Minor. Patmos was a place where political prisoners were exiled, and from which few ever returned. For someone of John's advanced age, exile to a prison island must have seemed like a sentence of certain death. It was here where John was given the visions that were to comprise the final book of the Bible.

Peter Points to John's Future Role

About 30 years earlier, in the closing months of his life, Peter wrote his last letter to the Church. Under God's inspiration, he sought to prepare the brethren for the future. He did so in two ways. First, he put together a permanent record of authoritative teaching for the Church. This was the first canon of the New Testament. We see it alluded to in 2 Peter 1:15: "But I will see to it that after I am gone you will have means of remembering these things at all times" (NEB). He did this by leaving an authoritative written record.

Second, he pointed the brethren to John. Along with Peter, and James the brother of John, John was said to possess a "more sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter 1:16–19), because he had been with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration ("eyewitnesses of His majesty," v. 16), and had heard the voice from heaven (cf. Matthew 17:1–9). When Peter was writing this passage, James had been martyred many years earlier (Acts 12:1–2), so Peter's "we" could refer only to himself and to John.

God purposed to use John to complete the New Testament, and Peter gave testimony to this in his final letter. John carried out this commission by writing a fourth gospel and three letters—all probably completed before his Patmos exile—and finally the book of Revelation itself. John was responsible for putting the New Testament in its final form.

In his gospel, John focused primarily on Jesus' teachings in the context of the festival seasons during His ministry. John did not begin with the human birth of the child

Jesus—or even the beginning of His earthly ministry—but rather stressed His pre-existence with the Father from "the beginning." The world in which John wrote was very different from that of the first three gospel writers, who had all completed their work before 70AD. John wrote against a backdrop of the heresies extant at the close of the first century. In the same way, his three letters dealt with the issues confronting the Church at that time. For instance, he was compelled to emphasize the importance of obedience to the law, and that such obedience could not be separated from the *real* love of God.

The Final Message

In his old age, in exile on Patmos, John described in Revelation 1:9–20 the most remarkable experience of his long life. He envisioned himself transported into the future, to the time of God's impending intervention and judgment, called "the Day of the Lord" in numerous Old Testament passages. Hearing a powerful voice, John turned to gaze upon seven golden lampstands. John saw One, standing in the midst of those lampstands, whose face shone like the sun in its full strength. Absolutely overwhelmed by what he saw, he fainted. The One he saw standing there was the very One with whom he had walked and talked as a young man; the One beside whom he had sat, and upon whose shoulder he had leaned at their last Passover meal together. John had last seen Him when he stood with other disciples on the Mount of Olives, gazing up and watching Him disappear into the clouds more than 65 years earlier. As John lay collapsed, that One reached down and touched him gently with His hand. "Don't be afraid, John," He declared, "it is I." Christ went on to reveal Himself as the One who is the first and the last; the One who was dead but is now alive forevermore. John was then told to write down what would be Jesus Christ's final message to the Church that He had built.

Years earlier, when Jesus had walked the earth as a human being, He had proclaimed the good news of the coming Kingdom. He had specially trained and taught 12 young men who were witnesses of all that He said and did, and sent them out to teach others. Now, well over six decades after He had ascended back to the Father, Jesus Christ appeared to His only disciple who was still living, and gave him His final message, to be recorded and transmitted to the Church.

In the midst of turmoil, and a world that did not make sense to them, God's people needed to know that He had everything well in hand. He had a plan, and a purpose that would be accomplished. Thousands of God's people had already "died in the faith" during the decades since Pentecost, 31AD. But the Church did not need to worry, for the One who appeared to John had the keys to unlock both

death and the grave (Revelation 1:18). In His message to John, Christ was going to unveil the future, and show the servants of God the things that would come to pass.

When pressures from the world seem overwhelming, it is easy to lose sight of the great invisible God, and to focus instead on what we can see. Remember: God did not operate on the time schedule that the first century Church expected, any more than He has operated on the schedule that many of today's Christians "set for Him" years ago! Events had lasted longer and grown worse than most members of the early Church could have imagined. What they discerned through their physical senses was a world in which the power of the Roman Empire was at its height. In addition, they saw the Church in turmoil and rent with heresies, mere decades after Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and gave assurance that He would return. What did it all mean, and where was it headed?

This was the context, as John began to record Revelation, in which the Almighty began to open what had previously been closed. The book of Daniel (the final prophetic book of the Old Testament in the inspired order preserved by the Jews) concluded by stating that the full understanding of its message was closed until the "time of the end." Daniel strove in vain to look through the veil that obscured the future in order to understand the full implications of the message that he had received. He could not do so, because it was not yet time for that message to be clearly revealed (Daniel 12:8–9).

At the end of the first century, the time had finally come to unveil the future. You see, *unveiling* is what the book of Revelation is about. The English word "revelation" is translated from the Greek *apocalypsis*, also rendered in English as "apocalypse." It literally means a "revealing" or an "unveiling." While the future is veiled and mysterious to human beings, it is clear to God. Man tries in vain to look through the mists of time and to perceive what it is that the future might bring. While all men can do is guess, the great God who inhabits eternity is able to declare what the end will be—all the way from the very beginning.

Jesus Christ was shown to be the only One worthy to unveil the details of God's great plan for the future, because He alone was worthy to break the seals and unroll the scroll containing God's revelation (Revelation 5:4–5). Appearing to John in vision, Christ told him to record three "threads" of revelation, woven together to comprise the book that was to follow. These threads were "the word of God," "the testimony of Jesus," and also the things that John "saw." For the very first time, the Old Testament prophecies (the word of God) were woven together with Jesus' statements from the New Testament (the testimony of Jesus). More than 100 times in Revelation, verses from the Old Testament are either quoted or paraphrased.

Revelation also contains direct statements by Jesus Christ, as well as allusions to statements that He made during His earthly ministry. Also, there are allusions to statements inspired by Christ in the New Testament and recorded by Paul or others in various of the epistles.

These references to the Old Testament and New Testament were woven together with visions of future events. The book of Revelation was intended to put the rest of the Bible in perspective, and to show the framework within which all the prophecies of Scripture would be brought to completion.

The story of God's Church through the ages was recorded, in advance, in the prophetic message addressed to the seven churches. It was important that Christians be reminded that whatever problems they encountered were not a surprise to God, but were foreseen in advance—and were "part of the story."

Further, John recorded that the Roman Empire (which was at a pinnacle of power as he wrote) would receive a deadly wound, but this wound would be healed and the empire would continue for centuries (1,260 prophetic "days") beyond. While he recorded a future martyrdom of saints, he also showed that the Almighty would finally pour out judgment on those who persecuted His people. In Revelation, John described the glorious destiny of those who continue to serve God faithfully in spite of adversity, as well as the destruction of the incorrigible who reject God's offer of salvation. John closed this final book of the New Testament with a glimpse of the new earth—the ultimate dwelling place of God and His family.

Revelation is an effective counterpoint to Genesis, providing the answers to the problems that Genesis describes. Genesis opens with the creation of the original heavens and earth; Revelation ends with a new heavens and a new earth. In Genesis, we see the serpent enticing our first parents; in Revelation the serpent is finally removed forever. Genesis introduces pain, sorrow and death as the consequence of man's sin; Revelation describes their banishment from the new heavens and new earth as a result of Christ's redemption. Genesis describes mankind cut off from the Tree of Life, and driven out from God's presence; Revelation shows that God will finally dwell with the redeemed, who will have unfettered access to the Tree of Life. Genesis explains the origins of what we see around us; Revelation shows their final resolution.

This last book in your New Testament is an unveiling of the future—*your* future! It is a book written as Christ's final message to the Church, to show that regardless of how bleak things may appear, there is no need to be fearful or despondent. God has a plan and purpose, and the accomplishment of that plan—on God's time schedule—is absolutely sure. ☐



International Corner...

“So much love, unity, zeal, peace and harmony reminds one of God’s Kingdom,” said Mr. Dibar Apartian, reflecting on the many reports Church Administration is receiving from Feast sites around the globe. In this issue of the *Living Church News*, the “International Corner” is devoted to reports from many of those sites.

One hundred thirty-five joyful brethren attended God’s “Fête des Tabernacles” in scenic *Evian, France*, feasting on hearty spiritual food and delicious French cuisine. Various courses of spiritual meat were well-prepared and well-served by Mr. Dibar Apartian and a good complement of ministers, sharing God’s revealed knowledge about His Kingdom and family.

Brethren from France, Germany, Switzerland, the United States, Spain, the Canary Islands, Australia, Martinique, Belgium, England, Ireland, Denmark, Colombia and the Philippines were drawn together in love and good fellowship by a common Spirit. No matter how different the backgrounds, everyone seemed like family, and the brethren especially rejoiced together over three baptisms during the Feast adding to that family. Sermons in the modern, well-equipped auditorium alternated between English and French, with translations through a modern headset system into French, English, German or Spanish.

Evian, France is a small, quiet resort city located on the southern

shore of scenic Lake Geneva a short distance from the Swiss border and northern Italy. Brethren could conveniently enjoy afternoon side trips into Geneva, the Swiss Alps or the French countryside, or could cross the lake by ferry to Lausanne, Switzerland.



Evian, France

Everyone stayed together in a self-contained lake front complex of vacation apartments located only a few hundred meters from the *centre ville*. Evian’s famous spa and shopping district were only a short walk away along a beautiful waterfront park. All meals were taken together within the complex, and the lively fellowship of the dining room was one of the highlights of the Feast. The lunches and dinners had appropriate wines from the local region and, of course, on every table were bottles of world-famous Evian water.

More than 130 brethren—about half from the United States or Canada, and others from Holland, France, Sweden, Italy and New Zealand—joined their British brethren for the Feast of Tabernacles in *Llandudno, Wales*. God provided beautiful weather to enjoy the truly unique beauty of His creation, and there was

a sense of warm and enthusiastic fellowship throughout.

Activities included an evening concert by a Welsh Male Voice Choir, catered lunches between services on the Holy Days and an evening banquet and family dance midway through the Feast. We made bus trips to two medieval castles: Caernarfon (the site of Prince Charles’ investiture as Prince of Wales) and Beaumaris. Other trips included a tour of a slate mine (once the basis of the North Wales economy), and a ride on a steam train that formerly hauled slate from the mine down though the mountains to an ocean port.

Brethren described the messages as “inspiring... thought-provoking... conveyed a sense of urgency... the best in a long time.” Mr. Rodger Bardo did a fine job coordinating the choir and special music. The varied and inspiring special music included piano, choral, vocal solos and instrumental solos—saxophone and bagpipes!

Many considered this North Wales location unsurpassed as a Feast site with its seaside location,

rich history, striking scenery and reasonable accommodations within walking distance of the meeting hall, restaurants and shopping.



Llandudno, Wales

The beautiful coastal town of *Bateman’s Bay, in New South Wales*, hosted the Feast of Tabernacles for the

Australian congregations (except Western Australia). One hundred forty of God's people met at the recently renovated Soldiers' Club in the town centre.

Mr. Bruce Tyler, Regional Pastor, was present for the whole feast. Four generations of his family were present, with Mrs. Tyler's parents visiting from the U.S. Mr. Tyler gave sermons on God's Kingdom and His Law, and that the "rod of iron" is the sceptre of righteousness Christ will use to rule the earth. Melbourne

pastor Mr. Rod King arrived halfway through the Feast; he spoke on marriage, God's reward for His family and the meaning of the Last Great Day.

Site coordinator Mr. Dayrell Tanner spoke on "three P's"—perspective, principles and preparation for the Kingdom of God. He also organized activities including a family and seniors' day at the Oak Ranch. Members enjoyed golf and horse riding, while the seniors were catered for at a special afternoon tea. A "bush dance" and "nostalgia talent night" provided further enjoyment.

The management of the venue thanked Church members for their good behaviour as well as their cleanliness. The hall cleaners said: "There is hardly anything for us to do when you are finished for the day. Your children are so well behaved, too."

Many of those attending for the first time commented on how wonderful the Feast of Tabernacles was.

At four sites across *the Philippines—Baguio City, Maranding, Tacloban City and Davao City*—564 faithful brethren

gathered at the places where God placed his name.

On the opening night in Baguio City, although it was raining outside, the warm love of the 169 registered brethren could be felt as everyone gathered to observe God's Feast; many brethren felt more closeness, unity of service, love, and kindness

during this Feast than ever before. At the end of the Feast, just before the farewell party hosted by the local Baguio brethren, a new family came to inquire about the Living Church of God.



Bateman's Bay, NSW

While they had been searching for where the Work was being done, this family had been keeping the Feast on the beach in temporary dwellings alone! They recently came into contact with some Church members, and are now planning to attend Sabbath services in the Pangasinan video group, north of Metro-Manila.

In Maranding, 276 brethren from Central and Northwestern Mindanao gathered to observe the Feast of Tabernacles. Mr. Tex Benitez, recovered from recent health trouble, gave two sermons during the Feast; he was assisted as site coordinator by his son, Mr. Gideon Benitez. Meetings were held in a building that was undergoing expansion. Because of the ongoing renovations, temporary roofing materials were in place, reminding Feastgoers that the Feast is all about living in temporary dwellings!

Some members traveled by 20-ton cargo truck for an 11-hour trip to the Feast site. Despite the harsh travel, with a few colds and coughs resulting from the inclement weather, God's people showed their seriousness, interest, and above all faith in serving and obeying Him, to keep His Feast despite many trials. One

special highlight of the Feast in Maranding was the baptism of six new brethren!

Fifty-seven brethren enjoyed very good weather and fine fellowship in the sunny city of Tacloban. Site coordinator Mr. Gorgonio de Guia spent the first half of the Feast there, traveling to Davao City for the end of the Feast. Children and adults alike happily rejoiced before God, enjoying the activities and the spiritual food. Mr. Basilio Osillos, elder from Metro-Manila, helped with songleading and sermonettes at this small but family-oriented Feast site, and delivered one sermon.

Davao City, located in the southernmost part of the Philippine archipelago, was the Feast site for brethren from southeastern area of Mindanao. On the opening night, 52 brethren gathered at the seaside venue of Victorio's Beach Resort. The following days were filled with spiritual food from live sermons and videotaped messages from Headquarters, and the high attendance reached 75. The children and youth had Bible class, the singles enjoyed their activity and the seniors were not forgotten. All ages participated in the variety show and family day activities. On three occasions, everyone joined together for potluck meals and fellowship.

Forty of God's people kept the Feast at *Wewak, Papua New Guinea*, on the Bismark Sea, just a few degrees south of the equator. The Feast was held in a hauswind—Pidgin English for a thatch-roofed building without windows. The sea breeze cooled Feast attendees as they listened to Mr. Rod King speak about the origins of the Papuans and their role in the wonderful world tomorrow. Brethren were fascinated to learn that they were descended from Cush, and that their ancestors had

travelled through the Hindu Kush, India, Burma, Malaya and the Indonesian archipelago before settling in their present land.

They learned about how God's Spirit changes our minds at conversion, and that God's firstfruits will be teachers in the Kingdom of God. All wanted to know as much as possible about God's way, and during meals they laughed and talked about their future. Brethren enjoyed a feast of tropical fruits, fish and rice.

A picnic at Wom beach was a great success. The azure blue ocean hides the remains of Japanese and Australian ships and airplanes destroyed in the last days before Japan's surrender to the Australian command at Wom.

The management and staff of the hauswind wanted to know more about the Church, and asked for booklets and articles to read.



Lake Taupo, New Zealand

Lake Taupo, located in the heart of New Zealand's North Island, was the destination for 45 Feastgoers this year. Included in this number were brethren visiting from Australia, Malaysia, and the U.S. Mr. Kinnear Penman of New Zealand was joined by Mr. Gaylyn Bonjour, visiting from Church Headquarters in the U.S., in providing inspiring messages throughout the week. Live sermons were supplemented by video sermons from Headquarters. Not only were the messages heartfelt and encouraging; the brethren exhibited a unity that made the Feast that much more enjoyable.

With participation in feast activities from virtually all of the brethren, everyone had the opportunity to learn about each other in a

way that made for a family-like atmosphere throughout the feast. Activities included an Asian dinner and games evening, in which each family brought its favorite Asian dish to share. After dinner, games and a Bible quiz were provided for children and adults alike. Other activities involved a mountain hike, a luncheon, and an afternoon at a small island inhabited by many free-roaming animals that could be fed and held.



Port Vila, Vanuatu

Many of the brethren also enjoyed other scenic and adventurous opportunities that Lake Taupo has to offer. With world-class trout fishing, golfing, biking, hiking, white-water rafting, jet boating, or just a stroll along the beautiful lakeshore, brethren were never at a loss for something to do.

An exciting aspect of the Feast was how it reflected the growth with which God is blessing His church.

Seven people were enjoying their first Feast. Of those attending, 30 percent had been called as a result of the Work led by Mr. Meredith. During the Feast, Messrs. Bonjour and Penman were also privileged to perform two baptisms.

Twenty brethren (three attending their very first Feast) kept the Feast in *Port Vila, Vanuatu*. Local deacon Mr. Jerry Sam supervised

the first half of the Feast, during which brethren watched video sermons supplied by Headquarters. For the last part of the Feast, Mr.

and Mrs. Kinnear Penman came from New Zealand; Mr. Penman presented sermons explaining the meaning of the Feast, and the

mystery of the ultimate destiny God offers us. The Feast is the one occasion that allows our scattered members to come from their respective islands and fellowship together. Members especially appreciated the generosity of some American brethren whose gift greatly enhanced their Feast.

At *Mae Sot, Thailand*, 37 brethren gathered for services held in four languages: Thai, Karen, Burmese and English. The video sermons were supplemented by Bible studies for adults and children. Activities included swimming and horseback riding. Everyone was delighted by the Feast, and looks

forward to returning next year, God willing.



Mae Sot, Thailand

Forty-four brethren kept the Feast in

Kyarinn, Myanmar, between the beautiful scenic mountains of the Kalay Valley. Feastgoers were reminded to keep their focus on tomorrow's world, and that the sufferings of the present are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us. Sermon videos, and the Behind the Work

2003 video, were highlights. Amid the poverty, unemployment and crime in Myanmar today, the theme of the Feast was: “In the peaceful Kingdom of God, they shall not learn war anymore.” While older members renewed their faith, younger members were very excited about truths they were learning for the first time. All are looking forward to an even more joyous Feast next year.

In *Penang, Malaysia*, 63 people attended the Feast, held at the Copthorne Orchid Hotel. Heavy storms of previous weeks, which had caused occasional flooding of lowlands and disruption of public transportation, gave way just before the Feast, allowing the Feast to run smoothly.

Video sermons were complemented by messages from site coordinator Mr. Rajan Moses, who also baptized three new members into the Body of Christ. Activities included a boating trip, volleyball and a variety of children’s games. One special activity was a Spokesman Club; Mr. Moses commented that the youngsters in Malaysia have not only grown physically, but also in their speaking abilities. Beach games and a talent show brought the whole group together with fun and laughter. The youths’ sketch portraying Noah and the Ark was an instant favorite; young men imitated animals coming out of the ark, as all the cameras in the hall clicked away!

The whole group ate and fellowshiped together at two combined luncheons and a barbecue night. The latter was especially popular because of its poolside location and the accompanying sing-along. Wholesome and hearty conversations characterized the event. All were reminded to stay close to God, and to one another, as this present evil world draws to an end.

Just over 100 gathered in *Port Alfred, South Africa*, to keep the Feast. Along the banks of the Kowie River, brethren from Milwaukee, U.S., Australia, Namibia and Botswana joined South African brethren as one big family to rejoice before their Maker. Old-timers, as well as those attending for the very first time, were able to leave behind the cares of this world, to rekindle old friendships and form new bonds, to refocus and strengthen their relationships with God and with one another.

The standard of the spiritual food was, as usual, very high. Brethren were reminded to prepare for the Kingdom of God and to be brave in doing so, and were admonished to observe God’s laws for radiant health, and not to defile our bodies—the temple of God. Sermons and sermonettes often complemented each other, and it was clear that God is the One who inspires human instruments. Some serious questions were raised, such as: “Will your character endure?”, “How special are we to God?”, “What is success?” and “What lies ahead after the White Throne Judgment?” Brethren were able to taste the joy of the Eternal as He has poured out His blessings in abundant riches, both physically and spiritually.

In *Mombasa, Kenya*, brethren kept the feast at the Babu Resort, amid calm breezes and agreeable temperatures, in a tranquil setting dotted with multi-colored flowers. One hundred four brethren were present for Mr. Meredith’s opening night message on tape. Simultaneous translation into Luo, a

southwestern Kenyan dialect, was provided. Choir and special music added much to the services. Mr. Ernest Owino, site coordinator, performed five baptisms during the Feast. On the family day, brethren had a foretaste of the real love and harmony that will be extant in God’s Family. The seniors’ luncheon was an animating experience for brethren, who listened to Mr. Owino’s comments about growing old. There was no void of recreational activities, including volley-



Indonesian brethren at the Feast

ball and football games. Special activities for children were also organized. Mr. Owino challenged the brethren to test their biblical understanding by doing the puzzles in the *Kids’ Activity Book*. Many brethren enjoyed oceanside sight-seeing, gleaning some beautiful seashells.

After attending one of our services, the proprietor of the resort commented: “I cannot deny such an exemplary peace, love and order shown by you; you are actually a unique people.”

Though the days ended very quickly, the brethren anticipated the future with happiness, when all of us will be in God’s extended Family—sharing our joys forever!

—Compiled from reports by Dibar Apartian, Gideon Benitez, Ashleigh Beyersdorfer, Joel Ochieng Bobo, Felipe Casing, Gorgonio de Guia, Thomas Tial Hoe, Rod King, Rod McNair, Benito Parbo, Kinnear Penman, Mehm Pho Saw, John Soosay, Bruce Tyler, Dexter Wakefield, Patrick Wallace and Douglas S. Winnail

Feast Roundup 2003

“We recently enjoyed one of the most unified, inspiring and uplifting Feast of Tabernacles observances in modern times. As one who has attended the Feast 55 times, I can report to you that God’s Spirit is truly working in His true Church. The understanding, the genuineness and depth of the sermons, the loving Christian fellowship among the brethren and the sincere spirit of service among so many, all contributed toward making this one of the ‘best Feasts ever.’ Most of our ministry—and most of you brethren—have been tried and tested for decades. You have shown God and one another that you really do want to ‘hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown’ (Revelation 3:11). You believe in God and in His form of government. You urgently desire to really do the Work, so your hearts reflect the ‘Philadelphia spirit’ in wanting to go through the open doors and proclaim Christ’s message to the entire world. And you deeply wish to hold fast to the ‘whole counsel of God’ and not have any part in watering down the way of life and the true approach to God and His service we have learned. All this was reflected at this year’s Feast of Tabernacles!”

—Roderick C. Meredith

At more than 40 sites around the world, thousands of Living Church of God brethren kept the 2003 Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day in a joyous mood of celebration and gratitude for God’s plan.

Brethren rejoiced at the strong and helpful Feast messages—beginning and ending at most sites with video messages from the Presiding Evangelist, Mr. Roderick C. Meredith—which reminded us of our roles and responsibilities as firstfruits in God’s soon-coming Kingdom, and of His love for all those who have not yet had their minds opened to His Truth. Attendance at the various sites ranged from more than 900 (at Panama City, Florida) to fewer than ten (in Haiti). Final counts are not in as this article is being compiled, but we can say that more than 6,500 brethren attended Living Church of God Feast sites around the globe.

The following accounts from many of the Living Church of God Feast sites may give a flavor of the wonderful experiences shared by many this year. For news of Feast sites outside the United States and Canada, see the “International Corner” section of this issue.

In *Panama City, Florida*, more than 900 happy Feastgoers filled the lower level of the Marina Civic Center. It was clear that God was inspiring His services with powerful sermons on the Kingdom of God—and our part in it—from speakers including Mr. Richard Ames, Mr. John Ogwyn

and Mr. Rand Millich. During the Feast, hundreds also attended Bible studies held by Mr. Ogywn and Mr. Millich.

The special music was truly “special,” with performances by several individuals as well as the Festival Choir, all under the direction of Mr. Dave Hilton from the Montgomery, Alabama congregation.

Brethren were greeted with light rain on the opening day, which soon turned to picture-perfect weather for the many opportunities to enjoy the fine attractions that this beautiful area has to offer.

On Sunday, nearly 100 singles attended a special luncheon at the beautiful Breakers restaurant, which looks out on the warm blue-green Gulf of Mexico. The food was excellent, reportedly prepared by a former chef to one of America’s most famous billionaires! Mr. Ames spoke on how to be a success in life, and site coordinator Mr. Carl Ponder exhorted singles to tell of activities they had enjoyed at previous Feasts that might be fun for others this year.

On Monday afternoon, more than 370 gathered for a picnic at the beach in Saint Andrew’s State Park, enjoying swimming, beach volleyball and other fun games.

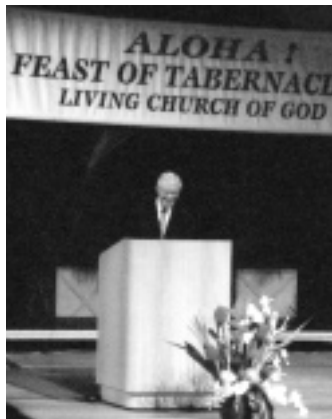
At the seniors’ luncheon the next day, something unusual occurred. The serving crew that had previously served our singles volunteered to serve at our seniors’ luncheon—even though another crew normally relieves them so they do not work two events so close together. The crew wanted to serve our seniors because of the attitudes they had experienced in our singles. They expected no extra gratuity for this; the tip is pre-figured and is included in the overall price of the meal. They just sincerely liked being around God’s people. At the luncheon, Mr. Millich complimented the many seniors who have stuck with the Truth through good times and bad.

On Wednesday afternoon, almost 400 adults, teens, singles, grandparents, and babies enjoyed bowling, pool and mild video games at Rock’it Lanes. The owners took a chance and closed their establishment to the public for our exclusive use, and later said they had never before had such a well-behaved large group. The teens especially impressed them.

On Thursday night, more than 500 danced the night away to live music from the Baton Rouge Band, led by Mr. J. R. Wells from Louisiana. Mr. Steve Hall joined in on saxophone, and Mr. Ponder even played a little blues guitar to everyone’s surprise.

Only a few had to be anointed for illness during the Feast, and some reported miraculous healings.

In beautiful *Myrtle Beach, South Carolina*, more than 840 brethren kept the Feast in the millennial surroundings



of the Kingston Plantation resort. Feastgoers were inspired by messages from Mr. Ogwyn, who spoke on “Coming Out of Babylon” and gave a fascinating overview of end-time prophecy. Mr. Ames gave sermons on our role as “Kings, Priests and Judges” and as “The Royal Family.” Messrs. David Chornomaz, Don Davis, Dan Friz and James Wells added further spiritual meat with their inspiring sermons.

From long-time members who had kept the Feast for more than 50 years, to several newly baptized Christians keeping their first Feast as members of God’s Church, everyone enjoyed the many opportunities for fun, fellowship and learning more about God’s plan. Activities included a Bible study led by Mr. Ogwyn, a sandcastle building contest on the beach and a family fun night with good food, dancing, fellowship and about a dozen “talent night” acts. The surrounding community offered attractions as varied as an alligator exhibit, plays, nature walks, and plenty of excellent fishing. A great Feast was had by all at Myrtle Beach!

More than 400 happy brethren kept the Feast at *Eureka Springs, Arkansas*. With sermons by Mr. Roderick C. Meredith, Mr. Ogwyn, Mr. Lambert Greer, Mr. Davy Crockett and Mr. John Harbison, the millennial beauty of the physical surroundings was surpassed by the spiritual beauty of God’s Word being preached.

At *Teton Village, Wyoming*, in beautiful Jackson Hole, visitors from New Zealand, Canada and England joined their brethren from Wyoming and across the continental United States.

Beautiful skies, partly cloudy and crystal clear, greeted everyone on the first High Day of the Feast, along with a light dusting of snow on the nearby mountain peaks. Daytime temperatures were in the 50s, 60s and low 70s, with evening temperatures dropping into the cool crisp 30s. This was great fall weather, with golden colors draping the mountainsides and valley floor. It was an awesome sight to see and experience.

Inspiring messages were brought to the brethren by Mr. Charles Bryce, who spoke about the Kingdom of God and the reality of its existence, and the child-like attitudes that God is seeking from His children. Mr. Keith Walden explained the birthright promise that is being given to the firstfruits. Mr. Dana Glatz talked about rejoicing before God, and living this way now in order to share the throne with Christ in the future. Mr. Sheldon Monson expressed hope for the future when Jerusalem and the rest of the world will be a safe place to live, and the miraculous healing power of God will always be available to everyone as He shows Himself strong to mankind in tomorrow’s world. Mr. Norm Aitchison spoke on welcoming change, and resisting “spiritual wolves” in order to survive. On the Last Great Day, Mr. Whitfield talked about

understanding the day’s meaning through our understanding of Christ’s messages at Jerusalem.

Feast activities balanced out the Feast with rejoicing and celebrating as God intended. Various teen and singles’ get-togethers, and meals along with a family day and dance, offered variety for everyone. A mountain hike to the scenic river-bottom benches of the mighty Snake River brought breathtaking views of the Tetons and sightings of elk. “This is real beauty in the heart of the Teton Mountains that God has made for us to enjoy, and He places His beautiful majestic animals in these parks for everyone to see and appreciate,” said Mr. Whitfield. In the afternoons, many ventured out to see and experience the wilds of nature God placed in the Grand Tetons and Yellowstone National Park.

For those who wanted to see and purchase a little bit of Jackson, various shops, art galleries and restaurants offered everyone excellent opportunities to experience this part of the West. A family fun show, Youth Day and seniors’ luncheon helped round out this year’s Feast in Jackson.

New Braunfels, Texas, in the state’s beautiful hill country, also played host to

this year’s Feast of Tabernacles. Abounding in natural beauty and charm, it provided a peaceful and tranquil setting for nearly 300 of God’s people to be filled with spiritual food from the King’s table. Feastgoers came from several states, Canada and England, attending services at the Holiday Inn Conference Center.

We were blessed this year to have three traveling speakers. Mr. Millich gave sermons on “Unity and The World Ahead” and “What Makes Christ Qualified to be King of Kings?” Mr. Lambert Greer gave sermons on “Physical Characteristics of Festival Observance Reveal Spiritual and Prophetic Purpose” and “Recapturing True Values: the Foundation of the Kingdom Of God.” Mr. Ben Faulkner gave sermons on “The Kingdom On My Shoulder” and “A Great Cloud of Witnesses.”

Mr. and Mrs. Deric Forrestier oversaw a teen outing. The teens enjoyed go-carting, miniature golf, batting and soccer cages and a pizza party afterward. They all seemed to have a great time. Troy and Zono Riggs and family organized a family day at the New Braunfels Civic Center. Events consisted of two meals, a talent show, square dancing, a family dance and activities for younger children.

Fifty-nine seniors enjoyed a luncheon at the Holiday Inn Restaurant, where they heard Mr. Greer speak. One of the physical highlights of the Feast was the “Louisiana Luau” hosted by Mr. and Mrs. Harold Forrestier and family. The gumbo, fellowship and music, and the scenic backdrop of the Comal River, made it a truly inspiring evening in a truly millennial setting. Festivities lasted well into the night.

This was truly a great Feast, with brethren able to fellowship with other saints of like minds while enjoying a



Myrtle Beach, NC

generous helping of spiritual food. The Feast gave everyone a real foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania brought more than 300 brethren together for eight millennial days—including visitors from Australia and Russia! Approximately a tithe of those attending were either brand-new to the Truth, or returning to the Church after having been away for five years or more. With daytime temperatures in the low 70s, and an abundance of powerful and inspiring messages from the speakers (including visiting speaker Mr. Ames), brethren felt abundantly the blessings God was pouring on this site.

A lively 200 brethren rejoiced in fellowship and rich spiritual food in *Florence, Oregon*, in a majestic Pacific Ocean environment, with daytime temperatures in the 50s and 60s. Brethren heard inspiring and encouraging sermons from Mr. Bryce, Mr. Carl McNair, Mr. Don Haney, Mr. Terrence Graves and Mr. Mark Mendiola.

Nearly 400 brethren gathered in *Prescott, Arizona*, to experience a wonderful foretaste of God's coming Kingdom. Beautiful fall scenery, and daytime temperatures ranging into the low 70s, contributed to a millennial setting. Sermons by Mr. Meredith, Mr. Bryce, Mr. McNair, Mr. Glen Gilchrist and Mr. Larry Solomon provided ample spiritual food for all attending. The family atmosphere, meaty and inspiring messages and fellowship helped make this a very special Feast for everyone in Prescott.

The "Garden Isle" of *Kauai, Hawaii* provided a near-millennial setting for 300 happy Feastgoers. This especially beautiful tropical island provided inspiring ocean views with verdant countryside and inland mountain backdrops.

The spirit of peace and harmony seemed to permeate the brethren in Kauai this year, resulting in good fellowship and activities that were well attended. The organized activities included a singles' mixer, a teen mixer, a family day, a festival dance and a traditional luau.

About three-quarters of the brethren turned out for the beachside family day. A delicious catered lunch was served under a huge pavilion that provided shade and temporary escape from a 10-minute cooling shower. Activities included a sand sculpture contest, snorkeling in a protected cove with colorful tropical fish, volleyball and much fellowshiping.

As it turned out, this site attracted many singles; at least 75 came to the singles' mixer, which amounted to roughly a quarter of our total attendance at the site.

The professional activity planner who helped us with scheduling activities and selling tickets commented on how impressed she was that our people wanted to schedule their optional activities together, unlike most conference groups with whom she deals. These optional activities included a luau, coastal boat tours, helicopter rides, kayaking to lush

waterfalls, snorkeling, scuba diving, and an abundance of lush tropical island sightseeing. Our activity planner also mentioned that if every group were as easy to work with as our members, her job would be very easy!

On the final two days, Mr. Meredith gave what would be the highlight sermons of the Feast. Everyone greatly appreciated the Merediths' visit.

The town of *Summerside, on Canada's Prince Edward Island*, provided a millennial setting for 110 excited and enthusiastic brethren, who experienced the warmest fall weather in a decade, with daytime temperatures above 70 degrees. But the real warmth was in the attitudes of the people—both the brethren, and the staff of the Linkletter Inn, who set the pace by going out of their way to be friendly, outgoing and very pleasant. Because of this friendly atmosphere, most of the brethren were

inspired to remain close to the Inn for Church-planned activities, leaving only for an occasional meal in a local restaurant or for a little shopping. Messages from Messrs. Gerald Weston, Jim Arnaldo, Ken Frank and Stuart Wachowicz also added to the uplifting mood of this unique Feast site.

In *Cranbrook, British Columbia*, 180 brethren met in a beautiful Canadian mountain setting. Nearly 10 percent of those attending were at a Living Church of God Feast site for the first time.

Speakers during the Feast included Mr. Eldon Davis, Mr. Brian Frank, Mr. Winston Gosse, Mr. Barry Howdeshell, Mr. Eng Monson and Mr. Mike Norris. On the Last Great Day, Mr. Gerald Weston gave a hope-filled sermon titled "The Valley of Dry Bones."

Feastgoers from the United States, and from as far away as New Zealand, joined their Canadian brethren for activities such as the family day at Wasa Park, where 145 took part in indoor and outdoor games and a barbecue picnic. Other activities included a singles' dinner, youth and family bowling, and a fellowship evening of table games and refreshments. On each of the Holy Days, a buffet meal between services provided an opportunity for fellowship.

More than 200 excited brethren met in *Cornwall, Ontario*—another of this year's Canadian Feast sites. Messrs. Gerald Weston, Frank Best, Gary Ehman, Bob League and Jacques Secours gave helpful and inspiring messages.

One highlight of the Feast was the large number of brethren attending a Living Church of God Feast site for the first time, whether coming from a previous Church group or entirely new to God's Church. Many commented that they felt this was the warmest and friendliest Feast they had ever attended.

—Compiled from reports by Jim Arnaldo, Frank Best, William Bowmer, Jeff Fall, Glen Gilchrist, Terrence Graves, Eng Monson, Bob Parker, Carl Ponder, Patrick Scarborough, Paul Shumway and Ben Whitfield



Kauai, HI

Practice Servant Leadership

(continued from page 3)

how *they* think—their problems at home, their health problems, their reactions to their fellow workers or supervisors and their ultimate goals in their career. As best we can, we should try to help them fulfill their hopes and, as stated before, their human potential.

Therefore, if we are “important” enough to be in a position of leadership, we had better learn to be “big” enough to *think through* all these things and try to *serve* those who are assisting us! Again, Jesus said: “It is more blessed to *give* than to *receive*” (Acts 20:35). Brethren, if we are sincerely trying to *give* ourselves to others—to lay down our lives for our fellow man—we will always tend to reflect *servant leadership* in our relationships with others. If we are, in fact, their “leader” in the sense of being over some project, some committee or perhaps a deacon, deaconess or elder in the Church, we should always approach our responsibility with the thought: “How can I best *give* and *serve* the people who will be working with me in the project at hand?” In all that we do, we should be *reflecting Jesus Christ*—the very One who *gave* Himself and even His life blood for all of us!

Jesus said: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35). This *sign* of genuinely *loving* and *serving* one another should be reflected whether we are “in charge” of a project, leading others, or if we are “under” someone else who is in authority. In any case, we should try to help each other, back each other up to the degree we can, and genuinely *serve* one another—as we are serving Christ.

Experiencing the interaction with fellow Christians in God’s Church—which is *Christ’s body*—and learning to occasionally lead or be responsible for the actions of others is part of our training to be kings and priests in Christ’s coming Kingdom. The Apostle Paul tells us: “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?” (1 Corinthians 6:2–5).

We are to learn to properly and fairly discern various situations in our interaction with others. We should constantly ask God to give us *wisdom*—and to help us be equitable and fair. We should study the *statutes* of God in the Old Testament. And certainly we should study and meditate upon the teachings and examples of Christ and the apostles as they *magnified* God’s law in the New Testament. Then, with God’s help, we can learn to rightly judge the situations that are presented to us in the Church and in the Work of God. But again, in all this, our attitude should be one of *servicing* in the fear of God.

Since *all* of us will eventually be kings and priests if we are counted worthy of the Kingdom of God, we should apply the *principles* of the Apostle Peter’s instruction to the elders. For we will be *far more* than human elders as we become kings in God’s Kingdom. Here is what God inspired Peter to write: “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the

sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble’” (1 Peter 5:1–5).

You will note that one in charge—an “overseer”—is to serve eagerly and honestly and *humbly*. They are **not** to be “lords” over those entrusted to their care. In all things they should be “examples” to the flock. Each of us, fellow brethren and ministers, must apply these principles to *ourselves*. And we must certainly follow Peter’s instruction in verse 6: “Therefore **humble** yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”

In all of this, we will make mistakes from time to time. *Human nature is still with us!* So we have got to constantly **forgive** each other along the way in an open and heartfelt way—**not** carrying grudges or hurt feelings over past mistakes. Nevertheless, each of us in *any* position of authority or leadership must try to carry out our responsibilities in the fear of God and in an attitude of deep *love* and genuine *service* to those who are working with us or who are under our leadership in the project at hand.

Let us all learn to reflect Jesus Christ in this way. Let us all learn to sincerely grow in and **practice servant leadership** to the glory and honor of the God we serve and the Savior who *gave* Himself for us. ☞

Are You Prepared for Persecution?

(continued from page 2)

Jesus powerfully warned the religious leaders of His day: “Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city” (Matthew 23:33–34). Again, Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword” (Matthew 10:34).

Brethren, *how* should we as true Christians prepare ourselves for these coming persecutions and hard times?

First of all, we need to build the mindset that Jesus explained in Matthew 10. Notice especially verses 38–39: “And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.” Through Christ within us, we must make ourselves mentally and spiritually prepared to go through the trials, tests and persecutions that the New Testament clearly indicates will come on faithful followers of Jesus Christ. We must *meditate* and *pray* about whether we are trying to “find” our lives—*our ultimate fulfillment*—in this present world, or whether we are genuinely willing to “lose” our lives for the Christ who died for us? Meanwhile, we must ask ourselves whether we are *demonstrating* this commitment to God by *really* following the Apostle Paul’s inspired instruction to all Christians: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a **living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1–2).

Let us each ask ourselves: “*How* am I truly giving my life to God? Am I trying to go *all out* in giving my *time*, my *talents*, my *strength* and my *resources* in serving God, in serving His people, in helping and serving in His Work?” Each of us has different ways in which we can serve. God knows this. And He will bless each one of us—*for all eternity*—to the degree that we actively surrender our lives to Him to serve and sacrifice according to our means. As Jesus said: “For everyone to whom much is given, to *him much will be required*; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48).

Also, each of us—by “walking with God” in regular Bible study, fervent prayer and meditation, heartfelt service and sacrifice—should be growing in the living **faith** we will need during the trials ahead. God states: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). And God’s word also tells us: “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:31–32).

Dear brethren, there is no good reason for **any** of us to become discouraged or to “fall away.” But we all need to carefully think through—*ahead of time*—the trials, tests and temptations that will surely come upon us, and what our response will be. Then we need—*right now*—to beseech God for more of His Spirit and for His guidance in doing *our part* to build the *faith* and *courage* that we will surely need in the perilous years just ahead.



Upcoming **Tomorrow's World** Telecasts

WGN: Sunday, 6:00 AM ET

VISION (Canada): Sunday, 5:30 PM & Thursday, 3:00 AM ET

Air Date	Broadcast Title
November 23	Did God Bless America?
November 30	Where Are We Now in Prophecy?
December 7	Prophetic Signs in the Middle East
December 14	The New World Order
December 21	Why Were You Born?
December 28	Is the Apocalypse Now?

For additional stations and times, check the Television and Radio Log on page 31 of your **Tomorrow's World** magazine.

Local Church News

Ordinations

During the Feast in Wewak, Papua New Guinea, **Mr. Peter Devis** was ordained as an elder. He will continue to serve the brethren in Papua New Guinea.

On the Feast of Trumpets, **Mr. Roy Monger** was ordained as an elder. He will continue to serve the brethren of the Knoxville, TN congregation.

In Evian, France, on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles, **Mr. Joseph Felber** was ordained as an elder. Mr. Felber will be serving the brethren in the French and German-speaking countries of Europe.

During the Feast at Bateman's Bay, Australia, **Mr. Zig Svalbe** of Melbourne, Australia, was ordained as an elder, **Mr. & Mrs. Mal Jennings** were ordained as deacon and deaconess, and **Mr. Norm Hellyer** was ordained as a deacon.

Chattanooga Spokesman Club

The year 2003 saw the debut of the Chattanooga Spokesman Club. Under the direction of our pastor, Mr. Bob League, assisted by local elder Mr. John Duckett, the club is learning to develop qualities to better represent the Kingdom of the Living God. One long-time Church member and veteran Spokesman remarked: "Of all the years in past speech clubs, this is the best one yet!" In its inaugural year, club members have embarked upon higher standards of Christian character and excellence. We are learning once again how the government of God works through quality leadership and godly attributes of love, sincerity, enthusiasm and genuine zeal. The season finale will feature a combined Nashville/Chattanooga ladies' and guests' night, which will demonstrate the progress and growth of the men to all present.

—James Sweat

Births

Joe and Brandy Hamby, from the Lafayette, LA congregation, are pleased to announce the birth of their daughter **Aurora Paige Hamby**, on September 22. She was 20 inches long and weighed 11 pounds, 2 ounces.

Sam and Sylvia Tomaselli of Brampton, ON, Canada, are pleased to announce the birth of their daughter **Desiree Josephine Tomaselli**, on September 26. She was 21.5 inches long and weighed 8 pounds, 2 ounces. Her big sister Cassandra Grace adores her!

In Loving Memory

Imogene McKinnon, of the Nashville, TN congregation, died at age 71 on August 15. She is survived by a daughter, Patricia L.

McKinnon, a son, a brother, three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. She was an example to all, and is greatly missed.

New Booklet!

All recipients of the *Living Church News* will automatically receive Mr. John Ogwyn's new booklet, *Revelation: The Mystery Unveiled!*, which Mr. Meredith offers in his upcoming "semi-annual letter" to *Tomorrow's World* subscribers. You need not ask for the booklet or send in a reply card; it will be mailed to you automatically, and should be in your mailbox sometime in late November or early December.

Feast Sermon Tapes

We regret that sermon tapes from each of the more than 40 Feast sites will not be available, because of the immense workload this would require on our tiny Headquarters video production staff. However, each congregation and video group will be receiving for its library a complete set of the Feast tapes that were sent to all Living Church of God Feast sites in 2003.

Commentary

Finding Your “Soul Mate”

By Glen Gilchrist

Have you noticed that despite the incredibly high divorce rate in our Western society, and despite all the turmoil and challenge of the dating process, marriage remains *very* popular today? Many books, television shows and movies focus on finding a “soul mate”—an intimate committed companion in life.

Many will try almost *anything* to find someone with whom they can truly share their life. Why does the goal of finding a long-term compatible life companion remain an ideal worth striving for, in this era of cohabitation, open marriages and other non-traditional arrangements? How can one escape the hopelessness of the dating game, and the emptiness of the singles scene?

The answer, quite simply, is that male and female roles in marriage were not developed by man, but were created by God Himself. Jesus tells us: “But from the beginning of the creation, God ‘made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mark 10:6–9).

God intended that man and woman form a bond for life, through the institution of marriage and family. But in today’s chaotic society, how does one find a life-long companion the way God intended? Studies have shown that marriages based on shared values stand a much greater likelihood of success than those based on any other factor. Shared values provide a context for marital partners’ roles, and a context for resolving the inevitable conflicts that arise.

Since God is the Creator of marriage, it stands to reason that the shared values we need for success in marriage must be His values. God’s Word reveals the pri-

orities we must follow to gain His favor, and to understand His will in our lives. God said: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:2–3). To build a proper foundation for marriage, we have to put Him first. In putting Him first, we also put His instructions first; His laws and His Word must come way ahead of everything else. The Bible is God’s instruction book for His creation. With it, we can understand the principles God has provided for living a successful life. With this strong foundation, we can then find a life-long “soul mate” who shares those same values.

Where does one find such a person? Obviously not in a singles bar or some Internet chat room. “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?” (2 Corinthians 6:14–15). One finds such a person within a group of people who share the same values.

Imagine that you were putting together a group of people for a golf league. Would it make any sense to include someone who had no interest in golf? Of course not! You would seek people who shared your interest in golf. This is even more important in the context of marriage.

Finding a true, life-long “soul mate” is not an impossible dream, but it requires *putting God first* in our lives, following His will and committing our lives into His hands. If we do so, we can find our “soul mate” among those who put the *same priority* on following the whole Truth of God as revealed in His Word.