

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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Keep Your Lamp Filled with Oil

Dear Brethren,

End-time events are heating up. This is obvious to anyone who has eyes to see. But why? The book of Daniel tells of a remarkable, ongoing spirit war then taking place in Persia (Daniel 10:12–14, 20–21). Our world today and the events happening in it are difficult to explain without understanding that there are unseen spirit forces at work. The prince of the power of the air and his powerful assistants are moving in our world (Ephesians 2:2; Mark 9:28–29).

These evil spirits must know that their time is short. And, although we do not know how short or when Satan will be cast down as described in Revelation 12, that event and the consequences of that battle are certain. Please do not read into this more than is intended, as it is likely that we will only understand the timing of that event in retrospect. But what we see for now is that prophecies we have known for decades are coming alive before our very eyes. While we have the overview of prophecy, we do not know every detail—but the stage *is* being set. Speculation is alluring, and fine when kept in perspective, but let us focus more on what we know for certain than on what we can only guess may happen.

We see an effort by the evil side of the spirit world to polarize and divide mankind at all levels. Sadly, even some in the Church have allowed themselves to become instruments of those unseen hands causing divisions. This problem is not new (1 Corinthians 1:10–13; 3:4). Again, please do not misunderstand; Paul was describing what was happening *within* the Church of God in Corinth. He was not promoting some form of emotional ecumenism to unify groups that had chosen to separate. He addressed that problem in Acts 20:29–31 and elsewhere.

Brethren, we *must not* get caught up in worldly controversies that evil spirits are stirring up to create division. Rather, we must keep our focus on what God has called us to do, especially as we see the events that we have talked about for decades occurring at warp speed before our eyes. Politicians and media have their agendas and messages, but we, as the body of Christ, must recognize why God has called us—to proclaim the good news of a better world and to warn the current world of what is happening and why.

A Remarkable and Special Calling

Dramatic events and sudden geopolitical shifts are making the world more dangerous. The pandemic turned our world upside down in too many ways to mention in this short message. America's disastrous departure from Afghanistan shocked the world—destroying trust among our allies and emboldening our enemies. Russia's invasion of Ukraine changed Europe overnight, moving it in a direction incomprehensible to most of the world. Germany is rearming, moving toward a future it does not even understand itself (Isaiah 10:5–7). This leaves us with a question: "What should we be doing right now?"

Jesus described ten virgins with lamps. Five are wise, five are foolish (Matthew 25:1–13). The wise take oil for their lamps, while the foolish do not. Five prepare for the wedding supper, while five remain unprepared. We are all familiar with this parable, but does it change our behavior?

The parable warns us that we must prepare for uncertain events with uncertain timing. Disasters come suddenly, but rarely without warning for those who have eyes to see. Is this not what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:1–8? Did he not warn

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us to stay awake, to watch, to be sober so we will not be—like the world and lukewarm Christians—caught off guard?

We should also learn lessons from the times of Noah and Lot. In both cases, people were going about their lives, oblivious to the calamities about to fall upon them. They were eating, drinking, marrying—carrying on as though all was okay—until the disasters suddenly descended (Luke 17:26–31). God used those times as examples for us “upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

If there ever was a time to get serious about our relationship with our Creator, it is now. May we personally and collectively redouble our efforts to strengthen our bond with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

David prayed three times a day (Psalm 55:17). So did Daniel (Daniel 6:10). It is easy to think, *I am ordinary, not special like these men were*. That is partly true—God did call those men for a special purpose—but your own calling means that God has something in mind for *you* as well. We all have the same nature, as we read regarding another powerful servant of God: “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit” (James 5:17–18).

Yes, we are ordinary people, not of ourselves remarkable or special. But we have been called to a remarkable and special calling—to be part of the Work of God. “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). That *will* be done! God has given us understanding of who the Israelite nations are, and we have the additional responsibility to warn them (Ezekiel 2–3; 33:1–9). We also see the whole world stumbling to the slaughter and must do all we can to warn mankind about what is coming (Proverbs 24:11–12).

The End May Be Closer Than We Thought

Along with having our spiritual house in order, we would be wise to prepare bodily and physically for difficult times. COVID-19 should have been a wake-up call. Some, even amongst us, were unnecessarily vulnerable to serious consequences—including death. Many of us live sedentary lives.

We do not move our bodies as much as we should. We have a greater variety and quantity of food than in past ages, but this can be a curse as well as a blessing. We know that COVID-19 took a greater toll on the obese and diabetic. How many lives were lost because the virus came suddenly, before victims had made the needed lifestyle adjustments? And what are we doing now to prepare for the next pandemic?

In addition, the Church has for many decades encouraged members to set aside moderate amounts of emergency supplies, such as food, water, batteries, and cash. But there is something in human nature that thinks, *Nothing will happen to me, or, I still have time*. It was remarkable to see how many Ukrainians did not believe Russia would invade, though all the signs of invasion were there. The same can be said for NATO nations, who belatedly recognized the potential threat and the need to rearm, which will take time.

The end is not yet, but events leading toward the end are coming together far more quickly than many realize. Can we not see that we may be closer to the end than we thought? Consider the moral slide that has taken place during the last five to ten years. Consider how our world has changed in just the last two years—a pandemic, economic upheaval, supply shortages, inflation, storms of “biblical proportions,” a war in Europe, the real possibility of major wars erupting in the Middle East and Asia this year, and a dangerous open border between Mexico and the United States. And there is much more. Stunning disasters are in our near future.

Let us never forget the spirit power behind division, chaos, and confusion. Now is no time to fall asleep spiritually. We must keep oil in our lamps and remember to heed Paul’s words:

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light (Romans 13:11–12).



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Better than Phylacteries

Knowing and memorizing the Ten Commandments is good, but not good enough. Israel was given the commandments in the most spectacular manner, yet the people ultimately failed to keep them. The shaking of Mount Sinai, accompanied by a great pyrotechnic display, shook even Moses: “And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I am exceedingly afraid and trembling’” (Hebrews 12:21). God wanted Israel to remember the words He proclaimed in their hearing!

Furthermore, God added rituals to help the Israelites remember the commandments. “You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:8–9). God also instructed Moses to “tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God” (Numbers 15:38–40).

Burnt offerings and sacrifices were added as reminders (Hebrews 10:3) of the price for breaking that great law of liberty (James 1:25; 2:12). Obedience to that law expresses love toward God and toward our fellow man (Matthew 22:36–40). “For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. But this is what I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you’” (Jeremiah 7:22–23). Yet, neither the voice of God, nor written reminders, nor tassels, nor burnt offerings kept Israel from forsaking the commandments.

The Pharisees of Jesus’ day were diligent regarding physical rituals. They wrote verses on parchment or vellum, then strapped them on their foreheads, or on the inside of their arms just above the elbow so as to keep them near the heart (Deuteronomy 6:6). Regrettably, human nature being what it is, these phylacteries became more important to the Pharisees than what they were meant to honor—the law of God. They became outward displays of hypocritical self-righteousness, rather than true righ-

teousness, as we see in Jesus’ famous rebuke of the Pharisees. “But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments” (Matthew 23:5).

A New Covenant

On the Feast of Weeks, in the great Sinaitic Covenant, God proclaimed that if the people kept His law, expressing His way of outgoing concern, He would bless them abundantly. They readily agreed—but failed time after time to uphold their end of the bargain. After the restatement of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, we read this woeful exclamation: “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!” (v. 29).

Yes, Israel heard the thundering voice of the One who became Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 10:1–4) spelling out the greatest code of law ever given to mankind. They had reminders—phylacteries, tassels, and animal sacrifices—but lacked obedient hearts. This is why God gave another great gift some 1,500 years later, on another Feast of Weeks, a day we know by another name: Pentecost (Acts 2). Regrettably, many misunderstand why God poured out His Spirit on that occasion. They focus on their idea of the “gift of tongues”—babbling in what amounts to gibberish—thinking that this is righteousness, while proclaiming by their actions, if not their words, that they view commandment-keeping as unnecessary.

How sad this is when the primary purpose of the Holy Spirit is spelled out so clearly in both Testaments. Jeremiah foretold a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–34) in a passage that is quoted nearly word for word in Hebrews 8:8–12:

Because finding fault with them, He says: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in

their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God tells us that the day will come when He puts a different spirit in the children of Israel, creating a new heart. "Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose hearts follow the desire for their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their deeds on their own heads,' says the Lord GOD" (Ezekiel 11:17–21).

Ezekiel repeated this in chapter 36: "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" (vv. 26–27).

This covenant will be made with the tribes of Israel in the last half of the seventieth week found in Daniel 9:27, but the terms of that covenant are in effect for all of God's people today—Jew and Gentile alike. God is in the process of forming the character of Christ in the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16; 2:20). Our natural hostility to the law of God (Romans 8:7) must be replaced by a heartfelt desire to keep not merely the letter, but the spiritual intent of the law. "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God" (Romans 2:28–29).

This key to understanding can transform us. Unlike the Pharisees, we must live by the intent of the law—to please God, not man. Our change is from the inside, and while that change manifests itself in outward actions, it is motivated not by our trying to impress others, but by our trying to do the will of God. The Apostles' declaration that "we ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29) has much greater meaning than we might observe superficially. Yes, they made this profession before rulers who commanded them to cease doing the Work for which they were commissioned, but time and again we see how human nature craves acceptance from men rather than God (John 7:13; 9:22; 12:42–43).

The Spirit of the Law

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave examples showing what the spirit of the law means. We not only refrain from

murder, but we must also overcome hatred in our heart that can lead to murder (Matthew 5:21–22). We must not only avoid adultery; we must overcome the lustful thoughts that lead to adultery (vv. 27–28). In fact, as Jesus said, those thoughts, if dwelt upon, *are* adultery! Rather than doing away with the law, Jesus' examples show that we must keep the law to a much higher standard (vv. 43–47). We are to strive for a perfection that goes beyond the letter of the law (v. 48).

Paul, defending himself to the critical Corinthians, explained that God "also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). If we live only by the letter of the law—without being transformed within to develop the very character of God—death awaits us, for the law brings the death penalty (Romans 4:14–15; 6:23).

This is basic "Christianity 101"—but some still mistakenly believe that the spirit of the law does away with the letter. One passage often quoted is Romans 7:6: "But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter." So, we must ask a simple question: Can you keep the spirit of the law without first keeping the letter? How does this apply to murder or adultery? Such critics fail to understand the verse that follows. "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet'" (v. 7).

David and Meditation

David made some terrible mistakes during his life, but he is nevertheless described as a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). Despite his shortcomings, he strove to understand God's law by meditating on it day and night (Psalm 119:55, 97, 148). This is instructive. David declared, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit" (Psalm 32:1–2). David understood the need for God's grace, even though Christ had not yet come. He understood that sacrifices, phylacteries, and tassels were insufficient reminders and were not a substitute for a repentant and obedient heart. The entirety of Psalm 51 enlightens us about what God seeks in each of us. It is a psalm on which we should all meditate regularly.

It is evident from David's psalms that he spent time thinking about the intricacies of God's law. How can we conclude otherwise when we read Psalm 119—in which David extols God's commandments, statutes, precepts, and judgments?

Beyond Phylacteries and Tassels

God thundered the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai on what was called the Feast of Weeks, the Day of Firstfruits,

and the Feast of Harvest (Exodus 34:22; 23:16). Today we call it Pentecost. We know that a great event occurred nearly 1,500 years after Sinai, on that first Pentecost following Christ's resurrection. No, God did not thunder, send lightning, and scare the wits out of the people as He had done at Sinai—but He did pour out His Spirit in an attention-grabbing manner (Acts 2).

Reading the commandments or reciting them verbatim is good, but not good enough. Those commandments must be internalized—written in our hearts and minds. Ritual practices were given as temporary reminders, as a schoolmaster or tutor to teach God's ways to those without His Spirit (Galatians 3:23–25). But without the Holy Spirit, Israel remained carnal in thinking and action. Phylacteries, tassels, and animal sacrifices were not enough.

God is not interested in these outward displays. What delights Him is a changed heart. God gives us the Holy Spirit to transform us, to make us different from our worldly neighbors. Paul describes its benefits in these terms: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22–23). It is true that different people naturally display various individual fruits more than others. Some have humanly developed greater self-control, are more patient, or are kind in their dealings with others. But to have the self-control, patience, and kindness of Christ, we must have His Spirit working in us.

Is it within our human abilities to overcome our carnal natures? Clearly, it is not! "So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His" (Romans 8:8–9). This is also shown in 1 Corinthians 2:11: "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God."

Does this mean, as many professing Christians believe, that it is all done for us, and we have no part in the process? Paul explains that "those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another" (Galatians 5:24–26; cf. Romans 12:9–21). Do these passages not make it obvious that we have our part in the process of becoming new creations?

To crucify the flesh means to put to death our past way of life. "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:13). Or, as we are also instructed:

Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the

sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him (Colossians 3:5–10).

Peter Rebuked

An interesting exchange took place when Jesus told His disciples that He would be killed in Jerusalem. Peter protested that he would not allow that to happen. His thinking was worldly and therefore satanic. "But He [Jesus] turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men'" (Matthew 16:23). A similar situation occurred when James and John were overcome with anger (Luke 9:51–56).

God does not funnel the fruits of the Spirit into our hearts and minds without our cooperation. Instead, the Spirit is a reminder of God's law and way of life. Perhaps you have experienced this reminder when, upon seeing someone do something foolish or sinful, you think, *How could he do such a thing?*—and then, almost instantly, God's Spirit reminds you that you yourself did something very similar in the past! Instead of working as an outside reminder like a phylactery or tassel, God's Holy Spirit works from inside us. The Jews failed to understand this and saw their pharisaical handwashing tradition as a means of righteousness (Mark 7:1–23).

A type of baptism took place when the Israelites walked through the Red Sea. They came out of Egypt to a new way of life. God made a covenant with them at Mount Sinai, but their hearts remained in their past, Egyptian way of thinking.

So, what about you? Do you respond to the Reminder that God gives His people? Is this not what Jesus explained to His disciples at His last Passover? "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, [which] the Father will send in My name, [it] will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26). The Bible is the word of God. If we study it, will God not bring back to remembrance those things we need to know at appropriate times? Will we not savor the things of God and recognize the difference between His ways and the ways of this world? Sometimes, though God's Spirit reminds us, we resist its urgings. So, the Holy Spirit reminds us, "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

We do not need phylacteries, tassels, or animal sacrifices. We need what the scribes and Pharisees lacked—the Holy Spirit. Our righteousness must exceed the "righteousness" of the scribes and Pharisees if we hope to enter the Kingdom of God (Matthew 5:20). Think on these things as Pentecost approaches. (LN)



Stir Up the Holy Spirit

By **John Meakin**

Receiving God's Spirit and knowing how to receive more of it are two of the most important issues in the life of a Christian. Actually, they are of quintessential importance, because one cannot become or remain a true and genuine Christian without getting these related issues right.

Let's look more closely at the role of God's Spirit—some-what briefly at how it first impacts our lives from the day of our baptism, and then in greater depth on how the Holy Spirit can subsequently be *stirred up* in our daily lives.

A New Spirit Nature

All true Christians possess the Holy Spirit that was received when hands were laid on us at the time of our baptism (Acts 2:38). God's Spirit was given as a begettal, creating a *new spirit nature* that resides within us (2 Corinthians 5:17).

As a result, we became the *children of God*, called to be transformed with His divine nature so we can become part of God's spirit family (cf. 1 John 3:1–2; 2 Peter 1:2–4). This spiritual begettal by our Father in Heaven is described as receiving God's seed (Gr. *sperma*) that imparts His sinless nature (1 John 3:9). It is like us having our human father's DNA that will unfailingly produce in us characteristics of our human parent.

But what happens to this spirit begettal following baptism? In a human pregnancy, an implanted new life is programmed to grow and develop, and will do so unfailingly, provided it is nurtured and fed. But if this new life cannot develop or be sustained for whatever reason, it will simply cease to be. The same is true of our Christian lives. We must *grow spiritually* each day by the renewal of our new nature through God's spirit (2 Corinthians 4:16; Romans 12:1–2). Consequently, knowing *how* to renew *on a daily basis* the spiritual power of God's Spirit in our lives is an essential issue. Everything else flows from it.

God's Spirit Is Like a Fire

Some read Christ's statement recorded in Matthew 3:11 about baptizing "with the Holy Spirit and fire" and confuse the "baptism with fire" as referring to being given the Holy Spirit.

This is not the case! The baptism of fire John the Baptist referred to is the second death in the Lake of Fire.

That said, there are lessons to be learned when comparing the Holy Spirit to fire. God's Spirit in us is not static. It is dynamic and variable and can either increase or decrease depending on many factors. What is clear from Scripture is that we need more of it, and God's word uses various analogies to help us understand this better. The Apostle Paul admonished the young evangelist Timothy, "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6). This gift from God is not a "spirit of fear." Rather, it is one of "power and of love and of a sound mind" (v. 7).

The meaning of "stir up" comes as something of a surprise. The *Amplified Bible, Classic Edition* helpfully translates 2 Timothy 1:6 as follows: "That is why I would remind you to stir up (rekindle the embers of, fan the flame of, and keep burning) the [gracious] gift of God, [the inner fire] that is in you by means of the laying on of my hands."

But how do we get all this sense from the simple English term "stir up"? The answer, of course, is that the Greek word actually means more than is reflected in the simple translation. The Greek word Paul uses metaphorically for "stir" is *anazopureo* (from *ana* = up or again; *zoos* = alive; *pur* = fire) and means "to kindle afresh" or "keep in full flame." In *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, we read, "The gift of God is regarded as a fire capable of dying out through neglect" (see the entry "Stir"). Paul is likening God's gift of the Holy Spirit to an *inner fire* that ought to burn strongly and powerfully within each of us. It will produce the fruit of the Spirit and the good works that God expects from us.

It is evident that this laying on of hands is a specific reference to Timothy's ordination as an evangelist when he was given this gift by prophecy (cf. 1 Timothy 4:14). But the gift, "that good thing," would be sustained by the Holy Spirit, which dwelt in him (2 Timothy 1:14). A reading of both epistles quickly establishes the impact God's Spirit was already having on his life, and so much the more when that Spirit would be stirred up subsequently. It is the same for us; we will all benefit from stirring up the Spirit we have been given.

The Anatomy of a Fire

The analogy of building a physical fire helps us better understand how to increase God's supply of divine power and energy to each of us. Consider that in order to have a strongly burning fire, we need several elements:

- **A source of fuel**—something flammable like wood, coal, gasoline, or oil.
- **A spark to get the fire going**—a match, a flint, a lighter.
- **Kindling**—something that burns easily to start the fire, such as tinder-dry twigs, wood shavings, or paper.

There are two other vital elements that we may take for granted:

- **The environment**—a fire needs oxygen to burn strongly, but if you surround it with carbon dioxide, it will rapidly go out.
- **Time and effort to tend the fire**—once started, the fire requires attention, as we must rake out the ash, add new fuel, and regulate the flow of oxygen.

How does all this apply spiritually? Well, for our personal spiritual fire, God calls us and opens our minds to His truth; He feeds us “the pure milk of the word” (1 Peter 2:2), which is a kind of spiritual kindling. He provides the vital spark by His Spirit and gives His Spirit to dwell in us permanently and provide that “inner fire.” Then, He trusts us with the job of fanning this divine spark into a flame. As we “bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Matthew 3:8), God brings us to become more like Him.

God's Spirit then imparts its characteristics to each of us. With it comes a sound (disciplined) mind, godly love, and power (strength)—especially belief and faith. The fire must be continually fed, tended, and nurtured, or it will go out. Sin is the great enemy of this fire—it creates the wrong kind of environment, in which our spiritual strength diminishes (Psalm 31:10) and God's Spirit will be quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

Why should we care about this inner fire? If we don't understand the reason and purpose for having it in our lives, we will not put forth the effort to keep it burning strongly, or even to keep it alive.

God's Spirit provides great power and strength (Ephesians 6:10); we become strong by putting on the armor of God, including “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” God's Spirit is the power to live a godly life in word and in deed, by personal example (Titus 2:12). It enables the Gospel of “the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” to be proclaimed (Acts 8:12). It empowers the ministry to preach wisely and with strength (Ephesians 6:19).

God's Spirit is the means by which God fulfills His promises, including divine healing (James 5:15–16). By the working of God's all-powerful Spirit, any and all challenges, problems, and crises can be met and resolved (Philippians 4:19). Being renewed by the Holy Spirit provides the key element to overcoming—putting off the old man and putting on the new man (Ephesians 4:22–24; Colossians 3:5–14).

Ask, Seek, and Knock

So, how can we have more of the amazing power of God's Spirit? Jesus Christ Himself provides the answer: “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Luke 11:9–10). In verse 13, Christ makes it plain that He is speaking about making the Holy Spirit available to those who *ask* for it. In the context of the model prayer, a few verses earlier, asking for “daily bread” would spiritually refer to seeking God's sustaining Spirit each and every day (11:3). Christ told His disciples several times that if they asked for anything in His name, He would do it (John 4:12–14; 15:7–8; 15:16; 16:23–24).

If, through prayer, we diligently ask, seek, and knock—asking God to make the power of His Spirit available to us—He promises to hear us. Our spiritual fire will become much stronger. Its power will then go to work to accomplish God's will and purpose in our lives. Our prayers will be energized. Our spiritual growth will speed up. Our spiritual accomplishments will increase. There is nothing too small—and nothing too big—that God cannot accomplish through the power of His Spirit (Genesis 18:14; Jeremiah 32:27). God is able “to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Ephesians 3:20).

Faith is the key. When the disciples failed to heal a child possessed by a demon, Christ explained that their failure came about because of their unbelief (Matthew 17:15–21). They lacked the power of faith. Notice that, when Christ gave this instruction, the disciples had not yet received the Holy Spirit. Yet Christ did not tell them, in the first instance, to receive that Spirit; He told them that they would need to pray and fast. Doing so would bring them closer to God and would connect them more effectively to the power of God that they needed.

Of course, receiving the Holy Spirit is vitally necessary for Christians. The disciples went on to become powerful instruments in God's service after they received that Spirit. But Christ's words here make it plain that even as Spirit-empowered Christians, they would still need to pray and fast regularly in order to keep their spiritual inner fires burning strongly.

A Divine Power Circuit

A related analogy is that of an energy circuit. The energy and power of fire can be enhanced greatly by establishing an energy circuit. A fire in a grate will heat one room, and you in that room. However, if you place a boiler behind the fire, and you put some radiators and a pump in a circuit throughout the house, the heat from the fire can be transferred to all the other rooms of the house, and even provide hot water for washing. Energy can be transferred around a circuit—in this example, through the agency of water moving through a radiator and pump.

Think of how an old steam locomotive functions. Coal is burned under a boiler that heats water into steam, which drives a piston, which turns the wheels and provides motion. This transfer of energy from the original coal allows much valuable work to be performed.

Next, think on an even larger scale. Consider a fire many miles away, in a power station. The burning fuel now heats water into steam, which powers an electrical turbine, which generates electricity. Now, the prospects for energy transfer become far greater. Connect this power station to an electrical grid, and thousands of homes and businesses can be heated and lit, and many electrical devices in those homes and businesses can be powered. Although you cannot see the electricity directly, you can see the work it accomplishes.

Now, consider this analogy spiritually. God possesses an infinite degree of divine energy, and thus He is an infinite source of power. That supremely powerful God, for those of us who have His Holy Spirit, is our “power station.” Each Christian is connected to this source of spiritual power and is part of the “power grid,” which comprises other members of God’s Church as well, who are to be one with each other and with God (John 17:20–23).

When God’s word goes forth, it is a fruitful and marvelous extension of His power.

For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10–11).

Plugged in and Switched On

What Isaiah is describing can be thought of, in our analogy, as a remarkable power circuit—a projection of divine power to accomplish God’s purpose and will. You and I, as Christians with the Holy Spirit, can tap into this source of power, thereby reaping and conveying its benefits.

But there is something about a power circuit that’s important to understand. There may be a vast amount of power in a circuit, but no power at all will flow until devices on that circuit are not only plugged in *but switched on as well*. Think of the vast spike in electrical demand that is created by the inhabitants of an entire nation all boiling water to make a cup of tea during the advertisement break midway through their favorite television show or sporting event!

You could say that we are “plugged in” to God’s power from conversion. But, each day, we also need to be “switched on” in our relationship with God, talking to Him and allowing Him to “talk” to us through His word.

We “plug in and switch on” when we ask, seek, and knock for more of God’s Holy Spirit to accomplish a godly purpose. Our spiritual tools to keep us spiritually strong and connected to God include prayer, Bible study, meditation, and fasting. And we know God will provide His power, as He says so—repeatedly—in Scripture. We just need to “complete the circuit.”

Faith Completes the Circuit

Using this analogy, our faith is like a switch that makes the connection in a divine power circuit. Without faith, the switch is off, and the power simply cannot flow. However, if you believe, the switch is on and the power can flow. And once the power is flowing, it can be “turned up” to higher levels—just as we can grow in faith. Amazingly, God promises that whenever we ask for something, according to His will, He will answer and provide (Mark 11:22–24). This is the faith that proverbially moves mountains, even though the faith might be as small as a mustard seed (v. 23; see also Matthew 17:20).

Prayer, Bible study, meditation, and fasting are vital spiritual tools—the “weapons of our warfare” (2 Corinthians 10:4). They bring us closer to God and connect us to more of His power. They activate and increase our faith by adding fuel to our inner spiritual fire. Put enough fuel on that fire, and it can become a roaring inferno to accomplish God’s will.

Yet another analogy used by Christ Himself is that of the grapevine (John 15:1–8). Christ is the grapevine. “Abiding in Christ” is akin to the sap flowing in the vine that allows the nutrients from the roots and the impact of the sun on the leaves to permeate the vine. Without the sap flowing there will be no fruit. God’s Spirit must likewise flow through us and will enable much fruit to be produced. To mix our metaphors for a moment, *God’s Spirit is our spiritual lifeblood*; it must never stop flowing or eventually we die spiritually.

So, be sure to stir up God’s Spirit within you. You will be astounded at the result in your life, in the lives of those for whom you ardently pray, and in the Work to which God has called you to do your part. (LN)

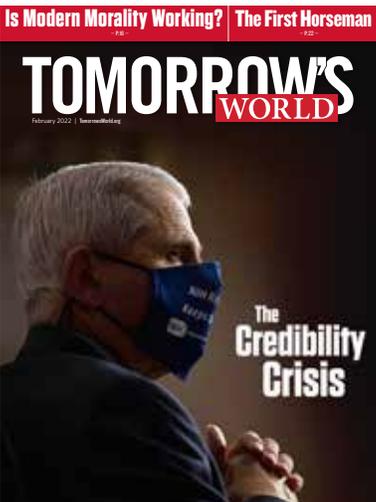


The Chief Propagandist

By **Paul Kearns**

The cover of the February 2022 *Tomorrow's World* magazine highlights Mr. Wallace Smith's article "The Credibility Crisis." The gentleman on the cover is Dr. Anthony Fauci, chief medical adviser to both sitting U.S. President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump. Dr. Fauci has certainly become a household name, and he provides an ideal example of the current credibility crisis. Depending on what news or social media source you read, he's either a savior who has done no wrong or a villain who is destroying the United States—maybe even the whole world. The article explains that we are indeed facing a credibility crisis, and that it's very difficult to find a credible source we can trust to relate the full truth of a matter.

Propaganda is defined by *AHDictionary.com* as "the systematic propagation of a doctrine or cause or of information



reflecting the views and interests of those advocating such a doctrine or cause." The information that is propagated fits the *agenda* of the organization propagating it—and it's important to understand that this is not just a modern-day issue. This credibility crisis is not new.

Who is the one ultimately responsible for pushing misinformation, spreading half-truths, and elimi-

nating important facts from a particular narrative in order to paint a picture different from the reality of an issue?

The answer to that question, when we think about it from a biblical perspective, is quite obvious—and it's not CNN. When we look at the credibility crisis and we see the confusion in the world today, we should know that *Satan the devil* is ultimately the one behind it. He *uses* CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, and other news outlets, but he is ultimately the one propagating the confusion.

And, in fact, false and twisted information existed long before news outlets and social media. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is replete with examples of propaganda being used to destroy people's reputations and lives. Let's examine how Satan has used propaganda throughout biblical history in his attempts to disrupt the Work of God and destroy God's people, and then take a look at a more recent example of how our adversary can use propaganda to influence entire nations.

Propaganda in the Old Testament

Satan used propaganda and misinformation in Eden. "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"?"' (Genesis 3:1). Satan sowed a seed of doubt in Eve's mind, causing confusion right from the beginning. That's how he operates.

"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'" (vv. 2–4). That was a half-truth, in that Adam and Eve didn't drop dead the moment they took of the fruit of that tree—but what Satan *neglected* to tell them was that the decision would bring them under the death penalty. Satan's agenda was, *I want to destroy these individuals*. The narrative he gave them was mixed with half-truths, misinformation, and outright lies in order to deceive them and achieve his agenda.

Then Satan began to slander the one, true source of truth, and we hear such slander in our media today, too. "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" (v. 5). Satan wanted Adam and Eve to look at God and say, *I don't trust You*, so he slandered God's credibility. Notice the result: "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" (v. 6).

We see another example in 2 Samuel 15. When Absalom's half-brother Amnon raped his sister Tamar, and their father King David failed to punish Amnon, Absalom began a propaganda campaign to discredit his father.

In those times, there was no newspaper circulating around the country. Information and rumors circulated at the city gate, where people were coming and going. It was the perfect place for Absalom to peddle his propaganda: “Absalom provided himself with chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. Now Absalom would rise early and stand beside the way to the gate. So it was, whenever anyone who had a lawsuit came to the king for a decision, that Absalom would call to him and say, ‘What city are you from?’ And he would say, ‘Your servant is from such and such a tribe of Israel!’” (2 Samuel 15:1–2).

Absalom endeared himself to the public. *Oh, you’re from Zebulun? That’s wonderful! I took a vacation there a few years ago—it was beautiful! I just love Zebulun!* He would “butter up” these individuals and come across as a really nice guy. “Then Absalom would say to him, ‘Look, your case is good and right; but there is no deputy of the king to hear you.’ Moreover, Absalom would say, ‘Oh, that I were made judge in the land, and everyone who has any suit or cause would come to me; then I would give him justice!’” (vv. 3–4).

Absalom was sowing seeds of doubt that would make people think, *Yeah, why isn’t King David sending more people to listen to us? King David must not care about us.* The next verses spell out Absalom’s agenda plainly: “And so it was, whenever anyone came near to bow down to him, that he would put out his hand and take him and kiss him. In this manner Absalom acted toward all Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel” (vv. 5–6).

Many people, because they didn’t see the agenda at the time, fell for Absalom’s propaganda—which led them to support a rebellion. Truly, propaganda can achieve disastrous results. Satan comes to us as an angel of light, and while we may not see him at the scene of the crime here, we see his fingerprints everywhere.

Propaganda in the New Testament

Propaganda was even used against Jesus Christ. In Matthew 11:19, Jesus said, “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But wisdom is justified by her children.”

Who was pushing the narrative that Christ was a drunkard, that He was a glutton? The religious leadership of the time. What was their agenda? *We need to discredit this guy, because he’s doing some miracles we can’t dispute, and if the people start accepting him, we’re going to lose our authority and our prestige.*

So, in order to combat that, they started releasing misinformation about Him that circulated throughout Judea. *Oh, I saw that Jesus character down two bottles of wine, you know. I saw him eating, and that guy had like, four or five helpings. He was just gorging himself.*

And then there were the half-truths, such as, *He’s a friend of tax collectors and sinners.* Was Jesus surrounded by sinners? Of course. But was He condoning their sinful actions, or hanging out with them for sinful pleasure? No, He was not. In fact, as a way of life, He was hanging out with His disciples most of the time. Again, the information that was circulated fit the agenda of those propagating it—in this case, the agenda to destroy the credibility of Jesus and ultimately destroy Him entirely. Even our Savior had to face propaganda.

From Genesis to Revelation, we find many examples of propaganda in the Bible. We will look at just one more example of this common theme in biblical history. “Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6:8). There were obvious signs that this faithful man was speaking the truth and preaching the Gospel, but some people didn’t like it. “Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke” (vv. 9–10). When someone is speaking uncomfortable truth, we always have the option to agree, but human nature often resists going down that road. Rather, “the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Romans 8:7).

The men from the Synagogue of the Freedmen began to be hostile to the truth. What was their grievance? *This fella Stephen, he’s speaking the truth, and we can’t prove him wrong. We’re going to lose our followers—people aren’t going to listen to us as heads of the synagogue anymore.* In Acts 6:11, “they secretly induced men to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.’”

An agenda was formed, propaganda was released, and “they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. They also set up false witnesses who said, ‘This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us!’” (vv. 12–14).

This was a mixture of half-truths, mistruths, and outright lies, and Stephen was ultimately executed because of the propaganda launched against him. Stephen’s enemies weren’t trying to uncover true information to get to the bottom of what he was saying; their agenda was to get rid of a man they considered a threat, regardless of whether he was speaking the truth.

The Power of Propaganda

In our modern age, Satan-influenced propaganda manifested itself in twentieth-century Germany in the horrifying form of Nazi anti-Semitism. In the Nazi government, Joseph Goebbels held the title “*Reichminister* of Public Enlightenment and Pro-

paganda.” How did he “enlighten” people? By telling them of an Aryan race, supposedly the “master race” to which many Germans belonged, and by telling them that the Jewish people were mortal enemies of that race. Long before he became Führer, Adolf Hitler wrote in 1924 that propaganda’s “task is not to make an objective study of the truth, in so far as it favors the enemy, and then set it before the masses with academic fairness; its task is to serve our own right, always and unflinchingly” (“Nazi Propaganda,” *The Holocaust Encyclopedia, USHMM.org*).

What was the Nazi agenda? On the surface, it was to increase the prestige and glory of Germany, which had been totally tarnished by World War I when the Treaty of Versailles was signed. But Hitler’s ultimate agenda was to destroy the Jews across Europe, as he acknowledged in 1925 in his book *Mein Kampf*, which he wrote in prison before gaining power: “The personification of the devil as the symbol of all evil assumes the living shape of the Jew.”

The propaganda that the Nazis spread stoked the fires and fanned the flames of anti-Semitism, a bias sustained by the adversary since ancient times. Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933. Step by step, he staged and/or manipulated events to gain more and more power. Within three months, Jews were being legislated out of the civil service and public schools. Within 18 months, any-

Knowing the agenda of an individual, news outlet, or organization is **vital to understanding the information being discussed.**

one who could potentially oppose him or threaten his power was arrested. Scores were executed.

Anti-Semitic propaganda took many forms and was widely disseminated by every possible means, including rallies, radio, the film industry, and the arts. Behind it all was a message: *This is a war, and if we don’t exterminate the Jews first, they will exterminate us.* Every effort was made to spread the message that Jewish people—human beings made in the image of God—were less than animals and worse than demons.

It might be easy for us today to recognize such malicious propaganda for what it is, but audiences of the time did not have the benefit of hindsight, nor were they grounded in the only truth that can protect us from error. Propaganda is a powerful tool of Satan the devil.

Propaganda in the Future

Matthew 24:9 reads, “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake.” How will Satan bring the world to the point where it hates God’s people?

The answer, of course, is propaganda. *All those people in the Church of God are so full of hate. They don’t support LGBTQ rights. They don’t support a woman’s right to choose abortion. They don’t even do their civic duty and vote. What’s their problem? Why don’t they love people? Those people are evil. They’re even saying that our nation is going down the drain—those people aren’t patriotic. Those people are against us.*

This attitude is something we need to expect at some time in the future, because it *will* lead to the persecution of God’s people. Ultimately, it will reach the point where Satan himself will inspire the beast and the false prophet, and all the world will follow their system. And if we’re not part of that system, we’ll be considered evil.

“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:23–24). We’ll see incredible cunning and deceit in the years ahead. Satan’s greatest propaganda campaign is yet to occur, and we need to be alert to it. We need to be aware that Satan’s endgame is to destroy God’s people, and he will use propaganda in his attempts to achieve that result.

This is a crucial point: Knowing the agenda of an individual, news outlet, or organization is *vital* to understanding the information being discussed. If we misread the agenda, we’ll be misled. For example, if President Biden has said something questionable, CNN is probably going to sugarcoat it—make it sound the best it can—while Fox News will fan the flames of criticism to magnify even his slightest stumble.

Conversely, during Donald Trump’s presidency, Fox News would be hard-pressed to find fault with his actions—the same actions for which CNN labeled him a lunatic and racist. The information a media outlet presents inevitably fits its narrative.

So, we *must* examine the agenda behind any source to which we look for information. Before reading a book or an article, ask, *Who is the author? Where did the author grow up? What’s the author’s outlook on life? Does the author believe in God?* Not everything an atheist author writes will be wrong, but we must ask such questions and be aware that every individual or news outlet will be pushing a particular bias. When we recognize that bias, we can more accurately sift through the half-truths and misinformation we come across.

The way to avoid being deceived is to stay close to God and to read sources we can trust, such as material from God’s true ministry. The one source of truth is not CNN, not Fox News, and not any social media outlet—the one source of truth is God’s word. So, keep your nose in that word, keep watching world events, and be aware of Satan, the chief propagandist, who wants to destroy God’s Work and His people. (LH)

A Tale of Two Pentecosts

By **Wallace G. Smith**

Sometimes it might seem like the day of Pentecost is neglected among the Holy Days as one that we do not think about as often, but God established every Holy Day for a reason, and each one has a richness and a depth that demands and deserves our meditation. Pentecost pictures the day on which God gave His Holy Spirit to His Church, empowering His people in a divine, miraculous way. And we need that Spirit and the miracles God makes possible through it, as Dr. Roderick C. Meredith wrote in the January-February 2010 *Living Church News*:

We so very much **need** these “gifts” to begin to have the real **impact** on our brethren—and especially on the world—that we need in order to truly “finish” the job. So I beseech you to join with me in being one of those striving to “go all out” in seeking God, and trying in every way we can to “give” our lives to Him in zealous obedience and service, and to **cry out** for the gifts of God’s Holy Spirit for His Work, His ministry and **all** His people!

Properly meditating on the meaning of Pentecost can help us cry out to God in this way. The Bible records several observances of Pentecost for us—let’s compare two of them and see what we can glean. Their similarities and differences carry significant principles we should keep in mind.

The Pentecost of Exodus

Approximately 3,500 years ago, God wrote the Ten Commandments with His own finger at Mount Sinai, and given the timing of all the events surrounding the giving of the Ten Commandments, the Church has long believed the event occurred on Pentecost, itself. Otherwise, we’d have to conclude that Pentecost was, say, the day after or the day before—as if God would realize, *Oh! You know, if only I had timed things slightly differently, this could have taken place on Pentecost!* If anyone is always on time and mindful of the larger plan, God is. The dates of the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread are tied to events of profound significance. And there is good

reason to believe God did not miss His mark concerning Pentecost, either.

And on that Pentecost, the Bible is plain that God wanted to make an impression—not just for show, but for a purpose. In fact, more than one.

For instance, Exodus 19:3–8 illustrates how God had Moses going back and forth between Himself and the people, conveying His instructions. Why? Could God not hear what the people said?

Part of the lesson God wanted the people to learn is how He works. The passage gives us important information not only in *what* He communicates, but also in *how* He communicates. Here, God was using Moses, and “the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, *that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever*’” (v. 9). God wanted to make such an impression that the people would realize that *He was using Moses*. God chooses whom God chooses, and He had chosen Moses. It was important to God that the people understand that and take it seriously.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast, he shall not live.’ When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain” (Exodus 19:10–13).

The God of heaven, the Creator of all things, was personally going to descend on this mountain. God was coming, and the people had an obligation to prepare for that. What might those three days have been like for them? Can you imagine the anticipation that would have been building?

Finally, “on the third day, in the morning... there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled” (v. 16). I’ve tried to look for mountain scenes that help me picture what that would have been like, and the closest I can come are some of these fantastic volcanic eruptions spewing ash and smoke into the sky, with lightning coursing through the ash because of the electrical discharge. All of that can happen as a natural phenomenon—but what’s *not* a natural phenomenon is the sound of a trumpet coming out of a cloud on the mountain, and it was loud enough and piercing enough that millions of people could hear it. That’s not normal, and they were terrified.

“Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD,” the Ever-Living One, the God of Israel who would become Jesus Christ, “descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly” (vv. 17–18). This mountain, what would normally be the picture of stability and solidity, was trembling itself, heaving back and forth with the power and the force of the One who was descending upon it, a Being with power to which a mountain could never compare.

An Event Crafted with Purpose

Verse 19 says that “the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder,” and this was *already* a trumpet blast that made the people tremble in fear. As this Being descended closer and closer to the mountain, “Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice.”

Wow. The Bible doesn’t specify exactly what was said, but it’s worth the time to imagine what that exchange must have been like for the assembled Israelites—to hear their human leader addressing the majestic God who was concealed behind the smoke and fire on the quaking mountain, amidst divine shofar blasts, and then to hear that same God respond with His own thunderous voice. Whatever Moses and God said to each other, it is clear that God sought to make an impression: *The Eternal One, your Creator, is here.* This was quite a Pentecost.

“Then the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up” (Exodus 19:20). Moses was a *brave* man! Can you imagine the impression it must have had on the people when—after they had been told not to go up to the mountain and had seen all that was happening—Moses actually went up that mountain, into the tumult? “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at the LORD, and many of

them perish. Also let the priests who come near the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them.’ But Moses said to the LORD, ‘The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for You warned us, saying, “Set bounds around the mountain and consecrate it”’” (vv. 21–23). God was making a point: *Even if you want to, you cannot come closer. You are not worthy.*

God used this Pentecost setting to give the Ten Commandments, and Pentecost is a beautiful season for reading them in Exodus 20:1–17. I encourage you to do so, and to imagine God’s powerful voice speaking each commandment from the mountain, as well as what it would have been like for those listening and trembling.

The passage gives us a sense of the impression it made on them: “Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, ‘You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die’” (Exodus 20:18–19). It was terrifying to them, so they turned to Moses, and, again, that was part of God’s purpose—that they would hear His chosen servant and believe him forever (Exodus 19:9).

In Exodus 20:20, “Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear, for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.’” God wanted them to realize that the Ten Commandments weren’t merely like the Code of Hammurabi, or like whatever collection of rules they may have had under Pharaoh during their time in Egypt. This was the very Creator of the Universe giving them these commands. He could have done so in a completely different way, but God crafts these moments with *intention and purpose*—He is the great Designer, and no one knows how to make an impression like the Ever-Living One.

Everything God does is for a reason and by design, including the actions He took and choices He made on that Pentecost some 3,500 years ago.

The Pentecost of Acts

Now, let’s fast-forward to the Pentecost of 31 AD. Keep in mind that the Man of whom we are about to read is that same Being who descended on Mount Sinai in flame, smoke, lightning, and thunder, and who spoke to Moses. “And being assembled together with them, He [Jesus Christ] commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’” (Acts 1:4–5).

God wanted them to wait for the Holy Spirit until the Day of Pentecost, because God knows what He’s doing and

is always on schedule. Can you imagine what those days must have been like? Imagine that the Messiah, whom you've seen resurrected, is going to give you power—but you need to wait in Jerusalem. What would that wait have been like, day in and day out, knowing a promise of divine power was coming?

They believed His promise, so they were preparing and working even before He gave them the Holy Spirit. They replaced Judas, making sure their number was complete. They spent time getting the Church in the kind of shape that they thought it needed to be in, as much as they could. Finally, “when the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:1–2).

It's easy to think of the early Church members as though they were entirely different from us, but these were *real* people. They had husbands or wives, they had children like us, they had daily concerns—they had *real lives*, and they would have reacted similarly to the way we would react if, out of nowhere, we started to hear the amazing sound of a mighty, rushing wind filling the room and reverberating in our ears. We would realize, as they did, that something miraculous was happening.

“Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them” (Acts 2:3). Can you imagine how exciting and unnerving it would be to see divided tongues of fire and flame descending in the air around you, upon the heads of your friends and family? Or realizing that meant one was descending upon you, too? “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (v. 4). The Apostles, in an *instant*, were speaking languages that they had never known before in their lives. It's inspiring to note that the gifts God gives the Church tend to come with the purpose of getting the truth out. The *very first gift* given in the Church was the power to take the Gospel to the entire world.

The nearby crowd heard this sound and began gathering. What is it like to hear a tornado coming from *inside* a building? “Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, ‘Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?’ ... Others mocking said, ‘They are full of new wine’” (Acts 2:7–8, 13). The mocking continues, 2,000 years later—but it doesn't change the truth of what God is doing. Peter then gave a vital message and, wrapping up, he said:

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (vv. 36–38).

That day, the Lord added 3,000 people to His begotten family, the Church of God.

Important Parallels

These two Pentecosts were very similar in many important ways.

On both Pentecosts, a group of people was called together by God to one location—and, on both Pentecosts, God founded a nation. What did God say before giving the Ten Commandments? “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me *a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*” (Exodus 19:5–6). And what did Peter say about God's Church? Almost exactly the same words: “But you are a chosen generation, *a royal priesthood, a holy nation*, His own special people” (1 Peter 2:9).

On the Day of Pentecost, God founded first the physical nation of Israel, then the spiritual nation of Israel—the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16)—filled with brothers and sisters who make up the body of Christ and who will make up the Kingdom of God. Nothing binds two people together as brother and sister like the Spirit of God. When we hear announcements about fellow Church members on the other side of the world, we should recognize that those people are our brothers and sisters in a profound way unmatched by even our biological siblings, because God's Spirit is what truly makes us family. The parallels between what God did on those two Pentecosts should not be missed.

Consider additional parallels. Physical Israel had to wait three days before God appeared on Mount Sinai, and the leaders of spiritual Israel had to wait for the Holy Spirit until the Day of Pentecost. Physical Israel heard great noise from the mountain that preceded the approach of God's presence, and spiritual Israel heard the sound of a rushing, mighty wind. Physical Israel saw fire and smoke descend from heaven, and spiritual Israel saw individual, divided tongues of fire descend. And, to both physical Israel and spiritual Israel, God miraculously and explicitly demonstrated through whom He was working in a special way—Moses and Christ's Apostles. Scripture is clear that miraculous signs have a purpose: They validate the message of God's messengers in a way that nothing else truly can. That's one reason why Dr. Meredith

often exhorted us to pray for those signs. A vital element of the message of both of these Pentecosts is the challenge: *To whom are you listening? Whom has God set apart to carry His message?*

Instructive Differences

Yet, as instructive as the similarities between these two events may be, the *differences* between these Pentecosts are perhaps even more instructive.

The first demonstrated that, although God *longs* to dwell among humanity, there is currently a gulf of unrighteousness that separates human beings from Him. When the Eternal descended upon Mount Sinai 3,500 years ago, no one but Moses was allowed to come near the mountain, because the presence of God was sacred and holy. Yet on the Pentecost of 31 AD, while fire still came from heaven, it descended not far away atop a distant mountain, but *upon each individual person* in a very intimate way.

At the coming of that divine presence, the ancient Israelites trembled in fear, and Paul tells us in Philippians 2:12 to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” because the fact that there should be righteous fear before God has not changed. The difference is that He is no longer the power at a distance on a mountain. Instead, “it is God who works *in you* both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (v. 13).

On Pentecost, we must remind ourselves of this: The very power that must have made the Israelites wonder whether the mountain itself was not about to be rent in two, has actually been put within us—within all of the baptized children of God, all over the world. When we internalize that, it’s not hard to think that there could be powerful miracles in God’s Church today— healings, speaking in foreign languages we don’t know, even raisings from the dead. Those things are possible, because on the Day of Pentecost in 31 AD, the light wasn’t at a distance, the fire wasn’t on a mountain—the fire was on the *people* and the Spirit was *in* the people.

Another important difference between these two moments involves God’s law, which was central to both. God originally wrote the Ten Commandments with His own finger on stone tablets and gave them to Moses to take to the people—yet He knew that wouldn’t be enough. Deuteronomy gives some details that aren’t present in Exodus, and one of them is God’s response to the people’s claim that they would always obey Him: “I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken. *Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!*” (Deuteronomy 5:28–29).

For all their proclamations of fear and obedience in the face of God’s terrifying display of power, the hearts of the

Israelites were not truly changed on that Pentecost. God addressed this on the Pentecost of 31 AD, as He established the beginnings of the New Covenant. The Apostle Paul wrote in Hebrews 8:7–10 that the faults within the hearts of the people doomed the first covenant, making it necessary to establish a second, in which God “will put My laws *in their mind* and write them *on their hearts*; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

Both Pentecosts are similar in that God began a process of writing His laws with His own divine finger, but the difference between the two Pentecosts is that, where He wrote on cold stone slabs for Israel, in 31 AD He began the process of personally writing those laws on our hearts and on our minds. That astonishing truth is at the heart of Pentecost: The Creator God—the Ever-Living One, the One who designed all we see and every molecule of air we breathe—is willing to personally work with us every day of our lives—to write His laws, as with His own finger, on our hearts and minds through His Holy Spirit. That Spirit is no longer at a distance on a mountain—it’s here, with us. It’s here *in us*. The difference between the two Pentecosts is significant.

From the Mountain to His Children

At Mount Sinai, God Himself was making His thoughts, His desires, His passions known from His own mouth, and in 31 AD, God was still speaking—but this time, He was speaking through the mouths of His people “as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). These two Pentecosts are similar in that they both serve as a reminder that the beautiful truth of the Gospel comes from God—and show us in their differences that while God once spoke at a distance, He is now speaking through people, through the mouths of human beings. He still has a message to give, and He is still in charge of that message, but He now proclaims it through the words and lives of individuals in whom His Spirit resides.

It’s so easy to lose sight of Pentecost amidst all the other exciting Holy Days, but we shouldn’t. On Pentecost, God began a process. In the past, a terrifying God descended upon a mountain with fire and thunder, and He wrote His laws with His own finger on tablets of stone to give to His people. But now, as we see from the Pentecost of 31 AD, He is no longer a God who dwells at a distance—instead, He dwells within us, His children (John 14:17, 23). He is a God who still writes His laws on tablets, but now those tablets are our individual hearts. And He does so not merely as the Divine Lawgiver, but with the care and concern of a loving Father who seeks to transform us.

Let us thank God for the Day of Pentecost. Let’s thank Him for taking His power, His law, and His presence off the mountain and moving them to a new home within His children. (LH)

The Purpose of Speaking in Tongues

By **Phil Sena**

A few days after Jesus Christ ascended to heaven in 31 AD, when the Apostles had gathered with many others in Jerusalem to observe the Day of Pentecost, unusual things began to happen. “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them” (Acts 2:1–3).

It was obvious to everyone that something extraordinary was happening. But this was just the beginning, as God used the wind and fire to bring many together for what was coming next: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

Was this the same speaking in tongues that many Pentecostal churches practice today? Was it a kind of frenzied gibberish, impossible for others to understand? As we will see, it definitely was not.

The Tongues Were Understood

Continuing in Acts, we read, “And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language” (Acts 2:5–6). Not only were the disciples not speaking gibberish, but every person heard them speak in the language in which the listener was born (v. 8). Notice that the miracle appears to have been as much in the hearing as in the speaking.

It is interesting to examine the Greek words used here. The word for “tongue” in verse four is *glossa*, which means the language or dialect used by a particular people, distinct from that of other nations. In verse six, the word for “language” is *dialektos*, from which we get the English word dialect, meaning the tongue or language peculiar to any people. Both words imply a known language—not a strange-sounding, incomprehensible utterance.

Yes, this was an extraordinary event unlike anything that had happened before. This miracle alone would have been an impressive display of God’s power, but there was much more to it. In this, as in everything God does, there was a purpose.

To understand the purpose of speaking in tongues on the Day of Pentecost, let us go back to the circumstances of the

Holy Day. At Pentecost, many Jews from different regions, and even from different countries, traveled to Jerusalem. No single language could have called them together, and most would not on their own have chosen to hear the Apostle Peter preach. But drawn together by excitement at the sound of rushing wind and tongues of fire where Christ’s disciples were gathered, they were moved to proclaim that “we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11). Thus, the purpose of this miracle was revealed—preaching the wonderful works of God. Not only did people understand what was said; they were also convicted by Peter’s powerful sermon—the catalyst for about 3,000 people to repent and be baptized. This was no purposeless spectacle!

Because of the incredible events of that day, the Church had an enthusiastic beginning. Speaking in tongues played a vital role in God’s will being accomplished.

We see a similar purpose in Acts’ two other accounts of speaking in tongues. Both occasions show no similarity to how “tongues” are commonly misused today.

The first of these occurred when the Spirit moved Peter to visit the Roman centurion Cornelius’ house after seeing the vision of unclean meats (Acts 10:17–23). After Peter proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ’s message to all in the household—both Jews and Gentiles—the Bible says that “the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word” (v. 44). The Jews who were with Peter were amazed that the Holy Spirit was being given to Gentiles. What’s more, they heard those on whom the Spirit was poured “speak with tongues and magnify God.” (v. 46). This was not incomprehensible babbling by people who worked themselves into a furor. On the contrary, what was said through the tongues was understood and edifying to the listeners.

The other incident occurred when Paul visited Ephesus and found that some newly baptized converts had never heard of the Holy Spirit. After Paul laid his hands on them, they received God’s Spirit and “spoke with tongues and prophesied” (Acts 19:6). The Greek word for “prophesied” can mean to break forth under sudden impulse in lofty discourse or to teach, refute, reprove, admonish, or comfort others. This too implies that what was said was understandable and helpful to those hearing, not pointless gibberish.

From these accounts in Acts, we see that there are at least three common factors when people spoke in tongues: It occurred at the giving of the Holy Spirit, there was always

a group gathered, and what was said was profitable to the listeners.

Paul's Instruction to the Corinthians

Speaking in tongues was apparently somewhat common in the first-century Church. Paul referred to it as one of God's gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, alongside gifts of faith, healing, and interpreting tongues (v. 10).

However, Paul gave some pointed instructions to those who were blessed with this gift. First, he wrote that prophesying is better than speaking in tongues. "Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.... He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church" (1 Corinthians 14:1, 4). The difference between speaking in tongues and prophesying is that those who prophesy don't require interpreters. Since tongues involved a language unknown to the speaker, it couldn't help anyone listening if it wasn't understood. Paul goes on to say that "I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification" (v. 5).

Perhaps Paul felt the need to emphasize this point so strongly because speaking in tongues was so dramatic and impressive. No doubt many who had this gift thought it was the most important gift one could have. It must have been a heady experience—imagine suddenly speaking through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in a language unknown to you. But Paul admonished that everything should be done to help others.

So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance. Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me. Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel (vv. 9–12).

Paul also pointed out that speaking in tongues was primarily meant to reach non-members, as was prophesied in Isaiah. "In the law it is written: 'With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; and yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,' says the LORD. Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe" (vv. 21–22).

Paul contrasted the gifts of prophecy and of tongues to show that hearers would get more out of what they could understand. But the combination of the two gifts could be a

powerful witness to an unbeliever, possibly to the point of repentance. "Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you" (vv. 23–25).

Additionally, Paul stressed that the church service was to be conducted in an organized manner, and that one with the gift of tongues should not speak if no one could interpret:

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.... For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints (vv. 26–28, 33).

The point is clear: Speaking in tongues was not meant to be a purposeless show, but a gift used to help others, especially unbelievers. In short, it was another method of furthering the Gospel.

Necessary Today?

Why don't we speak in tongues in the Church today? Because God has additional methods of preaching the Gospel, as His servants can now use technology to fulfill the purpose formerly achievable only through tongues. With the tools of mass communication we can send out telecasts, radio broadcasts, and the written word translated into different languages with an ease that was not available to people in the first century.

Remember, too, that Jesus was starting His Church then. There was incredible excitement for those who were witnesses of these miracles—so much so that there was no small stir created wherever Christ inspired His followers to go. It was an effective way for the Gospel to have a deep impact on those who heard it and saw the miracles that accompanied it.

As we have seen, speaking in tongues was a powerful tool that God used to bring many to repentance. Those who had this gift did not experience the same out-of-control display of emotional fervor that comes upon many in some religious circles today. God is not capricious—He has a purpose for what He does. He uses different methods at different times, but His purpose is the same. Let us be thankful that we have an opportunity to be a part of that purpose for this age in whatever way He chooses. (L)

In Loving Memory

Mrs. Shirley A. Clarke, 74, of Coal City, Illinois, died on Saturday, July 3, 2021, surrounded by family and friends. Mrs. Clarke was born in 1946 in Portland, Oregon, and graduated from high school in 1965. She married James (Randy) Clarke in Wheaton, Illinois, on July 31, 1982, and was a homemaker, devoting herself to her family. Mrs. Clarke began attending God's Church in 2010 and was baptized in 2012. She attended the Chicago and Peoria, Illinois, congregations and was an active, supportive member and a great listener and confidante. She regularly enjoyed mowing on her riding lawnmower, using the time to think, meditate, and pray. She was also an avid reader. Most of all, Mrs. Clarke enjoyed spending time with her grandchildren. She is survived by her husband, sons Adam (Kristen) Clarke and Chris Clarke, and six grandchildren. Many others also called her "Grandma Shirley." Mr. Irv Woelfle conducted her funeral service.

Mrs. Patsy Cordery, 75, died on May 14, 2021, in Queensland, Australia, after battling serious health issues for many years. God has mercifully given her peace from the great pain she suffered. She was baptized in 2002 and was in the Brisbane congregation.

Mrs. Sue Fourie, 66, a longtime, faithful member of God's Church, died on December 2 after a lengthy battle with cancer. Mrs. Fourie was from the Zimbabwe congregation and was visiting her daughter in Australia when the pandemic began. Border closures kept her in Australia, where she was cared for by her family as her life came to an end. She is greatly missed by the brethren in Zimbabwe, Western Australia, and South Africa.

Mrs. Margie H. Hebert, 78, died on February 9, surrounded by family and loved ones, after a valiant struggle with serious health issues. A faithful member of God's Church for more than 50 years, she was a member of the Lafayette, Louisiana, congregation. She was a wonderful baker and known as the "Cheesecake Lady." Mrs. Hebert loved her family and Church family. "Family is life," was her frequent comment. She leaves a rich legacy of steadfastness to her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, and her kindness and bright smile will be sorely missed by all who knew her.

Mr. Thomas Tial Hoe, 78, a longtime minister in Myanmar, finished his race and died June 26, 2021. He had been battling the effects of dengue fever and a subsequent stroke. Baptized in 1975, he contributed greatly to the spiritual growth and prosperity in the Burmese area. Mr. Tial Hoe was faithful to God and His way of life all the way to the end, and his leadership in Myanmar, especially during a time of civil unrest, will be greatly missed.

Mr. Charles (Chuck) G. Hoffman, 81, died on January 3. Baptized in 1972, Mr. Hoffman was a longtime, dedicated member in the Rolla, Missouri, congregation. He loved and cherished his family and friends and lived a simple and quiet life. He is survived by his wife Linda, daughter Alison, son Robert, as well as grandchildren and two brothers. He will be sorely missed by all who knew him. Area Pastor Richard Franz conducted the memorial service.

Mr. Trevor Hynds, 68, died on July 12, 2021. Mr. Hynds was baptized in 2009 and he served as the sound technician for services each Sabbath. He will be greatly missed by his wife and the brethren in New Zealand, where he attended the Rotorua congregation.

Mrs. Mildred Lovely, 83, a longtime member of the Baton Rouge, Louisiana, congregation, died peacefully on February 12 after a long illness. Mrs. Lovely was kind, compassionate, and a joy to be around. She worked as a Licensed Practical Nurse for 32 years, until retiring in 2009. She is survived by two sons, three daughters, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren, as well as by three brothers and three sisters. Mrs. Lovely left a rich legacy of having fought the good fight and kept the faith, and she will be missed by all who knew her.

Mr. Jonathan Malan, 81, died in his sleep on October 19. Born in wartime Britain to South African parents, he was the son of the most successful WWII fighter pilot of the RAF, and his godfather was Winston Churchill. He was called into the truth while a seaman and counselled in London with the late Dr. Roderick Meredith, who was holding campaigns there. Later, in South Africa, he was one of a group of 20 baptized in Johannesburg by Mr. Gerald Waterhouse in 1964 and was part of the foundation of the Church in that

country. He and his wife Denise had three loving children: two sons, David and Robert, and one daughter, Sharon. He was preceded in death by his wife. In his later years, he commented that he had learned more in old age than in the rest of his entire life!

Mr. Bernd Matthiessen, 85, died on December 14. Baptized in 1985, he was a longtime member of God's Church. He and his wife Gudrun, who survives him, were in the Durban congregation in South Africa during his last years.

Mrs. Blanche Miller, 86, of the Ocala, Florida congregation, died peacefully at her home on December 23, after a short illness. She was a longtime faithful member, originally from New York state. She and her husband, who was also a member, moved to Florida years ago, attending the Fort Lauderdale congregation. For the last 15 years, Mrs. Miller attended in Ocala. She inspired all who knew her, and is remembered in both congregations for her faithfulness, generosity, and love for the brethren. She will be greatly missed.

Mr. Willie Henry Miller, 82, died January 16. Mr. Miller was a longtime faithful member of the Baton Rouge, Louisiana, congregation. A kind gentleman, his smile and soft voice will be remembered by all who knew him. His memorial service was attended by his large family and many friends.

Mr. Arius Nusantara, 45, beloved husband, father, Indonesian pastor, and brother in Christ, died August 18. He and his immediate family had contracted COVID-19 and were in quarantine when his condition deteriorated and he was admitted to hospital. His wife and their two children have since recovered from the coronavirus but have suffered an unexpected and tragic loss. Mr. Nusantara was ordained into the ministry in May 2007, and he faithfully served the Indonesian brethren and translated Church literature extensively. In addition, he worked with the Indonesian and Thai brethren to help them develop their English skills and accompanied other ministers on their visits to the region. Mr. Nusantara's love for God and his family, as well as his zeal to serve the brethren and the Work of God in Indonesia, will continue to be an inspiration to others, and he will be deeply missed by all.

Mr. Gary Ownby, 85, died on January 31 after a short illness. Baptized in 1961, he had a full life and never lost his enthusiasm. He was a longtime deacon, actively involved in serving in his local congregation. When the Church headquarters moved to North Carolina, he moved to the Charlotte area and worked in various capacities in the office. In his last years, he moved to Idaho and attended the Layton, Utah, congregation, in order

to live closer to his daughter. Last winter, he traveled to Charlotte to visit his Church family there again. He was loved and respected and will be missed.

Mrs. May Smart, 83, died peacefully in her sleep on September 23. She was baptized in 1975 and was a faithful member of the West Wales congregation in the UK. Her funeral was held on October 4. Mrs. Smart will be greatly missed by all who knew her.

Mr. Michael Larry Subramaniam, 43, from the Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, congregation, died on June 23, 2021. He was baptized in 2001 and was a faithful member of God's Church. His physical and spiritual family miss Mr. Subramaniam very much.

Mrs. Augustine (Tina) Tolbert, 72, wife of elder Johnny Tolbert, of the Atlanta, Georgia, congregation, died peacefully at home on January 19. Born to Henry and Wilma Marsh on August 18, 1949, in Marshville, North Carolina, she was diligently trained in God's ways. In 1968, she committed her life to God and was baptized. At church services, she met her one true love, Johnny Tolbert, and they raised three children, Joan, John, and Joseph. She nobly fulfilled the role of homemaker and was devoted to her family's wellbeing. Even though she was deaf and had mobility problems in her later years, she never complained. It was obvious that her focus was on the big picture of God's coming Kingdom and on giving encouragement to others. Despite her limitations, she attended every Sabbath. Besides her immediate family, she is survived by four grandchildren and a large family of brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, and other relatives. Mrs. Tolbert will be greatly missed by many people.

Mr. John King Webber, 82, died on November 28. Mr. Webber had a long history of following God's Work under Mr. Herbert Armstrong, and he was delighted to finally act on all that he had learned when he was baptized in 2011. He will be remembered as a loving, generous, and kind member of the Akron, Ohio, congregation.

Mrs. Betty Jean Wiebe, 85, died on December 8. Born in 1936, she earned a Bachelor of Education with Distinction from the University of Lethbridge and taught in several rural communities. She was married to Mr. Walter Domolewski, who died in 1984, and later to Mr. Ben Wiebe, who died in 2006. She was also predeceased by her daughter and one great-granddaughter. Mrs. Wiebe is survived by her son, son-in-law, seven grandchildren, and nine great-grandchildren. She was baptized in 2007. The Lethbridge and Calgary congregations will especially miss this kind and gentle lady.

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Vincent (Christelle) Avagbo, of the Porto-Novo congregation in Benin, have the joy of announcing the birth of their new baby, **Emmanuel Benjamin**. He was born on the Sabbath of December 4. His two brothers and two sisters are overjoyed with their new baby brother. Both newborn and mother are doing very well.

Mr. and Mrs. Jamie (Annesha) Edyvane are delighted to announce the birth of their second child, **Ethan Matthew**. He was born October 12, weighing six pounds, eight ounces, and measuring 48 centimeters in length. Big brother Timmy is absolutely smitten with his baby brother. The Melbourne, Australia, brethren are excited to welcome this new addition to the congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Omar (Jodi) Fraser of the London, UK, congregation, welcomed their first child, **Tiana Camille**, on October 24. She weighed a healthy six pounds, ten ounces. The Frasers are overjoyed and thankful to God for a safe delivery.

Mr. and Mrs. Christian (Christiane) Hossou, of the Port-Novo congregation in Benin, have the great pleasure of announcing the birth of their second daughter. **Oluwa Tobi** was born on the Sabbath of December 11. Big sister Joanita is thrilled!

Mr. and Mrs. Kasani (Acadia) Kotamo, of the Sevenoaks, UK, congregation, are happy to announce the birth of their son **Elias Theo Tinungane** on August 21. Both mother and baby are happy and healthy. Dad and big sister are overjoyed.

Mr. and Mrs. VG (Patty) Lardé, of the Pontefract, UK, congregation, are delighted to announce the birth of their second son, **Emile**, on October 26, 17 days earlier than expected. The baby arrived weighing three kilograms (6.6 pounds) and in perfect health.

Mr. and Mrs. Eric (Julia) Lundgren happily announce the birth of their third son **Levi Samuel** on January 28. Older brothers Noah and Asher are very

excited, and everyone is doing well. The Lundgren family attends the Columbus, Ohio, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Jamie (Veronica) Meakin are delighted to announce the birth of their twins, **Serenity Joy** and **Ezekiel “Zeke” Alexander**. The babies were born on December 22. Keeping the twin theme, both weighted six pounds, nine ounces (2.98 kilograms). Older siblings Liberty and Jesse are thrilled with their new brother and sister. The Jamie Meakin family attends the Kettering congregation in the UK.

Riley David Eli Smith was born June 22, 2021, to Mr. and Mrs. Jason (Emma) Smith, of the Brisbane, Australia, congregation. He weighed eight pounds, three ounces, and measured 53 centimeters long. His parents, along with his older sisters Keira and Sophie, are overjoyed with the new addition to the family.

Reports from Brethren Around the World

We hope that the following reports encourage you to continue praying for our brethren across the globe—and that they help you to feel a deeper connection with your fellow members of the body of Christ, no matter how far away they may be!

Mindanao Leadership Conference

Twenty-five men and women from across Mindanao and Metro Manila attended the 2021 Leadership Training

Conference held November 18–20 in Valencia City, Central Mindanao. The theme of this three-day event was “Working Together in the Same Mind and Judgment,” taken from 1 Corinthians 1:10. Regional Director Robert Tyler gave an excellent lecture on Church government, while other lectures discussed the importance of developing leadership and working together to achieve the sevenfold commission of the Church. The conference also included a song-leading workshop, a Question and Answer session, and a Friday evening



Bible Study. The Sabbath service was livestreamed to most of our local congregations, which gave some of our men the opportunity to speak online for the first time. The men also participated in a Spokesman Club meeting in the evening and enjoyed further opportunities to develop their leadership and speaking skills. This centralized leadership training event was the first after a long hiatus.

The conference aimed to help our men develop a unified approach in doing the Work of God and give them an opportunity to build ties and connect with the ministry from all regions of the country. There clearly is a great benefit to keeping this program going, and we are already looking forward to conducting another one. We would appreciate your continued prayers and support as we ask God to open even more opportunities to help effectively feed the flock and preach the good news of God's Kingdom, not only in the Philippines, but around the world.

—Joseph Gonzales

Myanmar and Thailand Update

Our Myanmar brethren have been courageously dealing not just with COVID-19, but with the ongoing challenges of internal conflicts and civil war. Some have had to hide themselves in jungle areas to avoid confrontation and potential conscription into the military. Despite this, members in Thailand and Myanmar were still able to rejoice together—some in person and others online—in keeping the Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day. Twenty Thai members had the privilege of observing God's Feasts at Tak Andaman Hotel & Resort, in the Mueang Tak area—a district in lower northern Thailand. Brethren from Singapore, Myanmar, and even the United States also tuned in to services via the online livestream.

Although the death of Mr. Thomas Tial Hoe has undoubtedly affected our brethren in the Chin State, God blessed us with the ability to deliver spiritual food each day

of the Feast in three different languages—Karen, Thai, and Burmese—which greatly aided our diverse membership scattered across the region. Feast messages focused on developing God's holy and righteous character, on the importance of families to society, and on the wonderful gift of God's Festivals to humanity. Many brethren remarked that the messages provided a deep level of spiritual understanding and that they felt moved and motivated to make important life changes, which has been exciting to see. Despite the tests and trials many of our brethren faced—and continue to face—we are grateful to God for blessing us with such a positive and spiritually motivating Feast. We would appreciate everyone's prayers for His continued protection and guidance.

—Htoowah Laybeh

Malaysia Update

For more than a year, the Malaysian brethren have been experiencing lockdowns due to COVID-19. Brethren have congregated at home and tuned in to Sabbath services from Adelaide, Australia. On a brighter note, God has opened new doors through Facebook to preach the Gospel in Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and India. There have been many literature requests—almost 3,000 in Malaysia alone as of this writing—in response to the Facebook advertisement campaigns. We pray this can continue going forward.

The Kuala Lumpur congregation, along with a few Johor Bahru congregation members, also recently celebrated the anniversary of the Church of God in Malaysia. About three dozen brethren met for Sabbath services and enjoyed a delicious BBQ dinner that evening, as well as a trivia and games night. The following day, members came together for a day of fun, food, and fellowship. Young and old enjoyed pool activities such as water polo and concluded the positive afternoon with a tasty lunch. Brethren had a wonderful time together and grew stronger in unity and love.

—Rajan and Ronald Moses

Imphal Update

Brethren in India, much like many of their brethren around the world, have for some time had to gather together online for Sabbath services. The small but dedicated Imphal group here is made up of six wonderful families and includes eight baptized members. Although family income has been negatively affected by COVID-19 restrictions, we have not lost heart, and we are thankful to God for His truth and for keeping everyone safe.

—Subash Singh

Social Media Powers the Work in Spanish!

By **William Williams**

On January 13, 2022, the Spanish Department began a new initiative in the online Work in the Spanish language. In response to feedback from members in Guatemala, Mr. Cristian Orrego, pastor of Living Church of God congregations in Mexico and Guatemala and manager of the Spanish Department in Charlotte, and his wife Carmen, International Programs Analyst and assistant to her husband and Mr. Mario Hernandez, moved forward with the idea of uploading *Tomorrow's World* and Living Church of God videos directly to Facebook, and not just to the *Tomorrow's World* YouTube channel. The results of these “native-to-Facebook uploads” have been greater than expected, and Mr. and Mrs. Orrego were happy to discuss them.

A Profitable Suggestion

The suggestion for this project came during a trip to Guatemala in January, when they met with members from three congregations for combined services in the city of Antigua. While there, members asked about the possibility of using Facebook as a platform for sharing videos with brethren in South and Central America. “We never publish the telecast on Facebook,” Mr. Orrego said. “[They] asked about this. The conditions in Latin America are different. Internet use can be very expensive—data is expensive, and people don’t want to use a lot of data on their phones. However, in most countries in Latin America, including Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Peru, Facebook is free.” The Orregos had not realized that Internet service providers in many of these countries cover the cost of Facebook data as an incentive for people to increase their Internet involvement, and Mr. Orrego said that the idea looked very promising. They lost no time in moving it forward! Mr. Orrego continued, “Our idea was first to upload videos to Facebook so members could see them without having to use data. But, when we did it, we noticed that it had a huge impact over the same material on YouTube.”

Mrs. Orrego was able to share some of the data from the first *Tomorrow's World* telecast they uploaded—“The Day of the Lord in Bible Prophecy”—which was in the second week of January. She related that the usual response rate to such material on YouTube was somewhere between 1,000–2,000 “likes,” but that the first Facebook upload garnered 17,000 “likes” and a great deal of other engagement besides! She was overwhelmed.

“I could not stop answering comments—and that’s when we knew something was up. Ever since that video, we have posted weekly, every Thursday. The response has been good,

but two others—‘The Dangerous Times of the Gentiles’ and ‘Jeremiah’s Message for the British and American Peoples’—have gathered responses similar to the first,” meaning tens of thousands of “likes” and shares, along with thousands of comments each, compared to a fraction of those numbers for most other materials shared previously. While the response rates for our materials had been decent, these telecasts have dramatically increased engagement on the Spanish-language Facebook page compared to before the Orregos began uploading telecasts. This has helped the Facebook page overall, while also suggesting other open doors, as explained later in this article.

Mr. Orrego said, “It is true that many of the views are *not* just three-second views—the good thing is that, because of these video uploads, our Facebook page was resurrected. It went from several hundred to over 189,000 followers over the weeks. The line was going up and up and up.”

Mr. Mike DeSimone, manager of digital media and the television department, was able to elaborate on this meaningful engagement, adding more perspective. “When a video gets results like this, it’s wonderful—these are meaningful numbers, and the engagement is multiple times more than ‘normal.’... From January 16 to March 12, there was definitely an increase of activity on the *El Mundo de Mañana* website by approximately 75 percent, in large part due to these Facebook posts. In fact, the amount coming specifically from Facebook was four to five times higher during this time than the average of previous months.” Mr. DeSimone then added this interesting statistic: “The top five videos that have been posted since mid-January on the Spanish Facebook page have over twenty-five million minutes viewed, and the engagement on these native Facebook videos [likes, comments, and shares] dwarfs other types of posts, [such as] just sharing a YouTube video on Facebook. And as Mr. Orrego mentioned, these posts have positively impacted our Spanish Facebook followers. In fact, the ‘followers’ for the first quarter of 2022 are up 230,673 percent [not a misprint!] above the previous quarter. This is exciting! Let’s continue to pray for God’s blessing on the Work overall.”

And, when an initiative garners such unexpected results, the potential to use it to further the preaching of the Gospel should not be—and has not been—overlooked!

A New Avenue

Although the initial plan was simply to make Church materials like telecasts and sermons more readily available to members living in Latin America, these results have truly

been inspiring. In addition to the effort to make livestreaming possible for members to attend virtual services on a private Facebook page, the Spanish Department is also working on another idea, as Mr. Orrego discussed: “We want to do, maybe in a month, a virtual *Tomorrow’s World* Presentation on prophecy, by Mr. Mario Hernandez, with invitations announced several weeks prior to the event. We want to announce it on Facebook and see, by response,

how many people are interested.... People like prophecy [alluding to the success of the Spanish telecasts], and Mr. Hernandez has taught a lot about prophecy. The idea [is] to lead more people to the Church websites and to want to know more about the Church and its literature. If it works, depending on the impact, we may be able to do more, maybe every month or every other month. And we’ll try to give people notice several weeks ahead of time, to know what to expect.”

The initiative has great potential, especially considering the cost benefits. The Orregos pointed out that, by using a popular social media platform like Facebook for these various projects, the Work does not pay for advertising, despite the impressive response rates. This, of course, has the potential to bring the goals of a small department serving an immense area more fully within reach.

Let’s be praying for even more open doors as God’s Work in the Spanish language pushes forward! (L)

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. Paula Fa’oliu and **Miss Leata Mafuao** were united in marriage at a beautiful lakefront location in Helensville, Auckland, New Zealand, on December 21. The ceremony was conducted by New Zealand Pastor Paul Kearns. Auckland elder Tony Leman was a very engaging and exuberant Master of Ceremonies, who guided the guests through the array of entertainment that evening. Although guest numbers had to be limited due to pandemic restrictions, family and friends from overseas were able to join the ceremony via livestream. We wish the Fa’olius all the very best and rejoice with them at this exciting time!

After being separated for two years by COVID-19 border closures, **Mr. Ared Woskanian** of the Brisbane, Australia, congregation, and **Miss Rebecca Rodzaj** of the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA, congregation, were united in marriage on February 13 in the presence of family and friends, and joined by family, friends, and members around the world via livestream. The ceremony took place in a rustic lakefront lodge in southeastern Wisconsin and was performed by the bride’s father, Area Pastor Bob Rodzaj. The couple attends in the Brisbane congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Victor (Val) Baum celebrated their **fiftieth (golden) wedding anniversary** on September 16. Mr. Baum was baptized in February 2020 and attends the Kettering congregation in the UK. Congratulations to the Baums on this fine milestone!

Sixty-five years ago, on December 29, 1956, **Mr. and Mrs. Robert (Anita) Roy** were married in Val d’Or, Quebec, Canada. They have five children and a happy family life. They were baptized into God’s Church in 1974. Mr. and Mrs. Roy are part of the Montreal congregation. Congratulations to both of them, and may God bless them for their zeal for Him and His way.

ORDINATIONS

Mr. and Mrs. Wade (Peggy) Clemons were ordained deacon and deaconess on the Sabbath of February 26 by Area Pastor Gary Stein and elder Michael Johnson. Mr. and Mrs. Clemons serve in the Midland, Texas, congregation.

Mr. Jon Susi was ordained a deacon on the Sabbath of January 22 by Australasian Regional Director Robert Tyler and elders Martin Montgomery, Zig Svalbe, and Adam Jennings. Mr. Susi serves in the Melbourne, Australia, congregation.

Electronic Service Requested

How Can You Help?

Some people are helpers by nature—it is part of their personality to be caring, helpful, and insightful regarding the needs of other people. Most of us can think of one or more individuals who really helped us at some time in our life. We welcomed their help and have never forgotten it. Hopefully, we thanked them for their time, energy, and expertise to help us solve our problem and fill our need.

Of course, God is the greatest helper of all. Many scriptures mention how God is our help in time of need: “He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5–6).

Jesus promised the “Helper”—the Holy Spirit—to those who had repented and been baptized (John 14:16). After He ascended to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The Spirit “helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit [itself] makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26).

We do not all have the same gifts to give. “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them” (Romans 12:4–6).

We all have opportunities to help those in need. Romans 12 goes on to give examples of different gifts and how those gifts can be used to help others. For instance, “he who teaches,

in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness... distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.... Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:7–15).

Paul commended Phoebe in Romans 16:1–2: “I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.” Paul also mentions “Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles” (vv. 3–4). In verse 6, he mentions “Mary, who labored much for us.” These followers of Christ used their gifts in service to God and the Work He was doing through the Apostle Paul.

Even offering help in the simplest ways can have a tremendous impact on someone, filling the greatest need at that time in their life. It is hard to overstate the value of such actions as showing empathy and simply listening to someone who needs to express their grief or concern. Giving someone direction, respectfully showing them steps to take, and “opening doors” through your contacts to assist someone else may be of tremendous help. Who can put a price on encouraging someone who is discouraged, or on time spent with another human being who just needs someone to be there with them?

Being a helper is an important aspect of God’s nature, and one to which we should all aspire. So, how can *you* help?

—Roger Meyer