

# THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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## Now Is No Time to Fall Asleep!

*Dear Brethren,*

The Feast of Trumpets marks the beginning of the third great Festival period, and it is quickly approaching. We are now nearly two decades downstream from the transition to a new century, when some thought the world would come to an end due to a worldwide computer breakdown, the result of a programming glitch. But “Y2K” came and went, and here we are.

It sometimes seems as though the return of Christ will never come, but the Apostle Paul gave wise counsel that we would be prudent to remember: “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” (Romans 13:11). How true that is for every one of us.

The word “sleep” appears in three different contexts in the New Testament. One refers to a *natural, biological necessity*, and there is no condemnation for this. It is even described as a gift of God (Psalm 127:2). An example is found in Matthew 25, where ten virgins are described, five wise and five foolish. Some have misrepresented sleep in this parable as a bad thing, as though they all were guilty of falling asleep on the job—but the point of the parable is not to correct all ten virgins, but only the five foolish ones who took no oil for their lamps. All needed rest, but the five wise kept their *spiritual* lamps filled with “oil”—God’s Spirit. They were living life as they should, staying close to God and maintaining a daily relationship with Him. The five foolish virgins, on the other hand, were resting even while awake.

Christ’s warning that we may find ourselves with insufficient “oil” in our spiritual lives and miss out on the first resurrection is a weighty one indeed. Some have suggested that the parable indicates that half of the Church will be caught off

guard when the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord crash down upon us. That should be sobering.

Sleep is also used in Scripture to represent *death*. We see this in Jesus’ resurrection of Lazarus. Jesus said to His apostles, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.’ Then His disciples said, ‘Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.’ However, Jesus spoke of his death.... Then Jesus said to them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead’” (John 11:11–14). Yes, some of us, maybe many of us, will die before Christ returns, but as surely as He raised Lazarus from the dead, He will raise us from the grave when the seventh trumpet sounds—and it *will* sound in God’s due time! This is a truth Lazarus’ sister Martha understood: “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (John 11:24). Eternal life is one of the promises given to those who trust and obey God (1 John 2:25), and each Feast of Trumpets brings us one year closer to that glorious day.

In Romans 13:11, Paul made a similar point to Jesus’ in the parable of the five foolish virgins—but while Jesus’ parable was a warning concerning the state of the Church at the end, Paul warned how easy it is for any of us to fall asleep *spiritually* and drift into sin, no matter what age we live in. This is the third way “sleep” is used. Paul addressed the problem of people becoming lax, falling into a spiritual malaise, and losing out on eternal life if they do not wake up and repent. “Wake up!” he was saying. “Know the times we are in!”

I cannot write these words without thinking of Dr. Meredith and how he often warned us of this same danger, putting his whole being into his words. Our human nature so easily drifts off to sleep spiritually. While we cannot work our way into the Kingdom of God, let us not forget another admonition of the Apostle Paul: “Therefore, my beloved,

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as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*" (Philippians 2:12). Yes, maintaining any relationship takes work, and our relationship with our Creator is no exception.

Paul warns us of what can happen when we fall asleep spiritually—or perhaps it is more accurate to say that he gives us signs that may indicate spiritual sleep. But he also tells us how to wake up! "Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Romans 13:12–14).

You may not be caught up in "revelry and drunkenness," "lewdness and lust," or "strife and envy," but there is no room for complacency. Being overconfident is also a sign of spiritual complacency and slumber. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Even Paul recognized that he had to discipline himself in the race toward eternal life. "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:24–27).

It is tempting to take the easy road, but that is not the one that leads to eternal life. Only the few manage to take and stay on the right road (Matthew 7:13–14). Many of us came from denominations that taught that there is nothing

to do—"It has all been done for you." Similarly, it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that baptism is an end, not a beginning. Baptism is **not** the end! As Paul warned the Corinthians, "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.... But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness" (1 Corinthians 10:1–2, 5).

For many of us, the Fall Festivals represent a turn-

ing point in the year—a sort of halfway point between Passovers, and a time when we gather during the Feast of Tabernacles and take a break from our day-to-day lives for a week to focus on larger things. Use this season to examine yourself. If you have not developed and maintained the habit of daily prayer and Bible study,

resolve to set aside time to do so—not as an end in itself, but as a means of developing a close relationship with God our Father and Jesus our Lord and Savior. Now is the time. We are in a long-distance race, but the finish line *is* coming closer. Now is no time to fall asleep!

Truly, our salvation is drawing near! For every single one of us, either the seventh trumpet will sound before we die, or the common sleep of humanity will take us before then. In either case, there is never a good time to doze off spiritually! Our present world is clearly hurtling toward destruction, and this should make Paul's admonition to cast off the works of darkness ring in our ears—"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" (Romans 13:11). Let us be awake, brethren! As the Apostle says, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand" (v. 12)!



You may not be caught up in "revelry and drunkenness," "lewdness and lust," or "strife and envy," but there is no room for complacency.

**Being overconfident is also a sign of spiritual complacency and slumber.**

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## EDITORIAL By Gerald E. Weston

# Trumpets Past—and Future

**H**ow thankful we ought to be that we know God exists and what His plan is for us. His existence is not a truth to take for granted, as many very intelligent people do not recognize this reality. And many very sincere religious folks who *do* believe He exists do not understand who He is or what He is doing. They do not understand His Sabbaths, His Holy Days, His wonderful plan for mankind, and so much more. These truths are priceless and provable.

Believing in the truth of God's existence can and should go beyond the personal, as there is a wide world of solid evidence for any willing to look and see. There is evidence in flowers and trees, and in creatures great and small. We see the marvel of thoughtful design and engineering all around us. Modern science has revealed the amazing complexity of life—in effect debunking the idea that even one so-called “simple” cell could ever possibly form by chance, though many fail to admit this obvious fact. There is no such thing as a “simple” cell, and to assert that life could come into being by chance requires a leap of faith so immense that, as Michael Denton puts it, “Such an occurrence would be indistinguishable from a miracle” (*Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, p. 248).

We are so blessed by God with knowledge and understanding. Consider how wonderful it is to know that our unconverted family and friends will not go to an ever-burning hell to fry for eternity. How wonderful it is to know that our destiny is not merely to “stare into the face of God” endlessly, or to collect our harps and wings and spend all day—every day, forever—rolling around heaven on clouds, plucking strings and eating Philadelphia cream cheese. Instead, God has opened our minds to understand that we can become His sons and daughters—children in His divine Family. These are just some of the many, many truths revealed to us. They are our special heritage in the Church of God.

But there are other things we do not understand at this time, and we should not be afraid to recognize and admit this. For example, Earth's history prior to Genesis 1 remains something of a mystery. We recognize that there is a span of time between the actions described by the first two verses of Genesis 1, and we are not the only ones to recognize this. While this is called the “Gap Theory,” often by those who seek to dismiss

the idea, it is more than a “theory”—it is the only plausible explanation that places what we *do* know from Scripture in the proper order.

God created the angelic realm prior to the earth (cf. Job 38:4–7), and sometime in the distant past, a powerful cherub rebelled against Him (Ezekiel 28:12–16). We also know that he took with him one-third of the angels (Revelation 12:4), and that this archangel Lucifer had a throne on our planet—a throne we know to be earth-centric, as the Bible says plainly that it was below the clouds (Isaiah 14:12–14). He ascended *above* the clouds, up to heaven, in a vain attempt to take rulership away from his Creator.

As a result of this rebellion, the earth became “without form, and void,” as Genesis 1:2 describes. The Hebrew words for this expression are *tohu* and *bohu*, a state of destruction only found elsewhere in Scripture as a result of rebellion (e.g., Isaiah 34:11; Jeremiah 4:23). The Hebrew word *tohu* is used another 16 times, and “It refers to a desert wasteland... to a destroyed city... to moral and spiritual emptiness or confusion... and to nothingness or unreality.... **In most (if not all) of these cases, *tōhû* has a negative or pejorative sense...**” (“*tōhû*,” #2494a, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*).

## Catastrophism

Uniformitarianism has long been a bedrock geological theory, presuming that all things we currently see in Earth's crust are the result of ancient forces that operate in the same manner we see forces operate today. For example, Earth's mountains would gradually have formed over eons of time by volcanic and seismic upheavals and slowly shifting land masses. Obviously, it would take millions of years to form the Rockies, the Alps, and the Himalayas by such slow processes as those we see in our world today.

But scientists have also come to recognize that some things can only be explained in terms of *catastrophic* events far more powerful than the normal processes we now see at work in the world.

On a road trip earlier this year, my wife, her sister, and I visited Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming, Glacier National Park in Montana, and the Scablands in eastern Washington. Most have heard of the first two parks, but it seems that few are familiar with the Scablands.



Relatively recent discoveries have revealed that Yellowstone is essentially the caldera (crater) of a supervolcano. The caldera stretches across an area approximately 34 by 45 miles (55 by 72 kilometers). Without getting into all the details (which are readily available online or at the library), if this supervolcano were to erupt now, it would destroy the United States and Canada as we currently know them, and the effects would be felt around the world for years to come—an example of the sort of catastrophes that have contributed to the history of our planet.

That the lesser-known Scablands were formed by a catastrophe has only become widely recognized during the last half-century. Geologist J. Harlen Bretz first proposed the explanation in 1923, but it only became accepted in the 1970s. It is now believed that the bizarre formations and massive channels cutting across the landscape of eastern Washington are the result of calamitous floods that occurred during the last ice age, estimated to have ended some 10,000 to 20,000 years ago according to mainstream geological reckoning.

As the history is currently understood, a portion of a large glacier blocked the Clark Fork River in northern Idaho, creating a massive lake in western Montana.

This lake eventually grew to cover 3,000 square miles, containing as much water as Lake Erie and Lake Ontario combined. Then the ice dam collapsed.... Over 500 cubic miles of water swept across the landscape in a wall of water hundreds of feet deep and washed away everything in its path in a matter of days. The water flow of this mega flood was as great as the combined flow of all the rivers in the whole world, *times ten*. Geologists calculated that the Missoula Floods created their own earthquakes as they thundered across the landscape.... Geologists believe this happened more than forty times over a period of several thousand years... (“The Channeled Scablands,” *Seven Wonders of Washington State.com*, 2015).

Of course, evolutionists have a vested interest in expanding the scale of time on earth to fit their theory of life’s development. Did this event take place 10,000 to 20,000 years ago, and were there really over 40 such floods? Certainly, we

should not blindly accept such statements, and future discoveries may show such conclusions to be in need of revision. At the same time, there is nothing in Scripture that contradicts this account in and of itself, and the visible evidence certainly does point to a catastrophe of unimaginable proportions.

### Young-Earth Creationism

*The Genesis Flood* by John Whitcomb and Henry Morris burst onto the scene in 1961. It was an attempt to assign all geologic phenomena to the Noachian Flood and support the idea that the earth and universe are only 6,000 years old. According to

these authors, everything from Arizona’s Grand Canyon to Washington’s Grand Coulee was the result of the worldwide flood that occurred more than 4,000 years ago, and many attribute the beginning of the current “young earth” movement to their book. Of course, such an assertion carries with it a lot of baggage.

Those who visit the life-size “Noah’s Ark” near Cincinnati, Ohio, see dinosaurs depicted among the animals Noah took onto the Ark, an assumption lacking both common sense and scriptural backing.

We used Whitcomb and Morris’ thesis as a textbook when I attended Ambassador College in the mid-to-late 1960s, but we also understood that not all geologic features were the result of the Noachian Flood; Satan’s pre-Adamic rebellion also contributed to the picture. At one time, *The Plain Truth* magazine had articles attempting to relegate all geologic features to these two destructions. However, we came to realize this was rather simplistic and that some of the evidence in Whitcomb and Morris’ text was flawed. We also realized that our understanding of the pre-Adamic world was limited and incomplete, and we stopped publishing articles on the subject.

Anyone who takes even a casual look at some of the Scablands’ features realizes that something happened that cannot be explained by traditional “young earth” ideas. This is in part because these are relatively localized phenomena—even if you define “localized” as half of a moderate-sized state. If those features were caused by the worldwide flood of Noah’s day, for instance, why wouldn’t the rest of the earth show similar bizarre features? Why would this area be unique?

Even some members of the Church hang onto “young earth” ideas in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

If the Yellowstone supervolcano were to erupt now, it would destroy the United States and Canada as we currently know them, and the effects would be felt around the world for years to come—an example of the sort of catastrophes that have contributed to the history of our planet.

I find this interesting, since the public proponents of these ideas are wrong about almost everything else in Scripture. These proponents have rejected virtually all the revealed, biblical truths mentioned at the beginning of this article, and so many other truths of God, including the Bible's clear evidence that Genesis 1 describes the reshaping of the earth following a disaster that was the result of Satan's rebellion.

The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* brings clarity to this subject, explaining two different words that are found in the opening chapter of Genesis. Even in English the words *make/made* and *create/created* carry different connotations, but they especially do in the original Hebrew.

The root *bārā'* has the basic meaning "to create." It differs from *yāsar* "to fashion" in that the latter primarily emphasizes the shaping of an object while *bārā'* emphasizes the initiation of the object.... Since the word never occurs with the object of the material, and since the primary emphasis of the word is on the newness of the created object, **the word lends itself well to the concept of creation *ex nihilo* [from nothing]**, although that concept is not necessarily inherent within the meaning of the word ("*bārā'*," #278a, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*).

The use of *bārā'* in the opening statement of the account of creation seems to carry the implication that the physical phenomena came into existence at that time and had no previous existence in the form in which they were created by divine fiat. The use of '*āśā*' may simply connote the act of fashioning the objects involved in the whole creative process ("*āśā*," #1708a, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*).

Scientists tell us the earth is 4.5 billion years old. We do not *endorse* such large numbers, but neither should we doubt that they *may* be true. What we know from Scripture is that Earth is *more than* 6,000 years old—meaning it existed some time before the "creation week" of Genesis 1—and hard science indicates that the universe has been around for a *long* time. By properly understanding the opening verses of Genesis, comparing them with other passages of Scripture, and admitting certain facts and observations of science, we are not left to assume that the T-Rex and other dinosaurs roamed the earth with Adam and his descendants prior to the flood, as young-earth creationists erroneously assert.

Can we explain more about the Jurassic period than scientists who spend their lives studying the subject? Is it wise and sound-minded to think so? On the other hand, when scientists attempt to explain the world with an evolutionary bias, should we accept all their conclusions? That would

not be wise, either. As Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong and Dr. Roderick C. Meredith always explained, true science and the Scriptures do not contradict one another when they are understood properly.

### The Past Reveals the Future

What is interesting about Yellowstone and the Scablands is that they force us to acknowledge that catastrophes of unthinkable scope have occurred on our planet in times past. We know that what we now call Yellowstone is a supervolcano that has erupted several times during Earth's history. And looking forward to Earth's future, the book of Revelation describes a level of destruction that is reminiscent of the impact of a supervolcano eruption as one of the seven trumpet plagues marking the Day of the Lord. It will destroy one-third of all ships and one-third of the creatures in the sea (Revelation 8:8–9).

One leading theory regarding the sudden extinction of dinosaurs is that an asteroid ten kilometers (6.2 miles) in diameter struck our planet near Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula. This is only one of several theories, but there is ample evidence that an asteroid struck this region long ago. Is this what destroyed the dinosaurs? One day we will know. But such a finding should call to mind Revelation's prophecies, which seem to indicate that another large asteroid will strike the earth during the Day of the Lord (Revelation 8:10–11).

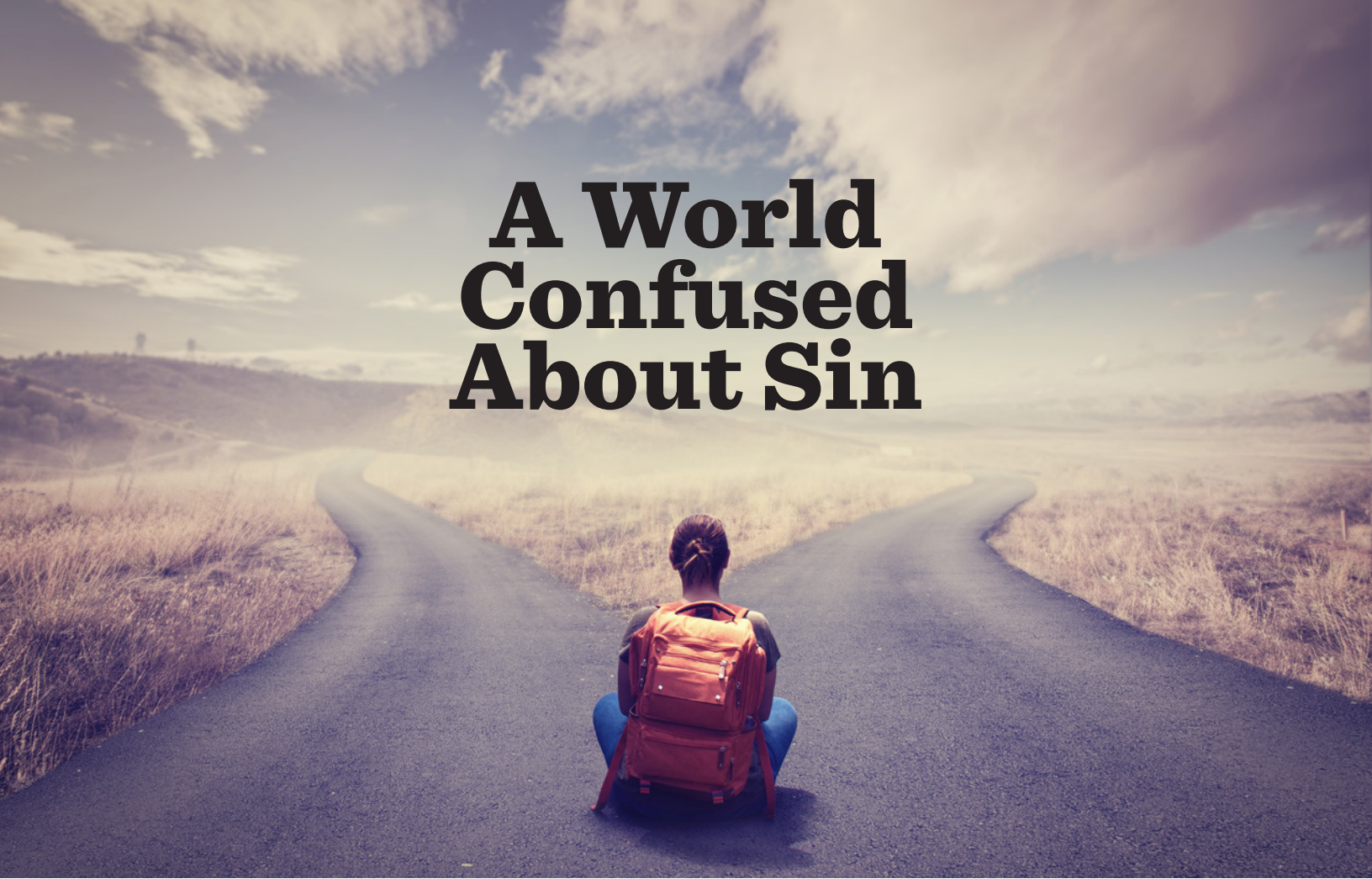
The important point is that it is not true that *everything* we see on earth has come to be by means of a slow, uniform, and gradual process over billions of years—and in this way, the past carries with it elements that foretell our future. God's word predicts further disasters to come during the time pictured by the Feast of Trumpets. These may be *natural* disasters, but the *timing* of them will be supernatural.

Why did God once allow asteroids, supervolcanos, and catastrophic floods far greater than those that have occurred during mankind's existence? Until recent decades, catastrophes such as those described in the book of Revelation may have appeared outrageously impossible except as direct acts of God. There is no doubt that their timing will be an act of God, but the evidence around us puts us on notice that forces capable of fulfilling many of the seven trumpet plagues already exist in nature. Should He choose to use them, it is only a matter of God letting them loose during the one-year Day of the Lord.

Our understanding of the pre-Adamic world is very limited, but this curious period is nevertheless fascinating to the inquiring mind. By studying Earth's history, we can better understand the future destruction that will surely come as a result of our rebellious world.

For more insight into this subject, please read Mr. Wallace Smith's booklet, *Evolution and Creation: What Both Sides Miss*. (LW)

# A World Confused About Sin



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By **Rod McNair**

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**W**hat is sin? That question is probably not at the top of the list of topics most people want to talk about! But sin—and how it is defined—affects almost everything in life.

Understanding what sin is, what it is not, and how to overcome it makes much of life fall into place. Far from being a dusty, dry, boring subject, the topic of sin and gaining a true understanding of it is at the center of understanding life itself.

In fact, this Feast of Tabernacles, as we celebrate the reign of Jesus Christ and the saints in the coming Kingdom of God, one of the passages we will surely review together is Isaiah 11:9, where we read that “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” One of the keys to the joyful new world Christ will establish will be the knowledge of God spreading to all corners of the earth. But this knowledge is not simply about better agricultural practices or more accurate science. It will include a true understanding of *sin*. A knowledge of what sin truly is—and what it is not—will prove to be a vital component of all the wonders to come in the Millennium! And to teach *tomorrow’s* world that knowledge, you and I need to understand it *today*.

Just what *is* sin?

## **The Curse of Mankind**

With the sole exception of Jesus Christ, every human who has ever lived has sinned (Romans 3:23). We all have earned what’s called “the wages of sin”—death (Romans 6:23). In 1 John 1:8–9, we read that if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, but if we confess and forsake our sins, “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” How we live matters! But we can have hope because of Jesus’ sacrifice. He died for everyone because of His love for all mankind. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

It is crucial to understand that all people need to have their sins covered and forgiven, and God is willing to do that because of His great love for mankind. Even if we haven’t committed a particular sin *in the letter*, we most likely have *in the spirit*. The Apostle Paul makes clear that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). John gives us no room to deny it, telling us, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

But what *is* sin? How should it be defined?



In our world today, there is widespread confusion and disagreement regarding acceptable moral behavior. A 2015 Pew Research report demonstrated how confused the American public is about right and wrong. When asked which behaviors they considered sinful, 22 percent of the American population said abortion is not a sin, 29 percent said homosexual behavior is not a sin, and 40 percent of people surveyed said living with a romantic partner outside marriage is not a sin. On the other hand, 19 percent of people surveyed said using energy without considering the environment *is* a sin!

Why is there so much disparity and confusion on what defines sin? Maybe it's best summed up by the final verse of the book of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; **everyone did what was right in his own eyes**" (Judges 21:25). Perhaps looking at how some people define sin can shed some light on the matter.

Some people who profess atheism might say that good behavior is simply defined as being good to all, doing what is right for you, and avoiding hurting anyone if you can. Sounds good, doesn't it? On the surface, it does. It even sounds similar to God's command to love our neighbor as ourselves. But what is wrong with that philosophy? Is it a sufficient guide for how we should conduct ourselves?

What if what I think is good contradicts what you think is good? What if our ideas clash? Today, for instance, it is not uncommon for someone to "fall in love" with another person who is already married and feel there is no choice but to pursue that relationship, even if a marriage or family is destroyed. Who should bear the burden of pain in this case—should the other spouse and any children in the family, or the new "couple," each of whom has suddenly "found" his or her "soulmate" after one of them was already married? How is that determined? How does human reason alone guarantee what is "good" in such a situation, when pain or hurt will result no matter *which* path is taken?

What about professing Christians? How do they define sin? In general, many well-meaning mainstream Christians will define sin as "not loving others or not keeping the New Testament covenant." What's the problem with that? What does "love" really mean? And what does the "New Testament covenant" say? Many will quote Paul, who said, "Love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10), believing it supports their belief that love has su-

perseded law to define what appropriate behavior is. While most will say the Ten Commandments are good, when pressed many will confess they do not believe a life of obedience to those commandments is in any way required for eternal life. Instead, such a notion is set aside in favor of a nebulous requirement of "love." However, Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). To which commandments was Jesus referring? He said elsewhere, "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17), and then proceeded to list several of the Ten Commandments. Later, James explained that compromising on one law breaks them all (James 2:10).

Did you know that more than a hundred years ago, some social commentators in the United States were very concerned about the effects of baseball's growing popularity? They were concerned that Sunday-afternoon baseball games were drawing professing Christians away from keeping "the Sabbath," and so eroding their faith. (In their minds, Sunday was "the Sabbath.") This controversy is outlined in a book written in 1900 by Abram Herbert Lewis, titled *Swift Decadence of Sunday, What Next?*

But what was really happening? Protestant leaders had long before eroded the Ten Commandments by perpetuating the false doctrine of keeping Sunday instead of the Sabbath.

They held to their position by saying the law was "done away." However, once you do away with one law, what is keeping you from doing away with another, and another, and yet another? One compromise leads to another. Once religious leaders changed the definition of "sin" from breaking

the law to a vague "lack of love," their moral argument was doomed. The current climate of "anything goes" is the result.

### Then What Is Sin?

The common denominator for all the wrong approaches to sin is that they are based on human reasoning. Can we rely on human reasoning to determine spiritual truth? No. As Solomon said, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12). The only valid definition of sin is the one that came from the One who created us! He inspired the Apostle John to write, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for **sin is the transgression of the law**" (1 John 3:4, *King James Version*). That is God's own definition of sin.

**What about professing Christians? How do they define sin?** In general, many well-meaning mainstream Christians will define sin as "not loving others or not keeping the New Testament covenant." What's the problem with that? What does "love" really mean?

Where does relying on nothing more than human reasoning about sin lead us? If you want to know, then just look around, because that approach is precisely what has produced the society we have! Is our society today, by and large, one of order or disorder? Harmony or chaos? Violence or peace?

When we attend the Feast of Tabernacles, the great differences between the world today and the Millennium to come are often made so clear. We are familiar with the present world we live in, and at the Feast we focus every day on the better world that is coming.

Our current society is the result of an overdependence on purely human reasoning about such things—reasoning that man, by himself, cannot truly separate from the deceptions of the Satan the Devil. The contrast between that society and the world God promises is brought into sharp focus during these Feast days.

Unlike man’s personal ideas about what sin is, God’s definition is not arbitrary. His commandments are not merely reflections of His perfect and unchangeable character—they are also designed for *our good*! Notice what Moses told the ancient Israelites: “You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, **that it may go well with you and with your children after you**, and that you may prolong your days in the

Unlike man’s personal ideas about what sin is, God’s definition of sin is not arbitrary.

land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time” (Deuteronomy 4:40). That same idea is repeated later: “And the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, **for our good always**, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day” (Deuteronomy 6:24). His laws—not our own ideas of what is good—will keep us from reaping sin’s consequences and will reward us with what is *truly* good.

**Clarity and Guidance for a World Deceived**  
God firmly warns His people to come out of Babylon (Revelation 18:4). The Greek word *Babylon* (*Babel* in Hebrew)

Which Behaviors Are Sinful?				
The Pew Research Center surveyed Americans, asking whether certain actions are sinful or not. Here are the percentages who responded “Yes” or “No” to these questions.				
	Among Catholics		Among U.S. general public	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you think it is sinful to...				
Have an abortion?	55	23	48	22
Engage in homosexual behavior?	44	39	45	29
Buy luxuries without giving to poor?	41	42	35	38
Live with romantic partner outside marriage?	33	54	36	40
Use energy without considering environment?	23	61	19	56
Get a divorce?	21	61	19	51
Drink alcohol?	12	71	15	58
Live in house larger than needed?	12	73	11	64
Source: Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Catholics and Family Life, May 5–June 7, 2015. Figures do not add to 100% because some respondents claimed not to believe in the concept of sin and others were unsure of their answer.				

means *confusion*, and when we ignore God’s definition of right and wrong, mankind’s ways do end in confusion—so much so that society has lost the ability to think clearly and soundly. The Bible, not our opinions or feelings, has to be our guide concerning what sin is.

God, not mankind, is the one who decides what is sin and what is not. “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’” (Romans 7:7). It is immensely important to understand and *keep* the law, because the law defines sin.

Jesus Christ is the standard (Ephesians 4:13). Only His living in a Christian through the Holy Spirit can help human beings keep God’s law the way the Eternal intended it to be kept. Jesus kept His Father’s law perfectly in every way, and He will help us keep it, as well. By itself, mankind can never keep it perfectly, as the history of Israel teaches us. However, when people sin, God, out of His perfect love, covers their sins when they repent and seek to love God by keeping His commandments with His help (1 John 5:3).

The world is deceived. Whether atheists, mainstream Christians, or anyone in between, most do not truly understand what sin is. But we *can* know! Through the understanding given only through God’s Spirit, we don’t have to be confused: Sin is the transgressing of God’s law. Through Jesus Christ, we have forgiveness and mercy when we do sin. Through His Spirit, He will even give us the power to resist and overcome sin—something every one of us desperately needs. (LN)





# THE WHEAT AND THE CHAFF

*“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”*

—1 Thessalonians 4:16–18

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By **Dexter Wakefield**

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**W**ho in God’s Church hasn’t imagined what that thunderous shout might be like, and how exciting it will be to know that the fulfillment of the ancient promise of the Feast of Trumpets is finally come? Then imagine being transformed “in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:52), utterly separated from the world of corruption, and brought into the glory of God’s immortal Family!

There is a recurring theme in the Bible of God’s **separating out** the good fruits from the bad, and our Father has both the *will* and *ability* to do just that. The annual Holy Days and their timing within the harvest cycle of ancient Israel work together to picture elements in the plan of salvation, and it is good to remember this great harvest theme during this season of the year. Let’s look at some examples.

## **An Ancient Practice**

When wheat or barley grows, a long stalk supports a “head” that consists of nutritious grains or seeds surrounded by

inedible husk. In the threshing process, wheat grains are removed from the husk and stalk on a *threshing floor*. The sheaves of grain are beaten out either by hand or by the action of a sled pulled by an animal. This was an essential part of the harvest in ancient times and is still done in some parts of the world today. The result of threshing is a mixture of wheat grains and ground bits of the inedible material called *chaff*. This mixture of wheat grains and chaff is then tossed into moving air—either from a breeze or a fan—and the chaff, being lighter, is blown away while the heavier wheat grains fall back into the worker’s pan to be kept. The process of separating the wheat grains from the chaff is called *winnowing*.

In describing what Jesus will do at His return, John the Baptist proclaimed, “His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire” (Luke 3:17). Clearly, the long-term prospects for the “spiritual chaff” are not very good.

It’s important to remember that the good and bad often grow in close proximity to each other. Referring to the Father, Jesus said, “He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good,



and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). In this age, the unrighteous often prosper more than the children of God living among them, but the time will come—pictured by the Feast of Trumpets—when God will *separate out* those who are His good fruits.

Jesus described it like this:

The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, “Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?” He said to them, “An enemy has done this.” The servants said to him, “Do you want us then to go and gather them up?” But he said, “No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn’” (Matthew 13:24–30).

At the spiritual harvest, when God’s begotten children enter His Kingdom, there is a separation involved.

### **The Threshing Floor of Ornan**

Let’s look at another example. Did you know that the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the location of Solomon’s Temple, is the site of an ancient threshing floor?

Then David said to Ornan, “Grant me the place of this threshing floor, that I may build an altar on it to the

LORD. You shall grant it to me at the full price, that the plague may be withdrawn from the people.”... So David gave Ornan six hundred shekels of gold by weight for the place (1 Chronicles 21:22, 25).

Now Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite (2 Chronicles 3:1).

At this point, it’s helpful to know a little geography. The threshing floor of Ornan was located a few hundred yards north of the small, walled city that was Jerusalem in the days of King David. The Dome of the Rock mosque is located in that area today. Both the threshing floor and the city occupied part of a low mountain, Mount Moriah or Zion. Located about 1,000 yards east is the Mount of Olives. Between the two mountains is the Kidron Valley, which was also known in ancient times as the Valley of Jehoshaphat. About 55 miles to the north, Mount Megiddo (Har Megiddo or “Armageddon”) overlooks the broad Valley of Jezreel (or Plain of Esdraelon).

Sometimes you may hear people refer to “The Battle of Armageddon,” but the Bible mentions that location—Har Megiddo—as the place where armies *gather* before marching on Jerusalem. It is at Jerusalem that the terrible battle takes place, in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, a name that means “the Eternal judges.” “For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, *to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.... And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon*” (Revelation 16:14, 16).



## The Bible Tells the Story

Prophecy foretells the events of “the Battle of that Great Day of God Almighty” in vivid detail. Consider these passages:

I will also *gather* all nations, and *bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat* [modern Kidron Valley]; and I will enter into *judgment* with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land (Joel 3:2).

For I will gather all the nations to battle *against Jerusalem*; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the *Mount of Olives*, which faces Jerusalem on the east (Zechariah 14:2–4).

“Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit *to judge* all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow—for their wickedness is great.” *Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!*... The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness. The LORD also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the LORD will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel. “So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again” (Joel 3:12–17).

Through the prophet Daniel, God describes this moment in history as a removal of chaff:

You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and *became like chaff from the summer threshing floors*; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth (Daniel 2:34–35).

That great mountain that grew to fill the earth is the Kingdom of God. The same Jesus who once came as a meek Lamb is coming back as a mighty warrior—as one who “fights in the day of battle”—to rule “with a rod of iron” (Revelation 2:27; 12:5; 19:15).

Apparently, the location of the threshing floor of Ornan will also be the scene of the greatest separation of wheat from chaff in history.

## Some Good Advice

God says that we are to be patient while He works out His purpose in this age, but sometimes His children can become discouraged because they have manifold trials while the dishonest seem to prosper. During the long wait between the spring and fall Holy Day seasons, it’s good to remember that while the world loves its own, God loves *His* own much more. He has a desire for the work of His hands (Job 14:15) and will surely perform what He has said, separating the wheat from the chaff by making His children immortal. Our job is to be His faithful, fruitful, obedient servants until our Lord comes. He left us some good advice:

Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.... Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.... Therefore you also **be ready**, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matthew 24:32–34, 42, 44).

Then He repeated His ancient promise!

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and *He will separate them* one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:31–34).

All of us should ponder this great promise and come to appreciate it all the more as the Feast of Trumpets approaches. <sup>(LN)</sup>





# A Tale of Two Goats

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By **Peter G. Nathan**

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**E**very year, members of God’s Church observe a Holy Day described in Leviticus 16 as the Day of Atonement. We understand that it is not an archaic “Jewish” festival; rather, it is full of meaning for those who understand the plan of God and who are striving to live by every word of God.

Of course, as a result of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice and the destruction of the Temple soon afterward, neither Jews nor Christians today perform each detail of the rituals described in Leviticus 16. Yet, as we study God’s instructions to the Israelites, we can learn much that helps us understand not only His plan for the whole world, but also His plan for our lives.

A central part of God’s Leviticus 16 instructions to the Israelites involved the *Azazel* goat. In the ancient ceremonies God gave to Israel concerning the Day of Atonement, perhaps one of the strangest to many concerned the two goats presented to the high priest that day. Lots were cast so that one goat was clearly chosen by God as being “for the LORD,” with the other being designated as “for *Azazel*” (v. 16, *English Standard Version*). The goat for the Eternal is sacrificed as

a sin offering, but the goat for *Azazel* is removed alive into the wilderness—a unique ritual, only done on the Day of Atonement.

If one goat is “for the LORD,” then clearly the other is not, but then what or who is it for? What does the goat chosen “for *Azazel*” represent? This article will help us better understand what this second goat does and does not symbolize, and the significance of that symbolism for Christians today.

## **The Term *Azazel*: Is It a Name?**

The English term “scapegoat” as a translation of the Hebrew term *Azazel* comes to us via William Tyndale’s translation of the Bible, yet it is a problematic term that has fostered much confusion, especially among those unfamiliar with the religion of ancient Israel. Like the Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate before him, Tyndale used the term “scapegoat,” but the “as a scapegoat” translation is driven by incorrect theology, not by the actual Hebrew text.

It is true that the word *Azazel* is a compound of two Hebrew words, but there is some debate about which two words and what they mean together. The pairing could be interpreted as a combination of *azaz* and *el*, which some

would hastily interpret as “strength” (*azaz*) plus “God” (*el*). However, more scholars believe that the two words are *ez*, meaning “goat,” and *azal*, meaning “gone,” “spent,” or “removed,” which certainly is a fitting description of what takes place. (In Hebrew, vowels can change as words are combined.) But this still adds no understanding concerning the meaning of the ritual, nor does it explain what the goat *not* selected “for the LORD” represents.

But there is more to consider. Compound nouns such as *Azazel*—nouns made from two different Hebrew words—are, as authors Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka remind us, “frequently used as proper nouns... [But] on the other hand they are very rarely used as common nouns” (*A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 2006, pp. 218–19). Indeed, the Hebrew language used in introducing the term *Azazel* in Leviticus 16:8–10 can only indicate a proper noun—that is, a name—rather than a function of the goat. The Hebrew text of verse 8 sets out both goats in parallel language—one lot for the Eternal, the other lot for *Azazel*. The implication is that if one goat is “for the LORD,” the second goat clearly is *not* but is for another—for *Azazel*.

We should note that in verse 10, the expression “go for a scapegoat into the wilderness,” used with little variation in both the *King James Version* and the *New King James Version*, is not accurate Hebrew. It should read “go to *Azazel* into the wilderness,” as it is indeed rendered in many newer English translations. For example, the *English Standard Version* translates verse 10 as “...but the goat on which the lot fell for *Azazel* shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to *Azazel*.” This ensures that the preposition used of both goats is translated consistently throughout, and treats the term as it likely should be treated—as a name.

### Atonement: What Does It Mean?

We understand from Scripture that the blood of the sin offering goat—not the goat for *Azazel*—was used to make atonement for the Tabernacle and the people of Israel. But what does “atonement” mean? The English term “atonement” is translated from the Hebrew word *kippur* (“to cover”). The blood of the sin offering was a covering for the sin of the people (Leviticus 16:15). Christians will recognize that this is the function of the shed blood of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). English-speakers familiar with the Ark of the Covenant may be particularly interested to learn that the English term “mercy seat”—describing the seat covering the Ark—is a poor translation of a Hebrew word derived from *kippur*. French translators who understood the Hebrew more correctly described the covering as *le propitiatoire* or *l'expiatoire*—“propitiation” or “expiation” in English.

In Leviticus 16, the Hebrew word *kippur* is also used regarding the goat called *Azazel*, but it is used in a notably different way. The blood of the sacrificed sin-offering goat made atonement for whatever it was placed upon, and it is *that* goat “which is for the people” (v. 15). By contrast, the living *Azazel* goat had to have atonement placed *upon it* (v. 10). In the summary statement at the chapter’s end (vv. 29–34), we see that the *Azazel* goat is not part of the process that made atonement for the people. Rather, it was covered with the sins of the people and sent away alive, a very literal expiation or removal of sins by their *physical* removal to a remote place.

We should note that although two goats were to be presented before the Eternal, Scripture makes it clear that there would be only *one* sin offering—singular rather than plural. A sin offering requires the shedding of blood by the sacrificed animal, and the *Azazel* goat neither dies nor loses any blood in the Tabernacle or Temple, nor does it have blood placed upon it. Put plainly, it could not be a sin offering—not according to Leviticus 4, which plainly describes the requirements for sin offerings, and not according to Hebrews, which states flatly that “without shedding of blood there is no remission” of sins (Hebrews 9:22).

It is instructive that the term “sin offering” is always used in the singular, not plural. The plural is used regarding sins of the people but never of the goats. If both goats were to be sin offerings, there would be no need for divine selection of the animals. However, the goats had to be presented before the Eternal so that He could choose which of the two was to be the sin offering. The goat slain is referred to in the rest of the chapter as the goat of the sin offering (Leviticus 16:15; cf. vv. 9, 27), while the goat *not* selected was to be for *Azazel*. As mentioned, no aspect of the part played by the *Azazel* goat has any relationship to a sin offering. No blood was shed for it, hence only one goat was a sin offering.

Furthermore, the Eternal—not the priests—chose which goat would become the sin offering. In choosing one for Himself (v. 8) and hence rejecting the other, the Eternal was making a difference between the goats. It is especially significant that God Himself made the choice. This fact should call to mind the Apostle Paul’s admonition that Satan can transform himself so that he is seen as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). We would not expect those without the insight of God’s Holy Spirit to be able to distinguish between the things of God and the things of the Devil, just as God Himself must distinguish between the two goats.

Only the *blood of the sacrificed sin offering* provided for atonement, but in verse 21 the meaning of atonement is set out for us in the confession of sins (“Leviticus,” *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 1989, p. 103). The consequence of that



confession was that the *Azazel* was, in some way, to bear the burden of the sins of the nation into the wilderness.

### Into the Wilderness

Reading only the English translation of Leviticus 16, one might easily assume that the *Azazel* goat takes a pleasant walk into the wilderness. The Hebrew, however, conveys that the goat is driven or forced into the wilderness—a trip that a male goat would not want to take of its own volition. It may be worth noting, as pointed out to me by some friends who have raised goats, that the Day of Atonement comes at a time of the year when female goats are typically in heat, such that a male goat would want to be with the females, not alone in the wilderness. The “suitable man” (v. 21) taking the goat into “an uninhabited land” (v. 22) would need great strength to control a goat reluctant to be separated from the herds of Israel and taken where it could no longer influence them. Contrast this to the example of Jesus Christ, who *willingly* gave up His life to be our Passover sacrifice. As we consider the typology of the *Azazel* goat, it is clear that an unwilling goat being driven by force away from the camp of Israel cannot picture our Savior and High Priest in any way! Interestingly, as an aside, this conveyance to the wilderness is the only Day of Atonement function that the high priest did not himself perform.

We should notice that every scriptural reference to Jesus Christ bearing our sins is in relation to His *death*, not a sojourn in the wilderness—e.g., Isaiah 53:1–12; Hebrews 7:27; 9:28; 1 Peter 2:24. Some people mistakenly use Isaiah 53 in imagining Jesus as the *Azazel* goat, but all the references in that chapter relate to the death of the sin-bearer. The verses in Hebrews and 1 Peter contain the Greek term that is used to convey what Leviticus 16:21 speaks about. But all of these verses speak of Christ bearing our sins through His death. Something else is therefore being portrayed in Leviticus 16:21–22. Christ’s blood is shed to make atonement for our sins, whereas the *Azazel* goat is used *alive* to send unrighteousness away or to separate it from the people.

It is important for us as Christians to remember that not every historical Temple ritual has its roots in the Bible’s direct commands. Scrupulous Hebrew scholars debated what God must have meant by the term “uninhabited” in verse 22; the original Hebrew word has the sense of a solitary land, a separate place cut off from other contact, and some concluded that the *Azazel* goat could not be fully separated from Israel unless it were to die. This led to the practice, established sometime during the Second Temple period, of the priesthood throwing the *Azazel* goat into a ravine or abyss. The Hebrew of Leviticus 16, however, does not call for such an execution. Many Jewish texts written in or before the first century AD support the perspective that the

*Azazel* goat was a representation of Satan, and Christians mindful of Revelation 20:1–3 will also see a parallel between the Leviticus 16 exile of the *Azazel* and the thousand-year solitary exile of the immortal spirit being known as Satan, in which he is separated from humanity.

Once again, we see the *Azazel* in the role of Satan, not of Christ. Taking place between the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of Tabernacles, the Day of Atonement does its part, as well, in symbolizing a crucial step in the plan of God. The Feast of Trumpets pictures the year-long Day of the Lord that climaxes with the return of the King of kings, and the Feast of Tabernacles pictures the Millennial reign of Christ with His saints. The Day of Atonement and its unusual *Azazel* goat ritual pictures that great event that must take place between them: the separation of Satan the Devil from humanity. Bound and cast into a bottomless pit by an angel appointed for the task (cf. Leviticus 16:21, “by the hand of a suitable man”), Satan will be utterly separated from humanity and unable to deceive and tempt mankind again until the thousand years are finished (Revelation 20:3).

So then, why was the confession of the sins of the people made over the head of the *Azazel* goat if he does not die for those sins (Leviticus 16:21)? Scripture describes Satan as having deceived the whole world (Revelation 12:9) and as having played a role in mankind’s sin from the very beginning (Genesis 3:1–5). It is on Satan’s head that the ultimate responsibility for sin rests. Jesus Christ, our High Priest, has already paid the penalty of sin for mankind. Satan, as the deceiver of all humanity, is to carry his responsibility for that sin, confessed over his head, from the presence of God. Leviticus also sets out who is normally to make the confession for sins: the party who is guilty (Leviticus 5:5; Psalm 32:5; Proverbs 28:13). But Satan is never shown in Scripture acknowledging his guilt—so the sins must be confessed over him by another. And he goes into the bottomless pit with the weight of his own guilt laid fully upon him.

### Two Goats, One Lamb!

As we have seen, the *Azazel* goat cannot accurately be seen as a type of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the sin offering for Christians, and we see His role prefigured in the sacrifice of the goat for the Atonement sin offering. Yet it is important that we take care in how we understand type and antitype, and take care, as well, that we not lose sight of God’s overall plan, as revealed in the annual Holy Days. Without such understanding, we might make the same mistake made by the early Roman Catholic theologians, notably Origen of Alexandria, who—unaware of or uncomfortable with Jewish religious practice—incorrectly associated the *Azazel* goat with Jesus Christ. Concerning God’s Holy Days and the Old





Testament, such individuals lacked the sort of knowledge that comes from obedience (cf. Psalm 111:10).

We must not forget that, while the sin offering at Atonement may in some important ways parallel the sin offering of Jesus Christ, our Savior is our Passover Lamb. Although this article is focused on Atonement, we must not neglect to recognize the interlinking of the Holy Days. Each does not exist in a vacuum to itself, but relates to the others to create not just a picture of the physical harvest that the Eternal provided to Israel, but also a picture of the larger plan of God, established before the foundation of the world.

In this regard, I wrote some years ago a brief explanation of the ways in which the Day of Atonement traces all of the Holy Days that precede it. Space prevents me from repeating it here, but you may want to refer to the September-October 2017 *Living Church News*, where you will find on page 11 my short piece, “The Sacrifices of the Day of Atonement and the Holy Days.”

Jesus Christ, just days before He gave His life as our Passover, uttered a fascinating statement while in the Temple at Jerusalem: “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (John 12:31–32). The text seems to indicate that He spoke these words on Nisan 10, when the Passover lambs were chosen. John records that Jesus arrived in Bethlehem at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus six days before the Passover. That would make His arrival sometime on the daylight part of our Thursday. The banquet would need to be the next day, Friday, before His entrance into Jerusalem on the Sabbath (John 12:1, 2, 12). What did Christ mean when He stated that “now the ruler of this world will be cast out”? Notice His expression of this as

a future event, not as something that had already happened. Indeed, even today, the ruler of this world—Satan—has not yet been cast out (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2). Christ was speaking of His death as the Passover lamb, and also about a subsequent event that has not yet occurred. Christ knew that His death would set in motion a chain of events that will conclude in our relatively near future, when Satan is cast out—an event echoed in the ceremonies on the Day of Atonement.


However, while the Atonement sin offering was made for the high priest and Israel, we should rejoice that Christ’s sacrifice was a sin offering for *all* people, including all those who will eventually be drawn to Him after the present ruler of this world is cast out. We may seldom think of the Passover as a sin offering, but the Bible record shows us that it was such. John the Baptist’s earliest statement about Jesus is couched in terms of a sin offering (John 1:29), as are statements by the apostles (Matthew 1:21; Hebrews 10:4–11; 1 Peter 1:19–21; 1 John 3:5).

### As Far as the East Is from the West

Scripture frequently mentions how totally our Father removes our sins from us. “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). He talks of them being cast into the sea, to picture the inability to retrieve them (Micah 7:19, see also Isaiah 38:17; 43:25; Jeremiah 50:20). We know that the blood of Jesus Christ pays the penalty for our sins, but there is more insight to be had for those willing to see.

For some, the Day of Atonement may come and go with little to no thought about the *Azazel* goat. This is a shame, as the typology of the *Azazel* is well worthy of our meditation. The Holy Days show a clear progression in God’s overall plan for mankind. The events described by the book of Revelation—the seven trumpets of the Day of the Lord (Revelation 8–9, 11), the removal of the Devil for a thousand years (20:1–3), the reign of Jesus Christ and the saints during that time (vv. 4–6), and the Great White Throne Judgment (vv. 11–15)—are powerfully pictured by the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Last Great Day. We should long for the world to keep these days, so that they can come to understand them as we do.

The English word “atonement” literally means a condition of being “at one.” As we fast on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29; 23:27), we seek to be “at one” with our Father and to embrace humility, the very opposite of the pride that fills the Devil (Ezekiel 28:17; 1 Timothy 3:6). As we do so, let us also rejoice that God seeks to be not only “at one” with us, but with all humanity. Let us rejoice that His plan is not merely to separate humanity from sin and the Devil for 1,000 years, but ultimately to separate us to Himself forever. (L)



# *Three Letters from the Millennium*

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By **Wallace Smith**

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**F**or all of us seeking the Kingdom of God and awaiting the return of Jesus Christ, the lives of the faithful who have gone before us contain valuable lessons. The book of Hebrews communicates one such lesson in its description of Abraham, saying that “he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). The record tells us that he and Sarah could have chosen to return to the land from which God had called them, but their minds did not dwell on that place (vv. 15–16). They focused on the new world to come—tomorrow’s world. They embraced *that* world and declared that they were no more than strangers and pilgrims in this one (v. 13).

Hebrews tells us that one of the reasons these individuals lived the sort of lives they did—lives that have made them heroes of faith to all of us—was that clear vision of the world God would bring. Tomorrow’s world was, in a way, more real to them than today’s. They had vision, and that vision emboldened and focused their faith.

The Feast of Tabernacles offers each of us a unique opportunity to sharpen that vision in our own lives. For a solid week, we will all focus together on the coming reign of Jesus Christ and the thousand years of peace He will bring to this troubled world. Together, we’ll strive to see that Millennium more clearly than we ever have before, seeking to be able to return to our homes after the Feast with our faith not simply renewed, but intensified.

Helping all of us to see the coming Millennium more clearly is what this article is about.

Over the years, I have found it a helpful personal exercise to engage my imagination and meditate about what that world might be like. God has given us imagination, and to what better use can we put it than to meditate on His inspired word—the prophecies of the thousand-year reign to come—and imagine just what sort of world our Creator is calling us to help Him build during that time?

With that in mind, the remainder of this article is devoted to three fictional “letters from the Millennium” that are meant to help you visualize that time to come—to make it more real. I ask you to imagine with me that each one is written by someone in the future, someone living life during the Millennium *after* Christ has returned. Obviously, such a scenario requires that the letters be fictional (unless someone has a time machine lying around) and speculative to a certain degree, but they can still be rooted in things we know from God’s word.

For instance, we know that early in the Millennium, Jesus Christ will call for Israelites, scattered all over the world in their captivity, to come live in the Holy Land—an event we have often called the “second exodus” (e.g., Jeremiah 23:7–8). We also know that many others will come to learn and serve there (e.g., Isaiah 60:9–10). We know that a new Temple will be built in Jerusalem, and that Jesus Christ will call that Temple “the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet” (Ezekiel 43:7). We know that some na-



tions may at first refuse to come under Jesus' authority and will suffer the consequences (Zechariah 14:16–19). And we know that the glorified members of the God Family will interact with those living during the Millennium, guiding, aiding, and teaching them (Isaiah 30:20–21).

It is in the spirit of these passages and others that these “letters” have been created. While we know that these are nothing more than fictionalized accounts, the good news is that the *actual* rule of Jesus Christ and the saints on the earth can only be *better* than we can imagine! So, take these “letters” for what they are: practice at seeing through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12, *KJV*) and an attempt to help us make much more real in our minds the coming reign of the One who will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

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### *Letter 1: New Lives in Jerusalem*

Hello, everyone! My name is Brian, and I'm writing to you from the Millennium to tell you part of my story—specifically about my early experiences after the Return.

In what feels like a previous life, I was a heroin junkie in Detroit. What a shock it was to learn that I was actually an Israelite of the tribe of Manasseh!

I remember riding one of the first ships from Tarshish—the nation I called “Spain” before the Return—taking previously captive Israelites from the nations where we had been scattered to our new homeland in Israel. It all seemed so unreal in so many ways, yet the events of the years leading up to that trip had taught me that just about anything was possible. While on the way, I became friends with one of the sailors of the ship—a young Spanish man from Alicante named Santiago—and with another passenger named Simon.

When we arrived on the shores of the land of Israel, it was clear that there was a lot of work going on. Though the reign of Jesus Christ and the saints had only just begun, the work of rebuilding and beautifying Israel, and especially Jerusalem, was already well underway. Santiago was going to stay as a representative of his nation, working under Israelites, helping with the construction, and learning everything he could of this new way of life so that he could later take it back to his own country. I learned that I, too, would become a part of the construction crew, working in masonry and stonework in Jerusalem. Simon got the shock of his life when he learned that he was of Levitical heritage! He was told that his last name, Cohen, was derived from the Hebrew word for *priest*, and that he was of the line of Zadok. While I was shaping and moving limestone, he would be in training as a Levite, preparing to serve in the new Temple that was being erected. Members of the Levitical family of Zadok were going to serve under the divine direction of the

Children of God, who themselves serve as both Kings and Priests under Christ in the order of Melchizedek.

I began to love my work, and to find a deep satisfaction in what I do. In the past, I had wasted so many years thinking of little more than feeding the endless, ravenous cravings that were consuming me. Now, the only vestiges of that life are the needle tracks I still bear on my arms—arms that have found new life and purpose in shaping and moving the stones that will become the new Temple and the headquarters of Jesus Christ on Earth.

Santiago, who worked on my crew under my direction, had a remarkable experience one day. One of the Children of God descended toward us while we were shaping a new building stone and called to us in a voice that demanded attention. “Santiago,” he said, “I would speak with you.” We could hardly look at him for his brightness as he descended in glory. But by the time he arrived beside us, he appeared as he had looked in his physical life before his transformation—and once he did, Santiago was shocked to see that this Child of God was, himself, a Spaniard. He explained to all of us that years ago, before the return of Christ, he had been traveling through Tierra del Fuego, at the southernmost tip of South America, and had heard an amazing radio broadcast from a small, nearby radio station, declaring in the Spanish language wonderful things about “Tomorrow's World.” He said it had been the beginning of a new life for him, and it was that life that he wanted to share with Santiago. He let me know that he was going to borrow Santiago for a while, and I saw the two of them strolling the Temple grounds, talking for hours, Santiago listening excitedly and sometimes tearfully. Once the Child of God left and Santiago returned, we finished our work for the day. I did not ask him what they had discussed, as I felt it may have been private, but I could see it in his eyes: The hope that our new King holds out for all of us became that much more real to him that day—and it did for me, as well.

As I wrap up this letter, I'll note that I am ending my day like I always do. I am sitting under my fig tree as Simon, the “new” Levite, leaves after the end-of-the-day chat that has become our tradition. Every day before dinner, we tell each other about our day and what we learned. I lovingly call him a Levite Nerd, he lovingly calls me a Stone Jockey, and we part ways until the next evening. I look to my left, and there is my two-year-old, chasing after a couple of bear cubs as the mother bear looks on, unconcerned. I look to my right and see my wife, watching our child along with me and just as unconcerned—every bit as lovely as the day I met her here in Jerusalem.

During my years in the gutters of Detroit, I never would have imagined that a life like this was possible. Now I sit under my own tree, outside my own home, laughing as I watch my own child playing, and holding hands with my own wife—



all thanks to the One who descended upon the Mount of Olives and made me *His* own.

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### ***Letter 2: Changing Hearts and Minds***

Hello! My name is Rana, and I am a 17-year-old Egyptian girl. I'm writing you from very early in the Millennium about an incident that occurred earlier this year when I was still 16.

At the time of Jesus' return, no country in the world had more unexploded landmines than my own nation of Egypt—the terrible remnants of our many wars. While I did not step on one myself, as a very small child I was close to one that went off in the part of the desert the locals called "The Devil's Garden." That explosion virtually shredded the lower half of my body, leaving me unable to walk, unable to ever have children, and in constant pain. The never-ending pain of my body, mangled and covered in scar tissue, defined my life from my earliest memories. Since I was my parents' only child, much of their time and effort was focused on caring for me.

After the return of Jesus Christ, my father was one of the few in our country who wanted to attend the first Feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem, but he was unable to persuade many others. Consequently, our nation saw not a single drop of rain in the months that followed. The resulting drought began to affect the will of a few of our stubborn leaders, but even after several months, many others remained determined to see the drought through and maintain their resistance.

My father, Youssef, became more vocal as the weeks went by, explaining to the elders and others that we should embrace the God in Jerusalem as our own, that our pride was a shameful sin. The backlash against him and our family was terrible.

One particular day, I remember sitting on the ground against the wall of our small home, where my father would frequently place me so that I could watch the faces of people in the street. I often dreamed of the simple pleasure of being able to walk the streets of my hometown, and seeing the faces of those walking by as they went from place to place brought me a small measure of comfort as I imagined myself being able to walk beside them.

But there was no comfort in the faces I saw that day. Tired of my father's preaching about our rebellion, the crowd gathered against us, and before he could carry me inside, they began pelting us with rocks and stones, accusing us of abandoning our heritage for the sake of "some Jewish God" and of weakening the nation during its great trial. I had never seen faces so angry and so bitter, and I was terrified as their stones struck the wall and ground all around me.

But one face in the mob was different. His demeanor was calm, and he was not yelling like the others. He began walking toward me very slowly and deliberately, and as he did so, the yelling and the stoning stopped for some reason, and all

became silent. Upon reaching where I was cowering on the ground, he looked at me and spoke to me—loud enough so that all could hear—saying, "I come on behalf of the One who reigns now in Jerusalem, for whom your family now suffers. He has heard your parents' prayers and yours, and what I do here, I do in His name." Then he reached his hand toward me and said simply, "Rise, Rana, and walk."

Before I even fully comprehended what he had said, I took his hand. The moment I did so, the pain I had known all of my life disappeared—and I *stood up*. I looked down in disbelief and saw a beautiful, new body, unblemished by a single scar and with two perfect legs that seemed to be begging me to use them!

I *leapt* forward to embrace my healer, only to find that he had vanished. But my legs would not allow me even a moment to pause and wonder where he had gone. I *ran* to embrace my father and mother, who were kneeling and praying and praising God with tears in their eyes. I prayed with them in joy but could not kneel to do so, as the wonder of being able to *walk* and *jump* and *dance* compelled me to run from person to person, to ask if they could see me—to ask them to tell me that all of this was real! As I did so, the faces that had been so twisted in hate only moments before now had tears streaming down them, as those in the crowd began to kneel and praise the God they had rejected, offering prayers for His mercy and forgiveness.

A few months have passed, and as I write this, I am accompanying my father and mother and many of our townspeople as a part of our nation's delegation to Jerusalem to observe our first Feast of Tabernacles. The caravan makes for a large and motley crew, assembled from the collected wagons, donkeys, and camels of a humbled nation that has suffered much but learned much—and which longs to learn even more. The trip is long, and I have ridden for most of it, but my father has promised to let me know when we come within a day's journey of Jerusalem.

He knows I want to walk the rest of the way.

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### ***Letter 3: Seeking the Lost***

Greetings! My name is Qiang, and I'm a 68-year-old metallurgist in China. I am working on tools and implements we are developing for the housing projects that are accelerating in preparation for the soon-coming Great White Throne Judgment.

But I'm writing to talk to you about something that happened to me much earlier in my life, about 63 years ago when I was a small child of five.

My parents and I lived in a beautiful part of the world, surrounded by dense and abundant forest. Of course, by the time in the Millennium when I was born, so much of

the world had become resplendent and beautiful. Before the Return, the area where we lived was known as the Taklamakan Desert—now it is called the Taklamakan Woodlands.

It's important for those of you in the past to know that even in the Millennium, five-year-olds are no wiser than they were when *you* were five. One day, while I was outside our cabin playing with some mountain lion kittens, I saw their momma come to the edge of our clearing to call them home. Well, the fact that they were done playing with me didn't mean that *I* was done playing with *them*, so I chased after them, laughing the whole time. Even after they were out of sight, I kept running—certain that they had just gone over this hill, or into that gully.

But as the sky began to darken, I suddenly realized that I had no idea where they were. And a heartbeat later, I realized that I had no idea where *I* was. I had run for so long and so far, *nothing* around me looked familiar; not a tree, not a log, not a stone looked anything like what I was familiar with around my home. Suddenly filled with fear, I sat down and began sobbing. I wasn't afraid of animals or people, or even the elements—the One who ruled in Jerusalem had long ago rid the world of such fears. But I was only five, and I did feel so terribly *alone*. I'd never been so far away and out of sight of my mother and father for so long, and I worried I would never see them again if I couldn't find my way back. I know it seems silly now, but for a little child who had never been alone in his life, the idea of being so completely alone in the dark without Mom or Dad was new, and it was terrifying.

And then, suddenly, I wasn't alone. Three other kids who looked to be about my own age were walking toward me out of the woods: a little boy and two little girls. The boy asked, "Why are you crying?" After going on for about five minutes about baby mountain lions, I explained that now I was all alone and scared I would never be able to find my way home to my family again.

Then one of the girls said, "Don't worry—you're not alone. We're here!" She took my hand and encouraged me to walk with them. She was so kind and friendly. I couldn't understand how someone my age could make me feel so calm like my mother always could, but I somehow knew I could trust her, and the four of us started walking in the woods.

As we made our way through the underbrush and climbed over fallen trees, the boy asked me if I knew the story of Daniel. I did, and I explained to him what my dad had taught me about the lion's den, and that it was a time when lions used to eat people. The boy said that he knew the story too, and that his older brother had taught him that one of the

lessons of Daniel's life is that God is always with us, even if our circumstances seem scary and dangerous.

Then, as we continued through the forest, one of the girls asked me if I knew the story of Ruth. I knew that one, too. I told them that my mom had explained about how faithful Ruth was to her mother-in-law and how God made her an ancestor to our King in Jerusalem. The girl said I was right, and that her older brother had taught her that one of the lessons of Ruth's life is that even when we find ourselves in a strange place where we don't know anyone, God is still with us, and we're never really alone.

Then the other girl asked me if I knew the story of Tabitha. I asked her if she meant Dorcas—she did, and I got excited, because I had once gotten extra points during a quiz on the

Sabbath when the question was about Dorcas. I said that she was the dead lady that God used Peter to bring back to life again. The girl laughed and said I was right. Then she said that her older brother had taught her that one of the lessons of Tabitha's life is that there is no place on earth

where God could ever lose us—that even in death, He can always find us and bring us back.

Shortly after she finished, I looked ahead and discovered that we had walked all the way back to the clearing where my house was. My father saw me first and yelled to my mother, "Honey, it's Qiang! He's here!" I ran to them as fast as my legs could carry me until they scooped me up in their arms, just as happy to have me back as I was to be there.

As I turned to thank my new friends for helping me, I saw that at the edge of the clearing stood not three small children, but three radiant beings of remarkable beauty. One cried out, "Welcome home, Li Qiang," right before all three of them slowly lifted off the ground and then shot upward into the nighttime sky so quickly that they were soon lost in the sea of brilliant stars shining in the darkness overhead.

I had not been helped by children at all, but by three of the Children of God themselves. And even at five years old, I quickly suspected that I knew which three they were—and who their Older Brother was, as well.

Even 63 years later, the thought that three beings of such unimaginable power and responsibility would care enough to spend an entire evening helping a single, lost child make his way back home still humbles me. Their service to me that night and their lessons about faith and about God's love for each of us have helped shaped the course of my life from that day forward. The words and kindness of the three "friends" I made that day have impacted every relationship I've had ever since—including the one I have with my heavenly Father—and I am eternally grateful. (L)

Then one of the girls said,  
**"Don't worry—you're not  
alone. We're here!"**

## Weddings & Anniversaries

On August 1, 2019, **Mr. and Mrs. Martin (Jan) Fannin** of



Knoxville, Tennessee, celebrated their Diamond Wedding Anniversary. They were married on August 1, 1959, and are long-time (baptized in 1962), faithful members of God's Church. Mr. Fannin pastors four Living Church of God congregations in East Tennessee and North

Georgia. They have two daughters and a son-in-law, who also live in Knoxville. Their grandson and his wife from California, their granddaughter and her husband, and their great-granddaughter from Ohio visited Knoxville for several days in honor of this special occasion. The family, along with brethren from Tennessee, Georgia, and North Carolina celebrated with them at an anniversary party on Sunday afternoon, July 28. Mr. and Mrs. Fannin feel blessed to have been married for sixty years and part of God's Work for so many decades!

The Kansas City, Missouri, congregation honored **Mr. and Mrs. Gary (Martha) Jones** after services on May 18, in celebration of their 50th wedding anniversary. Mr. and Mrs. Jones were married on May 24, 1969. They are longtime members of God's Church, and enjoy residing in the Kansas City area.

**Mr. and Mrs. Lehman (Nell) Lyons** of the Walterboro congregation in South Carolina celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary on May 28, and the congregation honored them with a reception after Sabbath services on June 1. On June 18, at a family reunion, their extended family surprised them with a celebration to honor the milestone. Mr. and Mrs. Lyons began listening to *The World Tomorrow* program from the Radio Church of God in the early sixties.

Mr. Lyons was baptized in April of 1967 and Mrs. Lyons in August of 1968; both were baptized in Columbia, South Carolina. Mr. Lyons was ordained a deacon in September

of 1974 and an elder in September of 1992. Mrs. Lyons was ordained a deaconess in June of 1990. They have served brethren in South Carolina and Georgia for many years. Mr. and Mrs. Lyons have four children, eleven grandchildren, fourteen great-grandchildren, and two great-great-grandchildren.

Chicago, Illinois, members **Willie Coleman** and **Mae Mayfield** were wed on May 5 in a ceremony conducted by Area Pastor Bob Rodzaj. Afterward, there was a reception for family and friends, including the Chicago congregation, many of which worked diligently to make the entire event a special occasion for all. Mr. and Mrs. Coleman are thankful to God for bringing them together, and they look forward to building their relationship and serving together in the Chicago congregation.

The Kansas City, Missouri, congregation honored **Mr. and Mrs. Rand (Gloria) Millich** after services on May 18 in celebration of their 50th wedding anniversary. Mr. and Mrs. Millich were married on May 25, 1969. During their 50 years together, they have served in many places. Mr. Millich currently serves as the Midwest Regional Pastor.

**Mr. Andrew Crouch** and **Miss Ellie Montgomery** were united in marriage on March 29 at the Albert River Wines vineyards in Queensland, Australia. Following the ceremony, which was officiated by the father of the bride, elder Martin Montgomery, guests enjoyed fellowship and hors d'oeuvres before dinner and dancing. The happy couple were sent on their way with many wishes for this day to be the start of a long and joyous marriage.

**Mr. and Mrs. Gerald (Vilma) Shoquist** celebrated their 64th wedding anniversary in July. On July 6, the Phoenix, Arizona, congregation honored them with a beautiful cake, ice cream, and a gift card. Mr. and Mrs. Shoquist were married on July 2, 1955, and were baptized in December 1971. They have two children and four grandchildren. Mr. Shoquist is an elder and Mrs. Shoquist a deaconess serving in the Phoenix congregation.

We want to hear more about the happy milestones in the lives of our brethren. If your family has had a birth, marriage, or major anniversary, please ask your local pastor to send word to the *Living Church News*, PO Box 3810, Charlotte, NC 28227-8010 (or to send an e-mail to [lcn@lcn.org](mailto:lcn@lcn.org)).



**Mr. and Mrs. Ben (Mary-Pat) Whitfield** celebrated their



50th wedding anniversary on June 1, and the Colorado congregations honored and celebrated with them after Sabbath services on June 8, in a reception with a special anniversary cake, champagne,

sparkling grape juice, and assorted finger foods. Mr. and Mrs. Whitfield were presented with a photo album containing photos of the Colorado members and photos from the many activities and events they've shared with the area brethren over the years.

Mr. and Mrs. Whitfield were married in Pasadena, California, in 1969 and have, in many responsibilities and in many locations throughout the U.S., served the brethren in God's Church throughout their 50 years together. The brethren in Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming are blessed to have the benefit of their love, leadership, and godly service!

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## Births

Greg and Sylvie Cnaepkens, of the Charleroi congregation in Belgium, announce the birth of their daughter **Nell Cnaepkens** on June 12. Nell is their fourth child and joins the fourth generation of the family in the Charleroi congregation. She weighed 2.8 kilograms and measured 46 centimeters. The family appreciates prayers, as Nell suffers health issues.

Matthew and Nichole Walters of the Rochester, New York, congregation, are overjoyed to announce the birth of their

son **Micah George Walters** on Wednesday, May 15. Micah weighed 8 pounds, 13 ounces, and was 20 inches long. Big sister Madeline is fascinated with her new baby brother and the Rochester and Corning brethren feel blessed to have another little one added to the area.

**Charles William Weekes** was born to Mr. and Mrs. Damian (Yonnette) Weekes, of Chaguanas, Trinidad, on June 4, weighing 6.7 pounds and measuring 50 centimeters. His three older brothers and one sister are happy to have him join them.

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## ORDINATIONS

The Phoenix, Arizona, congregation had three ordinations on July 13. **Mr. James Populo** was ordained an elder and **Mr. and Mrs. Julian (Sarah) Braddock** were ordained deacon and deaconess by Regional Pastor Jeffrey Fall, Area Pastor Stephen Elliott, and elder Joseph Lozano.

**Mr. Donald Stevens** was ordained an elder and **Mrs. Samira Wirfs** was ordained a deaconess on the Day of Pentecost by Area Pastor Wyatt Ciesielka, pastor Rod McNair, and elders Carl Derstine and Bob Riggan.

Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Wirfs serve in the Raleigh, North Carolina, congregation.

**Mr. Randolph Wettreich** was ordained an elder on Pentecost by Area Pastors Jacques Secours and Winston Gosse. Mr. Wettreich serves in the Montreal, Quebec, congregation in Canada.

**Mr. Johnny Tolbert** and **Dr. Howard Woodard** were ordained elders, and **Mr. Michael Long** was ordained a deacon, on Pentecost by Regional Pastor Daniel Hall and elders Rick Bordonaro and Richard Grimes.

They serve in the Atlanta, Columbus, and Warner Robins congregations, respectively, in Georgia.

**Mr. and Mrs. Glen (Linda) Clarke** were ordained deacon and deaconess on May 18 by Area Pastor Barry Walker. Mr. and Mrs. Clarke serve in the Victoria and Coombs congregations in British Columbia, Canada.

**Mr. Randy Wayne** was ordained an elder on Pentecost by Regional Pastor Lambert Greer. Mr. Wayne serves in the Cincinnati, Ohio, congregation.

# In Loving Memory

**Mrs. Louise Bennett, 96**, of the Long Island, New York, congregation, died on Pentecost, June 9, after being in declining health for several years. Mrs. Bennett was baptized in the early 1960s, and through the years, frequently hosted her physical and spiritual families for dinners and barbeques. She also generously provided baked goods for the many public Bible lectures that were held over the decades. Mrs. Bennett is survived by her daughter Eileen (also a member), three grandchildren (including elder Michael Aviles), six great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild. Regional Pastor Adam West conducted her funeral service on June 14, and she was buried next to her husband, Joe, a deacon in God's Church.

**Mr. Monico Campaner Eltagonde, 81**, died on February 22 after years of health difficulties. He was baptized on May 16, 1967 in the Worldwide Church of God by Mr. Arthur Docken, and endured in the faith. For two decades, he served the Davao congregations in the Philippines as a deacon. He is survived by eight children and dozens of grandchildren. He will be greatly missed.

**Mr. Frank Gooswilligen, 90**, of the Brisbane, Australia, congregation, died on February 2, just short of 91 years of age. He and his wife were baptized into God's Church in the 1970s. Even when deteriorating health kept him from attending Sabbath services, he remained an enthusiastic stay-at-home member. He is survived by his devoted wife Joy, three children, and numerous grandchildren. His smiling face and wonderful enthusiasm for God, family, and the Work will be missed.

**Mr. Bob Earl Harden, 79**, of Kansas City, Missouri, died May 19, after taking the second Passover. Mr. Harden was born July 27, 1939, in Mulberry, Kansas. A longtime member of the Church, he enjoyed square-dancing, woodworking, doing crafts, cooking, and playing cards. Mr. Harden loved his family and his dog Taco. He is survived by his son Joe Harden, Sr. (Kimberly) and daughter Lisa Bolin (Rick), all of them members, as well as six grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his parents, his wife Bobbie in 2005, three great-grandchildren, two brothers, and three sisters.

**Mr. Robert Humphreys, 93**, of the London, Ontario, congregation in Canada, died on May 9. He had not been able to attend services for a couple of years because of illness; however, he enjoyed and appreciated the sermons sent to him. He will be missed by his loving wife of over 70 years, also a member, and the brethren. Area Pastor Winston Gosse conducted his funeral service.

**Mr. John Mawhinney, 74**, of the Sydney, Australia, congregation, died on March 4 after a prolonged illness. Baptized in 1977, he was a longtime member and will be greatly missed by all.

**Mrs. Juanita McMillan, 84**, of the Rochester, New York, congregation, finished her Christian race on May 23. Mrs. McMillan was a longtime member of God's Church. She loved working outdoors, especially in her garden. She is survived by her husband, Bill McMillan, also a longtime member.

**Mrs. Brenda Faye Opel, 78**, of Columbia, Illinois, died on July 5, with her son Craig by her side. Mrs. Opel was a longtime member of God's Church, and since 1992 served faithfully and graciously as a deaconess in both the Rolla and St. Louis congregations in Missouri. Although health problems prevented her from regular Sabbath attendance in the last few years, she never failed to show love and concern for the brethren and the Work God is doing in His Church. Brenda is dearly missed by everyone who knew her. Area Pastor Richard Franz conducted her funeral.

**Ms. Mary E. Rice, 93**, of the Corning, New York, congregation, died on June 16. Ms. Rice was a dedicated member of God's Church for more than 30 years. She loved music, playing her guitar, and car rides. She is survived by her sister Vivian Brown and nephew Jerry Sullivan, also members of the Living Church of God. Assistant Pastor Randall Moran conducted the service.

**Miss Simone Titen, 7**, of the Orap Village congregation in Vanuatu, died of a respiratory affliction on October 23, 2018. She is survived by her parents, Adamon and Fiona Titen, and her younger brother, Jean Tiano.

**Mrs. Therese Verlili, 54**, of the Orap Village congregation in Vanuatu, died on October 29, 2018, after a long struggle with diabetes. Mrs. Verlili was baptized into God's Church in 1992. She is survived by her husband Jeannot, two sons, four daughters, and 13 grandchildren.

# Supporting, Building, and Maintaining: An Interview with Jonathan McNair

As the inaugural year of Living Education came to a successful close, we sat down with its director, Mr. Jonathan McNair, who gave us a glimpse behind the scenes of this exciting new initiative as it heads into its second academic year. A nine-month program, Living Education offers the young adults of God's Church a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in the study of His word without spending the time and money required for an undergraduate degree.

As one might expect, converting Living University into Living Education came with its fair share of obstacles. "Probably the most challenging thing is to be able to step back and make a fresh start while still respecting the great work that's gone on before and appropriately using that work," Mr. McNair said. "It was the same with Living University; there was a desire to do something that was new and different from, say, Ambassador College, while still respecting what Ambassador College was all about. I think we have to do the same now."

It's a fine line to walk, and one Mr. McNair takes seriously. "I feel a great desire to take what we can from the eleven years of effort in Living University, yet we do have to turn a corner," he said. "There are some different demands and we have different scenarios, so we have to make changes that are appropriate—I think that's challenging, to keep that balance right."

## A Desire Accomplished

The challenge of keeping that balance means learning through a bit of trial and error, and Mr. McNair looks forward to opportunities to fine-tune Living Education as the program continues. "I feel like there's a lot that can be improved," he says, "and that's one of the things we're going to be doing now: Whether it's curriculum or whether it's programming, we have to think, 'How can we synchronize it better?'"

Experience, of course, inevitably teaches us all, and Living Education's first year in operation has proved a valuable instructor. "There's a lot that we've learned from our first year, and we've had some time to prepare things for this second year, so I think there's much that we can improve on," Mr. McNair said. "I learned a lot in particular from the first year of my involvement here, trying to switch gears from being a field pastor, so there are many different areas in which I hope we're going to be able to step back and do better."

When asked to talk about the most fulfilling result of directing Living Education, Mr. McNair chuckled and candidly

replied, "To me, I think it's just seeing that it actually happened. It's easy to sit down, try to make plans, and say, 'Well, here's what should be done, and here's what can be done,' but to see it all actually come to fruition, and everyone work successfully toward an end—maybe that's sort of too 'big picture,' but really, that's rewarding—to see plans come to pass," he said. "You know, Proverbs 13:19 says, 'A desire accomplished is sweet to the soul' and it really is."

## A Threefold Focus

Finally, we asked Mr. McNair to describe the goals of Living Education as it moves into its second year—and beyond. "The main mission of what we do, both online and in the classroom, is to support the leadership of the Church in teaching and maintaining the truths of God," he said. "We're part of the Church, we're not a separate entity that somehow works in tandem or is parallel. We are literally part of the Church, so that needs to drive what we do and how we do it. That's the first big part of it."

"The second part is *building*," Mr. McNair continued. "None of us knows everything.... Whether we're brand-new to the Church, or we've grown up in the Church, or we've been in the Church for fifty years, it's still a building process. That's really important, and I think, especially, since we're gearing this program toward younger people, we have to think about building a solid foundation for the future." A second-generation Christian himself, Mr. McNair knows how important it is for those raised in God's Church to deeply appreciate His truth. With Living Education, Mr. McNair says, "we have a chance, here, to sort of fill in the blanks, holes, and blind spots that sometimes we don't even know we have, because we've just grown up with it all around us."

"So, I think building is a big part of it, and then, maintaining—whether it's our on-site program or online," Mr. McNair concluded. "If you just keep driving a vehicle and never change the oil, never do any maintenance on it, you'll drive it into the ground—and it's the same with us, spiritually and even educationally. We just assume that we know it all, but we forget, and we lose clarity, and we lose focus. That's what we're about with Living Education: doing our part to help the Church to *maintain* the truths solidly, clearly, with focus and renewed energy."

—Editorial Staff

*Editor's Note: This interview has been edited to fit. For the full interview, head out to the Living Education website, [LCGEducation.org](http://LCGEducation.org). (LW)*



## COMMENTARY

### Shofar, So Good!

**T**he shofar trumpet mentioned in the Bible was made from a ram's horn. It was blown by the priests of God for various purposes. Like today's siren, which makes a loud, attention-getting sound, the blast of the shofar also demanded people's attention. Those who heeded could say (pardon the pun), "Shofar, so good!" and be saved from serious injury or death.

However, if people heard the warning but failed to take heed, they would suffer the consequences.

In some communities today, a siren is still sounded simply to announce twelve o'clock—high noon. But primarily, sirens are considered critical public safety components, sounding warnings of tornados, tsunamis, or other dangers, telling citizens to take shelter and be spared injury or death. These warning sounds, whether piercing shofar blasts or deafening sirens, are for our good, that we may respond in a proper way.

I've seen news reports of a siren failing to give warning of an approaching tornado. In such cases, those who are appointed to sound the alarm are examined. If they were derelict in their duty and failed to sound the alarm when they should have, they are held accountable for any resulting destruction, injury, and death.

However, even when alarms sound, people sometimes foolishly fail to *heed* the warning. Then *they* are accountable for the results, having ignored the warning they were given.

Shofars and similar instruments have been used as signals for millennia. The walls of ancient Jericho fell at the

sound of the shofar and the shout of the people (Joshua 6:20), and Gideon made strategic use of shofars in defeating the vast army of Midian with only 300 soldiers (Judges 7:19–25). When God gave the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, the sound of shofars was heard ringing out from the cloud on the mountain (Exodus 19:16; 20:18).

One vital use of the shofar was to enable a city's watchmen, stationed at guard outposts, to sound the alarm and warn the people of approaching invaders so that armies could be quickly mustered for defense and battle.

The book of the prophet Ezekiel tells of his divine commission to be a watchman for the rebellious House of Israel (Ezekiel 2:3; 33:7), to sound the shofar alarm for Israel to either repent of sinful behaviors or suffer the punishment of captivity. But Israel had already been taken into captivity by Babylon about 150 years *before* Ezekiel's prophecy. God doesn't make mistakes, so we must conclude that this warning was for the future—and indeed, it is. His warnings are for the modern Israelite peoples of today, including the United States and the British-descended nations.

Ezekiel 33 describes the vital function of the watchman, as well as his grave responsibility. If the watchman—those who understand these prophecies—should fail to sound the warning, the blood of those that perish will be on the watchman's head. But if he does sound the shofar and Israel ignores it, then they will suffer the consequences of war and captivity.

There is a warning to be given. Who will sound the shofar? And who will heed its call?

—Roger Meyer

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The above is adapted from one of the many commentaries discussing vital topics facing our world, available at the [LCG.org](http://LCG.org) and [TomorrowsWorld.org](http://TomorrowsWorld.org) websites.