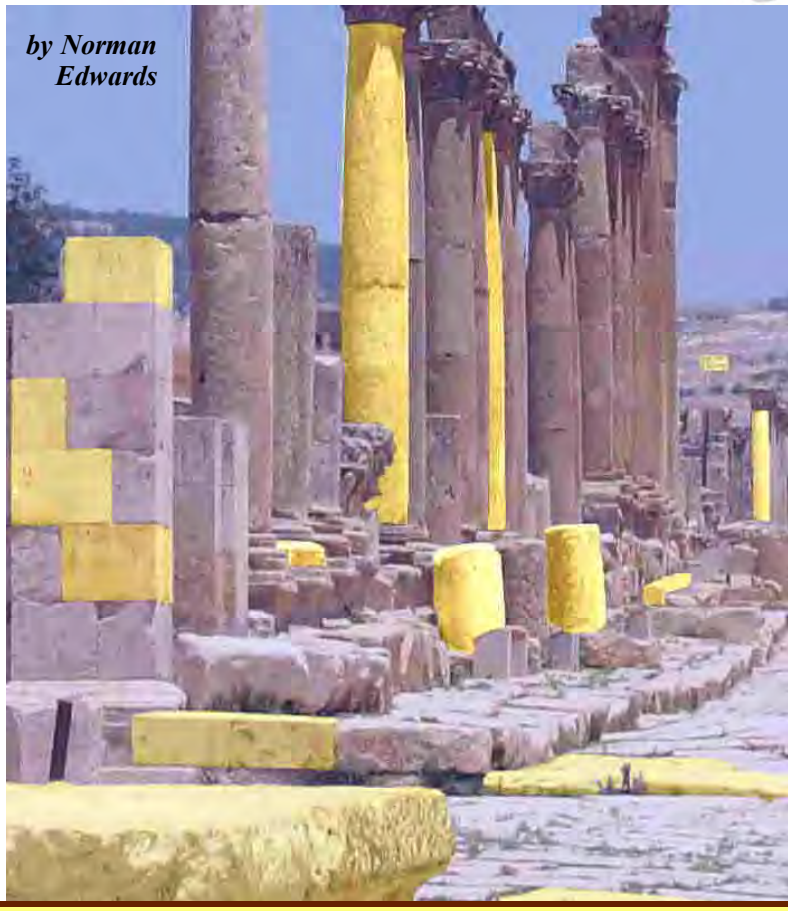
Servants' NEWS

Vol. 13, No. 3 *A newsletter for servants of the Almighty Eternal Creator, wherever they may be* **Sept-Oct 2009**

Stones for an Unseen Building

by Norman Edwards



If the Creator of the Universe is all powerful, then why does His Church appear to be fragmented and disarrayed? Why do corrupt governments, businesses and the entertainment industry seem so powerful by comparison? As believers, we can understand this paradox only by continuing to focus on our Father's purposes for our lives.

> You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1Pet 2:5).

We are being shaped by our Father to rule with his Son upon His return (2Tim 2:12; Rev 5:10). When King Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, he had all of the stones prepared off-site so that they just fit together perfectly when they were finally assembled. Similarly, individual members of His Church, will ultimately fit together, each in his own place in God's Kingdom.

> And the temple, when it was being built, was built with stone fin-

Continued on page 37

Wonderful Feast in Utica

by Norman Edwards

What I am about to say I am not saying lightly. The Feast of Tabernacles, 2009, at Utica, Illinois was the most wonderful that I have attended. I say that as having been the primary organizer of 10 Feasts of Tabernacles during the past 14 years. The mixture of fellowship, teaching, good food and activities all centrally located was a great inspiration and most pleasant to behold. Over 300 people attended and over half of them were young people.

This Feast was a wonderful testimony to what capable, hard-working believers can accomplish with-

Continued on page 18

Also In This Issue:

2 PABC Update: Faith in our Father, Not Man and His Money
3 Lessons from Katrina
5 Are Vaccines the Villain?
6 Passover and the Bride of Christ
10 Books Worth a Look: The Passover Papers
11 To Whom Does God Give Authority for Civil Government? (3)
20 Feast Pictures 2009 • 23 Teens' Message to Parents
26 Torah in the Garden • 28 Father Works in Diverse Ways
31 Letters & Responses (5 pages)
40 Winter Family Weekend, Lexington, Kentucky

Port Austin Bible Campus Update:

Faith in our Father Not in Man and His Money

by Norman Scott Edwards

Our Father has continued to provide for us here at PABC in a variety of ways. I believe that is a big part of the life lesson that he wants us to learn here at PABC—and for us to write for your benefit. Over the years, I have come to see that **even though we put "In God We Trust" on our money, we often put "In Money We Trust" on our God.** We want God to take care of us by giving us money so we can pay our bills and buy the things we want. But God sometimes wants to take care of us in His way, a way that will build our faith in Him.

The Old Testament certainly taught people to work hard and honestly use money.

> The rich man's wealth is his strong city; The destruction of the poor is their poverty (Prov 10:15).
>
> He who has a slack hand becomes poor, But the hand of the diligent makes rich (Prov 10:4).

The Bible even state that a man who is caught steeling, can remain a free man if he has money to make restitution. But if he has no money, he will become a slave:

> "... He should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft (Ex 22:3).

So with these verses and many other Old Testament verses emphasizing the private ownership of property, why do we find our Savior making the following statements?

> "**No one can serve two masters**; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. 25 Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. **Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?**... 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. **For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.** 33 But **seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you**" (Matt 6:24-35, 30-33).
>
> Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, **sell what you have** and give to the poor, **and you will have treasure in heaven**; and come, follow Me." But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that **it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven**" (Matt 19:21-23).

Where is the right balance? What is the difference between trusting God and physical irresponsibility? That topic has been

Continued on page 35

Servants' NEWS

Vol. 13, No. 3 Sept-Oct 2009

The purpose of Church Bible Teaching Ministry is to continue the work of the Church that was started by Jesus Christ (Yashua the Messiah) and His Apostles in the first century. This work involves expounding the truth of the Bible by means of teaching, writing, music and video as well as taking positive action to help and serve other believers and all people of the world. CBTM and those people who work within it are just a few of many parts of the Church, which is the body of Christ. *Servants' News* is a publication of CBTM.

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Lessons from Katrina

by Tommy Willis

Even as a lifelong resident of New Orleans, I didn't realize the changes that I would experience with the coming of Katrina. We had never left for a hurricane before, but I followed the principle to make no decision without much prayer. And after praying, I felt God's instruction to leave.

After leaving for the storm and trying to get back home, my parents and I wound up sleeping on chairs in a restaurant for four days, and also in the car. We couldn't leave the restaurant, because there was no gas. They needed what gas they had for government officials. Some people threatened the gas station owners. Nerves were tense.

Water flows through the cab of an abandoned Red Cross "Disaster Relief" truck during hurricane Katrina.

We finally made it to some of the nearby smaller towns about 40 miles from New Orleans. And it looked like one of those apocalyptic movies with people strewn along the road sleeping in their cars or on the ground. Thousands of people flooded the small towns near New Orleans trying to get back home. Technology failed. Communication with the rest of the world was gone. No electricity, no TV, no cell phones, no Internet. All was out. It was really bad in the city itself. It was only later that I learned of all that happened with the people at the Super Dome with no water to drink.

Many people drowned in the storm. The water came up so fast the people could not get out in time. In some places the water went up to the roofs. They were still finding bodies in New Orleans a year after the storm. Many crawled into their attics to get away from the rising water, and they got trapped there. The death toll from those that died from the stress and agony after the storm cannot be estimated. Many lives were shortened.

I live in the east part of the city. It is mostly marsh and some swamps. It's like living in the country. Wild packs of dogs roamed after the storm. Many deer died. One day I saw a dead deer, and the next day it was gone. I figured the dogs claimed it. How they had to rescue many of the starving dogs is a story in itself that was on PBS. Thousands of animals roamed the city. I spent three months in a tent in a nearby town. And now, thank God, I'm back in my own home again. Many people lived in tents like I did.

Some brethren told me the scenario with Katrina made them think more of what could happen in the future. The economic problems could really bring us to a more diminished nation as we continue to go into debt. Many say we are selling our children into slavery with all the debt we are creating, and that it could turn into a real nightmare, as America could become like a third world nation because of this debt. And the people that will make it through the chaos best are the ones who have learned to put their trust in God. We often argue about different picky points of doctrine, when our time would be better spent seeking God so that we would use the Bible to build up our relationship with Him. Our trust in God is what will pull us through. We should also learn to live a more simple life.

I was living simple before Katrina; God taught me to cut back even more as I learned more what is truly needed in life. To buy now and pay later is as insidious as many other forms of bondage. I learned years ago the best way around the hurdle is not making more money but spending less. People won't get rich living the way I do, but most of the time they will feel like they are. I still struggle with a lot of problems, but in the area of simple living I'm blessed.

We should not trust in our paycheck, but in God. We could easily become a much diminished nation with all the debt we are getting into. It's best to learn to live simply now, because we are probably going to be forced to in the future. Even if the economy does not collapse—living simply is a win-win situation, because it helps us have less distraction so that we can focus more on our personal relationship

with Jesus Christ. If we trust in the economy, we can fall if it does. But if our trust and foundation is down in Jesus Christ, then we can still be standing when things all around us are falling apart.

When the storm was approaching the city, I knew if God allowed it to happen then He would want us to learn from it. I shared that with many brethren after the storm when I was asked to give some sermons. It is from the suffering aspects of life that God has taught me the most. Katrina was no different. It was only through my contact with God I was able to deal with the aftereffects of the storm with as much peace as I did. It was not easy. They were some of the biggest struggles of my life. And there were others who had a lot more to deal with than I did. Some people were still sleeping in their cars a year after the storm. Suicide rates went up.

I thought a lot about the suffering of life with Katrina. And the lessons God wants us to learn from the suffering in what He allows us to go through. Years ago I read about a girl raised in a millionaire's home. She had servants and lawyers to do everything for her. And when she was let out into the world, she could not function.

I have often thought how this relates to how God knows that we have to experience the suffering of life if we are going to learn. It's the same principle as the girl in the millionaire's home. She was not able to function in life. She should have been allowed to experience the pains and aches of growing up and dealing with life. This is the attitude we should take towards any pain and suffering that comes our way. This attitude towards life will help us. Years ago I heard a minister say: "Everything that happens to you can be a blessing if you will not become offended". I have found this to be true from experience.

There were times when I went through trials and became offended and I brought chaos in my life. And then I learned to take it to God in prayer and repent. And God then gave me the right attitude, and then I was able to deal with it with a mind at ease. It was the difference between day and night. And most of it had to do with attitude. Repentance is the best "shot in the arm" we can receive; it clears the way for us.

When you think about it, much of the Bible is about attitude: our attitude towards God, our fellowman, and the vicissitudes of life on this planet. Scripture tells us: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5, NIV). God knows we can't produce what Christ can; only Christ can produce through us. We need to learn to submit to Him and let Him guide us, and then Christ will be manifest to the world. It involves seeking Him diligently and building up our relationship with Him, so that He can give us His mind and attitude towards all situations.

Life is not easy. The world can constantly throw things at us; it's how we handle those things that's important. If we seek God as we should, then He will give us more of the mind of Christ. There can be chaos all around us, and He will keep us at peace through His mind and attitude to view it all and handle it all.

Hatred is growing around the country at present, but with enough contact with God, He will have us function with His love, mercy and forgiveness towards all people. I've had enough failure in my life by not loving people, and I paid a price for years for the unforgiving heart I had. Therefore, I know God's way of love and forgiveness is the way to go. I was very judgmental with many people. He had to teach me how much of a failure I was so that I would seek His ability.

I share this because it relates to enduring through trials and can help us with the difficult days ahead: "And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matt 24:10-13). Think of the connection here of staying with the love of God and enduring.

Staying with the love of God is how God helps us stay in focus. "He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (1Jn 2:10-11).

Jesus said: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14:27).

The things I saw with Katrina made me think more of how fragile civilization is. This old world seems to be getting ready for its wildest ride in history. The storms, wars, economic chaos, and attitudes all around us can get worse and worse. But with enough contact with God, he will keep our attitude where it should be. And we will have His peace to deal with it all. This is true success. And with the right attitude we will be better able to help those around us with the love of God.

We Are Not Immune!

Because most people in the USA have never lived through a war or natural disaster, it is tough to visualize it happening here. Even Bible prophecy students who are convinced disasters are coming often think they will be delivered and have no need for advanced preparation. Hurricane Katrina shows that massive disasters do happen on our own soil and that long-time believers have to endure them. It also showed that individual advance preparation helps. Future *Servants' News* will contain articles showing how to prepare so when disaster strikes, you can be a blessing rather than a burden. — NSE

Are Vaccines the Villain?

by Norman Edwards

Ever since my wife and I were expecting our first child, I developed an interest in vaccines: What is in them? What will happen if we take them? What if not? The more I studied, the more convicted I became that I did not want to subject my family to them. Indeed, our last child never had any, and was our healthiest.

Now that grandchildren are a prospect, I have been studying vaccines again. It is a good time to study. Almost every day, there are news stories about the H1N1 swine flu and the vaccines for it. Some days they tell us how important it is that everyone get it. Other days, they tell us there are shortages of production and we can't get it. On October 24, 2009, the President's office declared a national state of emergency for the H1N1 "swine flu".[1]

While I have the legal right to make medical decisions for my family, I am not a doctor and am not legally qualified to give medical advice to others. But anyone can do historical research, report facts and document their sources. And I think research is the key.

In all the years that I have discussed vaccines with people, both pro and con, they seem to be divided into two categories:

1) People who are willing to research vaccines to learn about their effects, both good and bad. Nearly all of these people decide to get less or no vaccines.
2) People who rely on the advice of their doctor or the popular media. Nearly all of these people take whichever vaccines their doctors strongly recommend.

There is so much information on vaccines, that one cannot possibly read it all. There are many competent people who are good at their own job, so they expect the medical professions to be good at their job and to sort out the vaccine issue for them. It would be nice if it worked that way. But historically, it has not.

In 1976, there was a major effort to immunize the USA population against a previous "swine flu".[2] Only one person died from that flu and 13 were hospitalized. But 500 hundred people got Guillain–Barré syndrome, a crippling disease, from the vaccine and at least 25 of those died from it.[3] Yes, more people died from the vaccine than from the disease itself. This human tragedy is well documented in a "60 Minutes" program.[4]

Unfortunately, vaccine statistics and information on their side-effects are not available until months after they have been administered. When a person becomes gravely ill or dies, there is no label upon them that says: "a vaccine caused this." Since a new vaccine is not "known" to cause major illness or death, all other causes must be eliminated first. It also takes a while to discover that the same illnesses are occurring in certain people across the country, and to show the vaccine as the common link.

Yes, we have been assured the present day swine flu vaccine is safe, but people were assured the 1976 swine flu vaccine was safe. By 1979, 4000 people had claimed damages from that vaccine amounting to 3.5 billion dollars.[4] There is already a lawsuit filed by a group of doctors alleging the 2009 swine flu vaccine is unsafe![5]

Vaccines and Autism

While the safety of swine flu vaccines is a concern for us all, it is dwarfed by the concern that childhood vaccines might be causing Autism. The debate is huge; a Google search for **autism vaccine** produces 13 million hits. The Autism Society of America estimates that autism is growing by 10 to 17% per year.[6] About 1% of U.S.A. children ages 3-17 have an autism spectrum disorder.[7]

Most governments and medical establishments insist there is no link between vaccines and autism. But thousands of parents have seen their children develop normally until they took their first vaccine, then they immediately exhibit the developmental delay common to autism. In the case of Banks v Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (02-738)[8], the US Court of Federal claims awarded damages to Kenneth Banks because the evidence indicated the MMR vaccine caused his son, Bailey Banks, to develop PDD (Pervasive Developmental Delay) "with autistic features"—so close to autism that one doctor actually gave that diagnosis.

You have a right to wave vaccines. Make an informed choice! These websites might help:

nvic.org vactruth.com
tinyurl.com/flu09upd
tinyurl.com/VacH1N1no

Sources of Information

1 Whitehouse official website: www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/declaration-a-national-emergency-with-respect-2009-h1n1-influenza-pandemic-0
2 Center for Disease Control & Prevention website: www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/emergency/swineflu.htm
3 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1976_swine_flu_outbreak
4 www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=14433
5 www.healthfreedomusa.org/?page_id=3619
6 www.autism-society.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_whatis_factsstats
7 *Pediatrics*, October 5, 2009, based on a National Children's Health Survey done with 78,000 parents in 2007.
8 www.uscfc.uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/Abell.BANKS.02-0738V.pdf

Passover and the Bride of Christ

Most Bible students are aware that God was married to Israel. It is also well established that Christ will marry the church. The question is, Did He ever formally propose Marriage to His Beloved Bride?

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It may seem odd to couple together two terms that seem to occupy Testamental extremes, one being predominantly an Old Covenant association, and the other, not only New Covenant, but Millennial Age. Few are remotely aware of the profound involvement between these two institutions: Pass-over, and Christ's Bride, and, until the summer of 1996, myself included. The matrix between these two, of course, is the Paschal Lamb of God, [1] who is the affianced Husband of the Bride!

If you don't know how and when and under what circumstances Christ first proposed marriage to the Church, and with what words He did so, you need to read through this article.

It was one of those days, like during the Cuban Missile Crisis, when my boss, a retired Army Colonel, came bounding down the stairs from his office, exclaiming almost gleefully, "Well, it looks like war with the Soviets!" Being a recent high school grad, in the Vietnam War Era, facing the draft, this got my full attention. It was right at that exquisite moment just before Khrushchev blinked. I remember his exact words and just where I was at the time! Similarly, a few months later, hearing that President Kennedy had been shot, I remember exactly where I was, and the associates that were with me on break there at work, rather vividly.

Like these, at another profound moment, in the summer of 1996, I was listening to a segment of the radio broadcast Focus on the Family in the car. They had on a guest speaker, Ray Vander Laan a Bible teacher, who had studied at a Jewish College in Jerusalem in his youth. His topic that day was how the Scriptures have, contained within them, vignettes of Jewish Culture of the first century, many of them rather subliminal, that we, as twentieth century Christians would not normally perceive. His first example caused another one of those "I remember exactly where I was" moments! The thing is, the speaker may not have realized the full implications of what he was saying. But, for some reason, his comments caused lights to come on all through my consciousness. He provided that cognitive spark that opened up a whole new area of awareness I want you to share.

The True Passover, as Christ presented it [2] and as He fulfilled it, is profoundly essential to the emerging Bride of Christ. If that attainment is your quest, you'll want to know what this connection is!

The following is a partial transcript of that segment aired on the radio broadcast: Focus on the Family. Dr. James Dobson introduced "Ray Vander Laan, a teacher for 19 years at the High School level, currently the religion instructor at Holland Christian School in Michigan, and who had studied Jewish education in both the United States and in Israel, including Yeshiva University in New York and American Institute of Holy Land Studies in Jerusalem. He is getting his PHD now. Here's Ray Vander Laan to begin:

"I'd like to take this chance to share a few thoughts with you today. God put something very different in my life when I was about 19. I had a chance to go to Israel and study, and when I was there, I discovered that there was an element in my own Christian background that had been somewhat lacking. I began to discover that if you put the Bible back into its Jewish setting, (it's a Jewish book, written by Jewish people, to Jewish people, initially at least), it suddenly comes alive in new and different ways. Now that's not to say it's not for Gentiles, or that it doesn't have a timeless message, of course it does! It's to say that it has an additional nuance of meaning that can be found if you look at the Bible in the setting in which God placed it. I call it thinking Hebrew, and I've been involved in my career as a teacher for many years, trying to understand what does it mean, if we put the Bible back into that setting? I would like to share a couple thoughts coming out of that context with you.

"I remember very clearly sitting in an Orthodox Jewish classroom, listening to a Jewish man lecture, a brilliant Jewish individual, not a Christian, and he was describing the marriage customs of the first century Jewish people in the land of Israel. I sat there as a Christian, not Jewish, I'm Gentile, Dutch no less, and I'm sitting in the classroom, and I'm listening to this Orthodox Jew describe marriage. And he described how a young man would reach marrying age, and the young man and his father would pick out a family in the land of Israel that had a daughter, a Godly family that had a daughter, that would be an appropriate wife. …And the young man and his father would go to the young girl's house and they would sit and negotiate the bride price, because the loss of a daughter was an enormous loss. When they'd arrived at the price that was to be paid for this young girl, 14, 15, 16 years of age, the young man would then ask her to marry him, but he did it in a very Jewish way.

"The young man's father would take a

1 Eph. 5:23-27 "Christ is head of the Church; and He is the Savior of the body…Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of the water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself, a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle,… but that it should be Holy and without blemish."

2 My article, *"The Passover of the Exodus"* deals with the apparent timing discrepancy between the Passover of the Jews and that of early Christian practice.

*flask of wine. He would pour a cup of wine and hand it to his son The son would then turn to the young woman, and with all the solemnity of an oath before Almighty God Himself, that young man would take that cup of wine and say to that young woman, '**This cup is a new covenant in my blood,** which I offer to you.' In other words, 'I love you. I'll be your faithful husband. Will you be my bride?'*

"And tears came to my eyes as I recognized Jesus at the last Supper with His collection of Jewish disciples, who knew the Passover liturgy since they were old enough to think. Suddenly in the middle of the liturgy, after the third cup, completely out of place, Jesus, on His way to pay the bride price with His own blood, turns to those disciples and says to them in the language of the culture, 'This cup is the New Covenant in my blood'. I love you, Will you be my bride?

"And every single time you sit in your fellowship or your community in your Church, and your Elder, your Pastor, or whoever leads the Service, turns to you and offers you the cup, Jesus, in the language of the culture says to you, 'I love you', and the only way I can describe the depths and the passion of that love is to say, 'Will you be my wife?'

"This element in the presentation of Christ's last physical Passover conveys a subliminal message not apparent to those unfamiliar with the culture of that era, but which, no doubt, came across to those in the Upper Room." [Then, making it less obvious to all may have been intentional, as we will see.]

Actually, there is a little more to the ceremony than Mr. Vander Laan presents, but it was this broadcast that first made me aware of the significance of the presentation of that cup in the manner in which it was. The Jewish marriage proposal ceremony was conducted as he relates, but the ceremony carries further. In presenting the cup, **if** the young girl accepted the young man's proposal of marriage, she would take the cup from him and drink of it. To seal their betrothal, the young man would then take back the cup from her and he would drink of it himself!

Jesus Christ, our Passover, formally presented the New Covenant to His Bride, at Passover, in the format of a first century Jewish marriage proposal. But, He pointedly **declined** to drink of that cup just then, as the Biblical narrative specifically states! At that point in the ceremony where He, as the prospective bridegroom, would have partaken of the cup Himself, He made a rather startling statement, that He **would not** drink of it from that day onward, until He drank of it new, with them, in the Kingdom! This mention suggests that the disciples understood the significance, because after each of them had partaken of it, as He asked them to, at the time the cup was passed back to Him, at that very moment in time when He would be **expected** to drink of it, He announced that He would not! (But He did say that He **would** drink of it, and exactly when He would!)

Two things we need to note: First, their mention of this detail suggests that they understood that this new liturgy was borrowed from a formal proposal of marriage, and that His partaking of that cup at that time would have **sealed** that betrothal. (It does not say there why He didn't partake, though there was an important reason!) Second, later that evening, He said, *"The cup which the Father gave me, shall I not drink it?"* These details, woven into the New Testament narrative years later suggest they **knew** He was here proposing marriage to His Bride, not just them, but many others who would follow. That is why He deferred drinking of that cup until the establishment of the Kingdom! [3] So additional numbers could also be added to the Bride! That opportunity remains open until that day when He partakes of that cup anew, with them, Himself. [4] That occasion will conclude the current opportunity and seal the number. Beyond that time, it will no longer be possible to become a part of the Bride of Christ! Those called into the Family who are not receptive of the Passover invitation, or who come after [5] that great Passover in the Kingdom, will be included, but not as part of the Bride!

Does all of this suggest that observing the Passover reaffirms our commitment to be a part of the Bride of Christ? Taking the consideration a step further, is our observance of the Passover and our recommitment essential for us to remain included in the Bride of Christ? Is the typical Communion service, observed weekly, or monthly, or quarterly, as some do, the same as observing the annual Passover? On what basis would we conclude that Passover is <u>not</u> incumbent upon all true Christians? After all, He gave specific instructions to keep it: "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19) The Apostle Paul, years later, specifically instructed us to keep the Passover: "Christ, our Passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast." [6] (1Cor 5:7), and gave specific instructions on how to keep it (1Cor 11:23-29). Here we have a clear New Testament instruction to keep the feast of Passover, yet few choose to comply! It is not an observance that is suspended between the last pre-crucifixion evening and the Kingdom occasion. No church suggests that! Paul wouldn't have said, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1Cor 11:26) if he didn't expect they would be observing it on a regular

3 This consideration offers proof that the Kingdom of God, as He considered it, was to be established only at His return. If it is already in existence, when did He and they partake of that cup together as He said? Further, if He did partake of that cup already, then the opportunity for others to become added to the Bride would have long since been closed! Their presence at this later occasion also suggests a resurrection.

4 "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom" (Mark 14:23-25; Luke 22:18; Matt 26:29) This was spoken just at that moment in time when they would have expected He would have!

5 See my articles on the *Millennial Kingdom* and *The Hope of Last Great Day* for further explanation of the other harvest.

ongoing basis!

No, the Passover is every bit a New Covenant institution! Christ personally re-instituted its true observance, instructed that we keep it a perpetual memorial, then inspired the Apostle Paul decades later to issue instructions to keep it, then to repeat the instructions as to how to keep it, observing both its external essentials, but not without the proper internal essential, a 'worthy' spiritual state! [7]

The early Church understood. It wasn't until the fourth century that apostate Christianity succeeded in substantially eliminating Passover observance in the Church by force! The 'quartodeciman controversy', the observance of the fourteenth day of the first month, became pointedly excluded from orthodox Christianity in favor of the later Easter tradition. Anyone not familiar with this issue should review its place in Church history. The polarization against its observance, more than three centuries after Christ, is well documented! Likely, it was what Jesus wanted! Passover wasn't intended to be for everyone. We should note that the statement, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt.22:14) was made in the context of marriage! Is there a 'chosen inner circle', who will comprise the Bride of Christ, who keep it? Think about that!

Now, also contained within this subliminal picture is another illustration, that warrants our notice, because, as we'll see, the new inter-relationship between these two young people illustrates something very profound with respect to the existence of and the comparison between the two covenants: The Old and the New.

First, presenting the New Covenant in this context, illustrates something we need to comprehend. Too many are quick to disregard completely all Old Covenant proscriptions in favor of the New.

Think about this more deeply. Consider what those two young people would have thought regarding the Old Covenant. That covenant, under which each lived as individuals, set prohibitions against murder, theft, adultery, lust, idolatry, disrespect of parents, among others. When these two marry—enter into their New Covenant—would all of the Old Covenant provisions be replaced by new provisions that are just between themselves? In other words, would all requirements imposed upon them in society be abolished in favor of a whole new set of requirements? The flaws in that logic should be obvious.

No, all of the moral standards under which they functioned as citizens in their culture would have remained, just as before. What was 'new' were the commitments now being made between themselves which still involved the same standards! Those same standards were now elevated to a higher degree of application. Breaking any of those standards, such as adultery, murder or theft, against each other became infinitely more offensive than ever before, because they were entering into a relationship that involved mutual devotion and trust!

If a man were to steal from his wife, it'd be the same crime as if from any stranger, except for the higher level of commitment and trust involved within a betrothed or married state. Upon entering a 'new covenant', fidelity and trust between these two individuals makes the moral standard infinitely more personal. Compliance with the moral standards of the society, between themselves, becomes elevated to a matter of the heart, and any infraction thereafter is magnified to a more serious offense.

It wasn't a matter of scrapping the old moral code in favor of a new one. It was a re-incorporation of those former standards to a higher intra-personal commitment level than before! As singles, the covenant's moral standards applied generally toward all in that society. As betrothed individuals, those same standards become all the more obligatory, as the 'new' covenant bound the two to one another, it becoming an even higher-level offense should any of those standards be violated with respect to each other!

The New Covenant did not abolish the Old, it elevated it [8] to a new inter-personal commitment level, being now made also a matter of the heart, not just rote performance out of fear of punishment. Those same laws still applied, only to a much higher degree, between the covenant makers!

That inference is also apparent in the consistent illustration Jesus chose to use when first introducing the New Covenant to His prospective Bride: Spiritual Israel:

> "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make **a new covenant** with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, **although I was an husband** unto them, [9]... But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, **I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts**" (Jer 31:31-33; Heb 8:8-10).

This latter New Testament reference, being verbatim with the other one, demonstrates their perceptions of God's Law being made a matter of the heart hadn't changed one iota even three decades after it was first proposed!

This is the prior-perception the disciples there in the Upper Room, at that most significant Passover, would have had toward a New Covenant. It would not have occurred to them that the New abolished the Law, but rather, that it internalized it, making their commitment to it all the more deeply personal

The thoughtful illustration Jesus specifically chose to use in formally presenting the New Covenant to His Church, His prospective Bride, for the first time, solidly reinforced that perception.

footnotes 6 – 9 on next page

The Value of Learning from Each Other

Commentary on the article at left by Norman Edwards

I very much appreciated this article as I did not previously understand the phrase "this cup is the new covenant in my blood" as a Jewish marriage proposal. It makes a lot of sense and ties together other scriptures which were hard to understand. I am glad to see Rich Traver give credit to James Dobson's guest as his source. Other Sabbath-keepers have gone to great efforts to hide what they learned from non-Sabbath keepers.

I was less glad to see the strong implication that a person must keep the Passover to be a Christian. While I believe that every Christian should want to keep the Passover once they understand it, I realize that Christians do not come to all understanding at once or in the same sequence. An Internet search showed hundreds of websites that explained the meaning of the covenant cup in a Jewish marriage proposal. Most were not Sabbath-observing. They arrived at this understanding before most of us did.

Does Christ require us to know when he proposed marriage to His bride in order to be a part of the bride? If so, then I have many departed friends whom I regarded as dedicated believers who will miss out, because I do not believe they understood this before they died. However, I certainly would expect them to instantly accept it when they are raised from the dead.

So must one understand and observe the Passover in order to be part of the bride? Christians—even Sabbatarian Christians—differ on whether or not Christ's last supper was the Passover or if it occurred a day (or more) before. I had one understanding for over 20 years, then studied the issue and changed.

An initial reading of the first three gospels seems to indicate that Christ ate the Passover with his disciples before he was betrayed (Matt 26:17; Mar 14;12; Luke 22;8), But then

- The above verses are all commands to prepare the passover. None of the accounts contain any verse saying he was actually at the Passover or eating the Passover with his disciples.
- The Gospel writers call the meal their "supper" (Luke 22:20; John 13:2, 4; 21:20).
- When Paul refers to this occasion, he calls it "supper" (1Cor 11:20, 21, 25) and "the night He was betrayed" (1Cor 11:23).
- Hours after this meal, John mentions that the Jews were avoiding becoming defiled because they had not yet eaten the Passover (John 18:28).
- Paul's instructions for partaking of symbolic bread and wine say nothing about an annual basis, but five times say "when you come together" (1Cor 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34).

This box cannot contain a thorough study of the Passover, but I do recommend Paul Finch's *The Passover Papers*, reviewed on page 10.

The point of this box is that dedicated believers have different understandings of the scriptures, and they change as they grow. This is not to say that everyone who claims to be a Christian is one (Matt 25:1-13; Matt 7:21-23). But we ought to avoid making certain doctrines into tests of Christianity when the Bible does not make them such. I actually think the modern Christian practice of frequent bread and wine is closer to the New Testament practice than the one-a-year practice. But these are not commands for salvation, but "traditions" (1Cor 11:2).

A perfect betrothal is not necessary for a wedding. I was amazed to read the Michigan law in regard to marriage licenses, and found that nearly every possible mistake one could make in a marriage license did not invalidate the marriage as long as there was no deliberate fraud. Similarly, we find no escape clauses in the Bible for people whose intent was to marry and who consummate the marriage. Even Jacob kept Leah when he was deceived and though he had Rachel (Gen 29:16-28)—Christ descended through that marriage (Gen 35:23; Heb 7:14).

The bride of Christ is not perfect at the betrothal. Ancient Israel said "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Ex 19:8), but didn't do it. After Christ made his marriage proposal with the cup, Peter and the other disciples said: "even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" (Matt 26:35), but they did deny Christ. We should not think we, or anyone else whom Christ is calling, will be without significant sin. But the collective bride of Christ will be making herself ready:

> "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints (Rev 19:7-8).

We do not help the bride get ready by trying to decide who is and is not part of the bride. That is not our job. I plan to accept whoever our Father accepts.

> Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand (Rom 14:4). 🕮

6 It should be noted that the Jewish Passover observance is not the same as the New Testament observance, neither in timing or symbology. My article *The Passover of the Exodus* verifies Christ's accuracy in deference to orthodox tradition!

7 1st Corinthians 11:29

8 Isaiah 42:21 "…He will magnify the Law and make it honorable." Honor figures heavily into the marital covenant!

9 Notice that he involved the idea of a marriage in the Old Testament announcement of the New Covenant! This prior marriage also was based on God's Moral Laws!

Books Worth a Look

by Bill Buckman

The Passover Papers: Controversy, Myth, Fairy Tales and Nonsense

by Paul R. Finch, Second Edition, copyright © 2009 by B-F Enterprises

Mr. Finch is an independent researcher and former member of the worldwide Church of God. He has studied the subject of this book since the 1970's. He comes to a number of conclusions that might be upsetting to many Church of God people.

At first this reviewer thought this book might be just a rehashing of studies by Church of God researchers and a bashing of Worldwide teachings on Passover. The author is rather critical of some of Herbert Armstrong's and other Church of God ministers' writings, in particular Fred Coulter's book, the Christian Passover. But Mr. Finch goes far beyond this. He cites numerous prominent scholars from diverse backgrounds including Catholic, Protestant and Jewish; both ancient and modern.

The author begins with a discussion of the early or late 14th of Nisan Passover controversy and then reviews the so-called "Quartodeciman Controversy" of the early centuries of the church and goes on to deal with the supposed synoptic problem between John and the other gospel writers, particularly relating to the timing of Passover.

Mr. Finch does quote from many commentators on the Passover, but mostly he draws his conclusions from how terms are used in scripture itself. In particular he goes deeply into the usage of *erev* ("evening") and *ben ha-arbayim* ("between the evenings"). He gives a chronology of Christ's last week that is different from both common protestant and Church of God understanding. He studies the hour, the day and the year of the crucifixion.

One of Mr. Finches key points is the fact that the ancient world basically did not know "exclusive reckoning", that is they did not understand the concept of a day or a year "0". They always started with "1"! Applying modern "exclusive reckoning" has led to many chronological misunderstandings in the Bible.

The author also believes there has been a basic misunderstanding of evening and morning in Genesis chapter 1, that has implications throughout scripture. He gives a thorough analysis of the events recorded in Exodus 12 and also discusses the Israelite population figures in the Pentateuch. He even gives a new understanding to the Hebrew word *pasach*.

This reviewer found the first few chapters a little slow going, but after that, the rest of the book was fascinating reading. Whether or not the reader agrees with all or any of Mr. Finch's conclusions, the reviewer believes the reader will find this book valuable and interesting. Although the nature of the subject sometimes makes the material a little hard to follow, generally the reviewer found the author's style easy to read.

Mr. Finch has a way of expressing himself that usually makes his point quite clear. For example on page 249 he writes: "Also consider that the belief that the daily sacrifice was not to begin until sunset would also force a conclusion that ancient Israel conducted much of its Temple ritual during the darkness of night, with the entire afternoons being spent with the priesthood doing nothing but waiting until sunset so they could carry out hours of work in the dark. If this is so, then this would mean that the Passover Sacrifice itself would not be consumed until late at night rather than it being an early evening meal."

The book has an 18 page bibliography and a 12 page index, with a total of 340 pages.

This book also makes the point that even when one uses the Bible as their knowledge filter they can still be led into error and that sometimes it is good to question long held basic assumptions. 📖

Where to Buy Books

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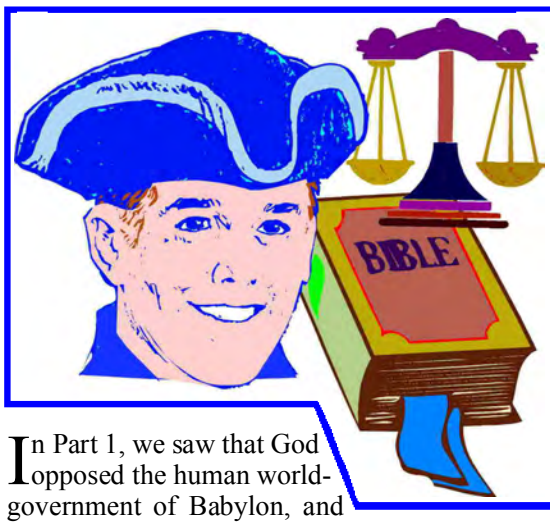


To Whom Does God Give Authority for Civil Government, Today? (Part 3)

by Norman Edwards

In Part 1, we saw that God opposed the human world-government of Babylon, and later gave Moses extensive information about how to run a civil government—largely local, consisting of judges and officers appointed by the people. He said other nations would be impressed by His wise laws if Israel followed them. This government worked during the time of Joshua and the elders, but degenerated during the time of the judges. When the people demanded a king, God agreed to continue to work with the people under that system, but said their kings would oppress them. Their kings certainly did.

Part 2 contained five civil government principles: 1) The Eternal Takes an Active Role in Human Leaders; 2) It is Good to Have a Righteous Ruler; 3) God Frequently Allows Unrighteous Rulers; 4) Sometimes God Gives us a Choice of Leaders; 5) Sometimes The Eternal Does Not Give us a Choice.

The key is understanding what God is doing in any particular situation. Sometimes the people can choose a right government, other times he tells them they must submit to a foreign power as punishment for their sin. and other times one individual can make a big difference: Ehud courageously deposed Eglon and freed Israel; an unnamed woman made peace when Joab surrounded her city with an army to fight the rebellious Bichri. Jehoiada and other volunteers deposed the evil queen Athalia—an example of an armed revolution for righteous purposes that God supported.

New Testament Government: Spiritual and Civil

The Bible is such a cohesive book, from Old Testament to New. It teaches and expands upon such similar righteous principles that many people do not notice the areas where the two Testaments are markedly different. But once the obvious contrast is seen, our understanding comes much easier.

The **Old Testament** teaches:

1) spiritual principles of living,,
2) religious ritual including temple offerings to be performed by priests and Levites, and
3) the laws and punishments God gave for civil governments.

The **New Testament** expands upon the Old Testament spiritual principles and shows they can only be lived through the saving blood of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. The church is never instructed to continue or replace the roles of priests and Levites or civil government. The temple offerings and Jewish civil government remained in place from the death of Christ until 70 A.D. when they were destroyed by war. The Church never "took over" or replaced either one.

The New Testament gives no "punishments" which the church was to impose if people refused to repent, be baptized, etc. Believers and the organized church were to cooperate with civil governments (such as the Jews and the Romans) when they could, or flee from them if persecuted. But the church will not replace the civil government until Christ returns (2Tim 2:12; Jude 1:14; Rev 20:6).

Church Government is Not Civil Government

Some people may ask, didn't Christ establish government in the church? The short answer is "minimally". Christ remained head of the Church (Eph 5:23; Col 1:18). The word "government" appears in a church context only once in most Bibles (1Cor 12:28), where it is one of many spiritual gifts. Many modern translations say simply "administration" instead. The twelve apostles did have a leadership role, and Paul shows that the gospel to Israelites was committed to Peter, whereas the preaching to other nations was committed to him (Gal 2:7-8). But primarily, Chris's works in His Church by giving of spiritual gifts directly to individuals (Rom 12:6-8; 1Cor 12:7-11, 1Cor 12:28-13:1; Eph 4:11-15; 1Pet 4:8-11). (Ask for or download our 66-page publication "How Does the Eternal Govern Through Humans?" for an in-depth view of Church government.).

The purpose of the church, the assembly of believers, was to provide a place for believers to use their spiritual and physical gifts to edify each other, and to work together to preach the Gospel. No new structure of hierarchy, laws, punishments or judges

was established for the church. Christ's sermon on the mount (Matt 5-7) certainly calls believers to a higher standard of personal behavior than Old Testament law, but does not implement judgments or punishments for missing that standard. It calls for brethren to suffer for the benefit of others rather than demand all the recompense that the law allows.

When Jesus was asked to render judgments based upon Old Testament law, he declined. When the Jewish leaders asked Him what to do with a woman "taken in adultery" (John 8:3-10), Christ did not say "stone her". There is no mention of the man or witnesses, Roman law did not allow the Jews to put anyone to death, and Jesus was not the appointed judge in her town. Similarly, when a man came to Jesus asking him to make his brother divide the inheritance, Jesus said: "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" (Luke 12:14). This is not to say that Jesus or any believer could not have the job of a judge, but it is saying that Christ and Christianity did not replace civil governments.

(It is very important in any legal system to have one court and one judge that hears each case—with a possible limited sequence of appeals thereafter. If a system allowed a person to continually bring the same case before different courts—a sort of shopping for judges—a person is eventually going to wear out the other litigant or find a judge who agrees with them. There would be no such thing as a conclusive judgment, but a legal "survival of the fittest"—usually the richest.)

In a very important passage, Paul shows how believers may sometimes voluntarily bypass the civil government and use the church instead. This is not because the church has replaced the civil government, but so that believers can live in love, lot legalism, toward each other; and so that believers, who will be ruling with Christ, can learn to judge righteous judgment. This is clearly illustrated when Paul admonished some of the Corinthian brethren who were taking each other to court:

> If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? 2 **Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?** And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! 4 Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, **appoint as judges even men of little account in the church!** 5 I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? 6 But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers! 7 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? 8 Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers (1Cor 6:1-8, NIV).

Paul goes as far as asking the brethren why they did not decide to select "men of little account in the church"—there were no established "church judges". He also makes other suggestions, such as they accept wrong rather than take each other to court. But there was no established "person appointed to hear legal disputes" or other established "church government" which he tells them to utilize in place of the civil government.

The only "punishments" that the church ever invokes on its membership is to remove them from the church. Paul did not even suggest that the brethren who took other brethren to court should be removed from the church. He just told them to change. Only when a believer is flagrantly sinning or when he/she teaches massively false doctrine does the Bible teach that they are to be removed from the Church (1Cor 5:1-2; 2Thes 3:14-15; Titus 3:10; 2 Jo 1:10)

The New Testament Supports Continued Civil Government

While the concept of continued civil government should be obvious, there are people who believe that Christians should never be involved in any kind of punishment of any crime. They believe that the Church should be a source of love—and it should be. But sometimes love includes stern correction. This is what God, in His love, does for us:

> …"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son" (Heb 12:5-6).

The apostle Paul explains, beyond any doubt, that God still wants civil governments:

> Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, **and the authorities that exist are appointed by God**. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, **and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.** 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. 4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil. 5 Therefore *you* must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, **for they are God's ministers** attending continually to this very thing. (Rom 13:1-6).

One might find it odd that the

Roman authorities, who did not believe in the God of the Bible and condemned Christ to die, are called "God's Ministers". They are called that, because God used them to generally keep the peace. God actually found them less guilty than the hypocritical Jewish leaders who knew His way and still did evil:

> Jesus answered, "You [the Roman governor, Pilate] could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one [Jewish leader] who delivered Me to you has the greater sin" (John 19:11).

Reading the entire story of John 18-19, we see that the Roman governor Pilate was actually afraid to kill an innocent man, especially one who claimed to be the Son of God, but the Jewish leaders were willing to bribe, lie and do whatever they could to get rid of a political rival. This writer believes this is why God frequently leaves unbelievers in charge of civil governments—because they basically want to keep their subjects alive, and working—so they can tax them—and they want them to be happy enough so that they won't rebel. Religious leaders frequently end up convincing themselves that God is on their side no matter what they do and they end up oppressing or even killing others over petty doctrinal differences.

Paul unmistakably states the purpose of secular authority in his instruction to pray for them. They are to keep the peace so that people can live in godliness and reverence.

> Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, **that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.** For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior (1Tim 2:1-3).

Do civil rulers always do what this verses tells them to do? No. In those cases, we need seek God's will on the matter. There are times to stand up, disobey, and even risk jail and death to obey God.

> And when they [Jewish leaders] had brought them [the apostles], they set *them* before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."… When they [Jewish leaders] heard *this,* they were furious and plotted to kill them (Acts 5:27-29, 33).

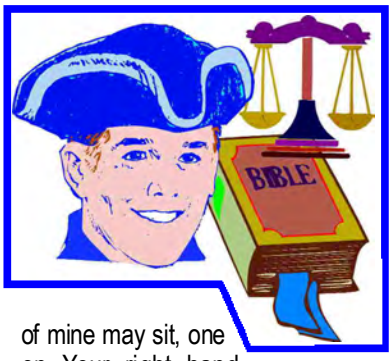
Jesus often Does Not Agree with the Way Rulers use their Authority

Even though the Eternal still wants secular governments and frequently entrusts it to unbelievers, he does not agree with the way they do it. There are two points we should learn from this:

- We should not believe all that civil governments do is right or good, just because God allows them to do it.
- When believers have authority in civil government, they observe Christ's teaching to the extent possible.

Civil governments are charged to be utterly fair and impartial (Deut 16:18-20). Once the mother of Zebedee's sons wanted to do something most people would consider "good thinking"—she wanted to ask a favor of a powerful person. After all, the worst He could say was "no". She didn't think about a leaders obligation to be fair and just, nor did she think how others might react if her favor was granted. Christ used this to teach an important lesson about the nature of Civil government:

> Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. 21 And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons



> of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom." 22 But Jesus answered and said, "**You do not know what you ask.** Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." 23 So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left **is not Mine to give**, but *it is for those* for whom it is prepared by My Father." 24 **And when the ten heard *it,* they were greatly displeased with the two brothers.** 25 But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, "**You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.** 26 Yet **it shall not be so among you**; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave — 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 20:20-28).

Our Savior warned his disciples that King Herod was a corrupt leader.

> Then He charged them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" (Mark 8:15).

> Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long *time* to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him…. Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt

and mocked *Him,* arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate (Luke 23:8,11).

Herod was more interested in being entertained than running a just government. The Roman governor Pilate also chose to try to protect his political career rather than do what he knew to be just:

> Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you [Roman governor Pilate] from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." 12 From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "**If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.**" 13 When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called *The* Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. 14 Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" 15 But they cried out, "Away with *Him,* away with *Him!* Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!" 16 **Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified.** So they took Jesus and led *Him* away (John 19:11-16).

Can Believers Participate in Civil Governments?

Even before Christ came to the Earth, the Old Testament shows us that there were men of faith (Heb 11) who believed in God and had the Holy Spirit (Deut 34:9; Pslm 51:11). Some were leaders in civil governments. Moses, Joshua and the elders followed the Eternal (Heb 3:5; Josh 24:31). David was a "man after God's heart" (Acts 13:22).

Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer in the civil government of Persia (Neh 1:1, 11). He hoped to help reestablish the people of Judah in their land. He asked the king of Persia for help and received it. He went to Jerusalem where he served as governor, were he followed the biblical teaching of using his resources to help his brethren (Deut 17:20), rather than to lift himself up (Neh 5:14-19).

The book of Daniel tells the story of a man greatly beloved of God (Dan 10:19), who worked in the civil government of Babylon (Dan 5:29). Daniel was able to live and work there, even though the Babylonian gods and many of their laws were in conflict with the Scriptures. Daniel had to choose between bowing to Nebuchadnezzar's image and trusting God (Dan 2). Later, he had to fend off attacks from jealous government bureaucrats who trapped him and sent him on a trip to the lion's den (Dan 6). He was delivered by God from both—he did not need to compromise his beliefs or leave his job in the civil government.

Can Christians Have Government Positions?

The biblical answer to that question is overwhelmingly "yes"—there were many Christians with government positions and none were asked to leave them. Unfortunately, many Christians believe they must stay out of civil government because it is corrupt. That belief has kept many Christians out of civil government over the last few decades—and has greatly increased the corruption there over the last decades.

Let us read the many examples of Christians who worked in civil government. The first ones are disciples of John the Baptist, but Christ said he preached the way of righteousness (Matt 21:32). When government employees straight up asked him what they should do, he did not tell them to resign, but to do their job honestly:

> Then **tax collectors** also came to be baptized, and said to him [John the Baptist], "Teacher, **what shall we do?**" And he said to them, "**Collect no more than what is appointed for you**." Likewise the **soldiers** asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "**Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages**" (Luke 3:12-14).
>
> While He spoke these things to them, behold, a **ruler** came and worshiped Him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay Your hand on her and she will live." 19 So Jesus arose and followed him, and so *did* His disciples…. 23 When Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd wailing, 24 He said to them, "Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping." And they ridiculed Him. 25 But when the crowd was put outside, He went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose (Matt 9:18-25).

Jesus was bold enough to send everyone in the man's house outside while he healed the girl—he even commanded that something be given to her to eat (Mark 5:43). But he did not tell the ruler to resign from his government job.

> Now it came to pass, afterward, that He [Christ] went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve *were* with Him, and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities — Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and **Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward,** and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance (Luke 8:1-3).

If it were sinful to work for Herod, would it be lawful for Christ to accept money earned in sin? "You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog to the house of the LORD your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God" (Deut 23:18).

> So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, **a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of**

all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship,… Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:27, 36-37).

If he needed to quit his job before being baptized, Philip missed his opportunity. In the passage below, the Holy Spirit falls on Cornelius while he is still a soldier in the Roman army.

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, **a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment,** 2 **a devout man and one who feared God with all his household**, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. 3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!" 4 And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?" So he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. …44 While Peter was still speaking these words**, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.** 45 And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, 47 "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *have*?" (Acts 10:1-4, 44-47).

Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name *was* Bar-Jesus, 7 who was with **the proconsul, Sergius Paulus**, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. 9 Then Saul, who also *is called* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 10 and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? 11 "And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord *is* upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. 12 **Then the proconsul believed,** when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord (Acts 13:6-12).

Paul had a very interesting way of dealing with corruption in government—he struck it with blindness. When God has a mission for us, we do not need to fear men—even powerful ones. The Roman jailer, below, did not leave his job after baptism, but remained there, and communicated Paul's demand that the corrupt magistrates themselves come and let him out after illegally beating and jailing them:

And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household. 35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go." 36 So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace." 37 But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, *and* have thrown *us* into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out." 38 And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. 39 Then they came and pleaded with them and brought *them* out, and asked *them* to depart from the city (Acts 16:33-38).

The Greek words for the "important" and "prominent" in the verses below can refer to people in government.

Now Paul and Silas traveled through the towns of Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue…4 Some who listened were persuaded and **became converts**, including a large number of godly Greek men and also **many important women of the city** (Acts 17:1, 4, NLT).

These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore **many of them believed**, and also not a few of the Greeks, **prominent women as well as men** (Acts 17:11-12).

Below, we find a Roman judge and the ruler of a synagogue who became believers. If they quit these jobs upon conversion, what would be the point of listing their job as the only fact about them? A synagogue ruler was responsible for many civil functions as well as religious teaching.

And so Paul left them. But some did join him, and **became believers.** Among them were **Dionysius, a member of the Court of the Areopagus**, a woman named Damaris, and others with them (Acts 17:33-34).

Then Crispus, the **ruler of the synagogue**, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, **believed** and were baptized (Acts 18:8).

Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives.… Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. **Erastus, who is the city's director of public works**, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings (Rom 16:21, 23, NIV).

While Paul was a prisoner of Caesar, it appears that he continued preaching Christ and converted a number of the people who worked for Caesar:

> But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the **whole palace guard**, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ (Phil 1:12-13).
>
> Philippians 4:22 **And all the other Christians** send their greetings, too, especially **those who work in Caesar's palace.**

Do Christians Vote?

Should Christians vote in an election?

Some Christians feel they cannot vote for a man who might not follow God. They can relax. Nearly all of the leaders that God himself placed in power did not follow Him either.

Some Christians are afraid they might vote against the person whom God wants in office. There is no reason to fear this. He is more than able to influence an election, just like He influenced wars, revolutions, cold-blooded murders and other ways that biblical leaders have gotten into office. Is not an election one of the more peaceful ways for Him to bring a leader he wants into office?

The Biblical truth is that God commands his people to choose good civil government leaders for themselves. He even gives us qualities that we should look for in leaders. The only way that a large group of people can choose leaders is to vote for them:

> "You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you (Deut 16:16-18).

Who is the "you" that God is talking to here? It is the entire nation of Israel—certainly those past the age of accountability. The chapter is full of things that everyone should do. Notice that the instructions for judging righteously are not addressed to the judges, but to "you", the entire nation. The only way the people could fulfill these commands is by appointing judges and officers that would carry them out. The only way a group of people can be responsible for appointing an individual is to vote for him—either directly or by having their representatives vote.

Even though He did not want them to have a King, the Eternal knew the people would want one and gave the people instructions for who to "set over them":

> "When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that *are* around me,' you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; *one* from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who *is* not your brother. But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, 'You shall not return that way again' (Deut 7:14-16).

Yes, they were to set one over them "whom the Lord your God chooses," but that means they were to consult God—and to follow all of the rules for a King He gave them. This worked properly with David, who was anointed by Samuel to be King (1Sam 16:13), but who was also anointed king and set over Israel by the elders—the representatives of the choice of the people:

> Therefore all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD. And they anointed David king over Israel (2Sam 5:3).

When the Grecian widows were not adequately being taken care of, they were told to chose seven men from among themselves to be in charge of taking care of them. This must be a poll or an election:

> In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them (Acts 6:1-3, NIV).

Is there a Greek word in the Bible that means "vote"? Yes. Unfortunately, its meaning has not been well preserved in translation—because most of church doctrine has taught the divine right of kings to rule in civil government and clerics to rule in the church. But here is the definition of the Greek word *cheirotoneo* (Strong's #5500) from Thayer's Greek Lexicon:

> G5500 ***cheirotoneo***, from a comparative of 5495 and teino (to stretch); 1) to vote by stretching out the hand 2) to create or appoint by vote: one to have charge of some office or duty 3) to elect, create, appoint

This word is used in two places in the New Testament. The notes in the NIV translation correctly preserve the meaning in Acts 14:23. We also include **Young's Literal Translation (YLT)** which has the correct meaning in bother verses:

> Paul and Barnabas **appointed** [#5500] elders {or ordained elders; or had elders elected} for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust (Acts 14:23, NIV).
>
> and having **appointed to them by vote** [#5500] elders in

every assembly, having prayed with fastings, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed (Acts 14:23, **YLT**).

And we sent with him the brother, whose praise in the good news *is* through all the assemblies, and not only so, but who was also **appointed by vote** [#5500] by the assemblies, our fellow-traveller, with this favour that is ministered by us, unto the glory of the same Lord, and your willing mind (2Cor 8:18-19, **YLT**).

Conclusion

The Old Testament gives us God's fundamental principles of Civil Government. The New Testament is a spiritual message of changed hearts and eternal life, which can be taught and accepted regardless of civil government. It neither removes nor adds authority for civil government.

We need to seek the Eternal's guidance in how to deal with any particular government—most of the time we should follow it, but there are times we should not.

A Christian can be in civil government and even better fulfill that job through godly righteousness and a spiritual understanding of its purpose. This may cause him to be a shining light among his peers, as was Daniel and Christ. It may cause others to be jealous and want to kill him, as almost happened to Daniel and did happen to Christ.

Christ and the Church do not replace the civil governments of this world until Christ returns:

"Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "**The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ**, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Rev 11:15)

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. **And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years** (Rev 20:4). 🕮

A Lesson for Politicians

The following fictitious, humorous story is of unknown origin, but certainly incorporates the eternal judgment principle in Matthew 7:2. Even though the Bible teaches the concept of voting for leaders, it does not guarantee all elected leaders will follow God—even if elected by Christians. Good leaders may become corrupt after their election, or they may lie to people while running for office. Whatever happens, elector and elected will be judged by God.

While walking down the street one day a US senator is tragically hit by a truck and dies. He arrives in heaven and is met by St. Peter at the entrance.

"Welcome to heaven," says St. Peter. "Before you settle in, it seems there is a problem. We seldom see a high official around these parts, so we're not sure what to do with you."

"No problem, just let me in," says the man.

"Well, I'd like to, but I have orders from higher up. What we'll do is have you spend one day in hell and one in heaven. Then you can choose where to spend eternity."

"Really, I've made up my mind. I want to be in heaven," says the senator.

"I'm sorry, but we have our rules."

And with that, St. Peter escorts him to the elevator and he goes down, down, down to hell. The doors open and he finds himself in the middle of a green golf course. In the distance is a clubhouse and standing in front of it are all his friends and other politicians who had worked with him.

Everyone is very happy and in evening dress. They run to greet him, shake his hand, and reminisce about the good times they had while getting rich at the expense of the people. They play a friendly game of golf and then dine on lobster, caviar and champagne.

Also present is the devil, who really is a very friendly guy who has a good time dancing and telling jokes. They are having such a good time that before he realizes it, it's time to go. Everyone gives him a hearty farewell and waves while the elevator rises.

The elevator goes up, up, up and the door reopens on heaven where St Peter is waiting for him. "Now it's time to visit heaven."

So, 24 hours pass with the senator joining a group of contented souls moving from cloud to cloud, playing the harp and singing. They have a good time and, before he realizes it, the 24 hours have gone by and St. Peter returns.

"Well, then, you've spent a day in hell and another in heaven. Now choose your eternity."

The senator reflects for a minute, then he answers: "Well, I would never have said it before, I mean heaven has been delightful, but I think I would be better off in hell."

So St. Peter escorts him to the elevator and he goes down, down, down to hell. Now the doors of the elevator open and he's in the middle of a barren land covered with waste and garbage. He sees all his friends, dressed in rags, picking up the trash and putting it in black bags as more trash falls from above.

The devil comes over to him and puts his arm around his shoulder. "I don't understand," stammers the senator. "Yesterday I was here and there was a golf course and clubhouse, and we ate lobster and caviar, drank champagne, and danced and had a great time. Now there's just a wasteland full of garbage and my friends look miserable. What happened?"

The devil looks at him, smiles and says:

"Yesterday we were campaigning."

"Today you voted!" 🕮

"Wonderful Feast " from p. 1

out a formal organization. Everything flowed smoothly and began and ended close to on time. Yet there was variety in music, teaching, activities and dress not found in most Feast sites. Many people remarked that they were amazed that there was no promotion to join a group, get on a mailing list or do something else that is so common at Feast sites.

The Feast was held at Grizzly Jack's Grand Bear Lodge. It was a very good setting as it had regular motel rooms for those who wanted them, as well as 1800 sq. ft. villas for families. These were all within easy walking distance, so brethren—even children—could come and go from their living quarters to the studies and activities at will. Beside all of the items in this article and on the schedule, there were many impromptu studies, meals and other get-togethers. It was very easy to meet other brethren—and invite 30 of them to one's villa if so desired.

All of the offerings given at the Feast were used at the Feast. This reduced the cost of the rooms, and paid for five group meals and all the activities. Offerings were simply placed in a box in the meeting room and an announcement was made when enough funds were collected to pay for the Feast. Leftovers will be used as seed money for future feasts.

Teachings

The schedule for the Feast was much more varied than the traditional "Church of God" Feast schedule. The scripture only commands "holy convocations"—assemblies of all the brethren—only on the first and eighth days (Lev 23:35-36). So services were held on those days (both Sabbaths), with additional services on the Sunday and Wednesday. A morning praise and worship service was held on all of the other days.

Teachings on the other days consisted of 12 one-hour seminar clusters. Each cluster had two adult studies, a young-adult study, a teen study, a pre-teen study, and a children's study. Anyone was welcome to attend any study, and it was a common site to see a few young people in the adult studies and parents checking out the teen studies. There were also some evening sessions devoted to prophecy, speculation, calendars, marriage videos, etc.

Some of the brethren, who were using a different calendar system, kept the Feast for two more days in accordance with their understanding. They also used early morning time slots and occasionally alternative rooms where Don Wales organized the reading of the book of Deuteronomy, as the Scripture instructs us to do at the Feast every seven years (Deut 31:10-13).

There were so many valuable seminars and sermons we cannot begin to describe them all here. Most presentations had computer slides. A brief summary of the presentations as well as the whole audio or slides are available on the website: www.feast2009.org. The article *Teens Message to Parents* on page 23 describes one seminar: a short teaching to teens followed by their answers to six questions on how we can spiritually serve them better. A brief description of two particular teachings is included as they have **not** been commonly taught in the Church of God in the past, but this writer believes they are important:

History of the Bible

Matt Gaffney presented: *Where did your bible come from?* The story of the men who copied, translated and preserved the scriptures throughout the centuries is truly awesome. During the middle ages, the catholic church emphasized its own doctrine over the Bible and biblical scholarship languished. Good copies of Hebrew and Greek manuscripts were difficult to find and those extant suffered the effects of aging. Desiderius Erasmus consolidated the Greek texts into a single parallel Greek/Latin Bible. John Wycliffe used it extensively to prepare his English Bible and Martin Luther to prepare his German Bible.

These men and many others who fought to translate, print and place the Bible in the common man's hands were generally **not** the heads of big churches or state governments. They were independently minded believers with a desire to serve God no matter what the cost. Indeed, many Bible translators were executed for doing what they did. Others expected to lose their jobs or be killed during most of their lives. While Christians know that the King James Version was produced in 1611 at the command of King James, they do not know that the KJV was the states reaction to the Geneva Bible (and other prior versions). King James wanted one "authorized version" with no notes or alternate readings, rather than the many versions with wild notes in them such as "the Pope is the Beast of Revelation".

All of the English Bible translations up through the KJV were largely based on the work of William Tyndale, who was burned at the stake by Henry VIII in 1536. His last sentence was a prayer asking God to open the eyes of the King of England, to allow free distribution of English Bibles. Three years later, King Henry commanded the publication of the Great Bible, with a copy to be placed in every church and readers to read it.

There is much more to the story. An excellent chart as well as the slides from the presentation is available in the 2009 Messages section of www.feast2009.org.

The Tabernacle or *Succah*

Hal Geiger explained the biblical reason to build a *succah* (Hebrew for "tabernacle" or "booth") at the Feast of Tabernacles. Many people put the leaven out of their houses in the spring to teach the lesson of put-

ting sin out of their life and taking on the unleavened body of Christ. While many Church of God groups have not built a *succah* in the past, they are missing out on the vital teaching of the scripture:

> "Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the LORD *for* seven days; on the first day *there shall be* a sabbath-*rest,* and on the eighth day a sabbath-*rest.* And you shall **take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days.** You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall **dwell in booths for seven days**. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God." (Lev 23:39-43).
>
> And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should **dwell in booths** during the feast of the seventh month, and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and **bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths,** as *it is* written." Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one **on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim.** So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for **since the days of Joshua the son of Nun** until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness (Neh 8:14-16).

It is very clear from the above scripture that they were building symbolic booths at their houses and in prominent places—and that the practice was also done during the time of Joshua—when Israel was serving God (Josh 24:31). The Hebrew word translated "dwell" in these verses (*yashab* Strong's #3427) does not mean "live in (including overnight)" as our English word "dwell" means. The Hebrew *yashab* has more of a meaning of simply "to occupy"—whether day or night. It is translated **"sit**" 172 times, "dwell" 437 times, and many other ways 479 times. When used with the Hebrew *qal* stem, as it is here, "sit in booths" or "occupy booths" would be a better translation.

A *succah* is not a hotel room—it is more like a shed. It is not fancy. Staying in a hotel—especially one that is nicer than our own home, does not picture the symbolism in the above verses. Hal Geiger explained seven things that God does for us—that are symbolized by the *succah* or tabernacle: defends us, saves us, hides us, produces fruit in us, calls us His branches, changes us from temporary to permanent and offers us the tree of life.

Leviticus 23:40 also mentions rejoicing with branches, as was done when Christ entered Jerusalem (John 12:13) and as will be done by the "innumerable multitude" when they praise the Lamb (Rev 7:9). Several brethren brought palm branches that many of the brethren waved as they sang "The Days of Elijah and other inspiring music". (see pictures pages 20-21).

Music

The congregational music at the Utica, Illinois, Feast was very inspiring. It was a variety of traditional hymns and modern praise and worship music led by a group of both younger and older musicians. I admit I might be biased because my children were involved, but there were others who commented to me that this was the best music they had experienced in 30 years or more of Feast keeping. Certainly most of the brethren came for the music services, and many clapped along to the vigorous songs and applauded afterward. They had the inspiring feeling that one feels in a large, well-run concert.

Kevan Umberfield and Josh Edwards organized the congregational music. The words were always on a large screen so that everyone could see them and sing looking up. There were always several singers accompanied by two or more guitars, bass guitar, piano and drums. The Bible has numerous references and even commands to praise God with multi-stringed instruments, tambourines (a type of drum) and cymbals.

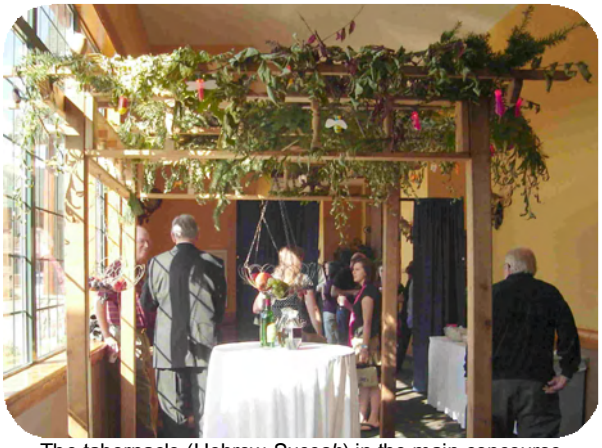
The drums had microphones and were run through the sound system. This is the first time this writer has seen that done at any independent Feast and was concerned that there might be a lot of complaints about "loud drums". But he has learned over the years that when people complain about "loud drums" it is usually "not so good drums" that are the real difficulty. Anyone can make a sound on a drum set. But to stay precisely in rhythm and enhance music and its message, rather than just add additional noise, requires a lot of skill and care. Jesse Edwards, with more than 10 years of experience and two years of music college more than filled the bill.

The instruments and singers blended well together to provide powerful but worshipful music which was an inspiration to young and old alike. **Nearly all the little**

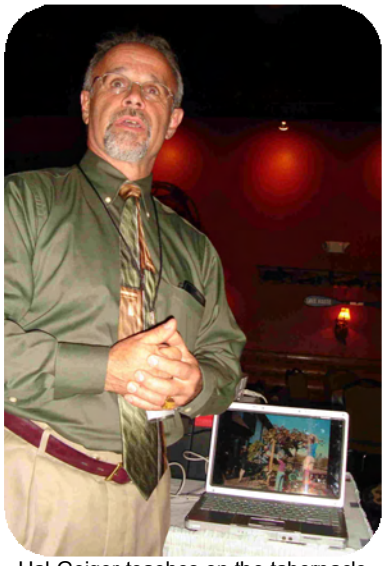
Continued on page 22

Utica Feast Pictures 2009

Some brethren rejoicing with branches at the Feast (Lev 23:40)

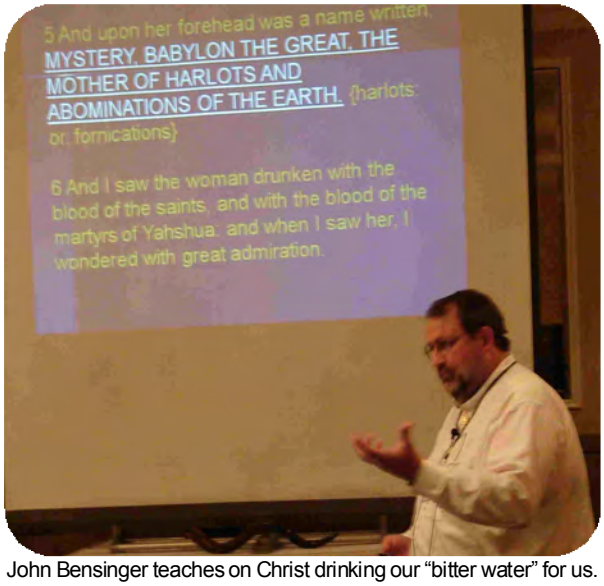


The tabernacle (Hebrew *Succah*) in the main concourse



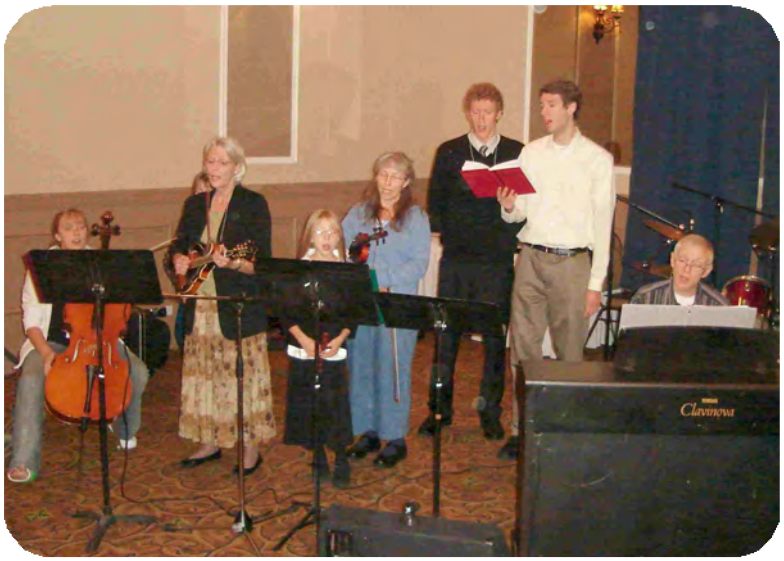
Hal Geiger teaches on the tabernacle

Musicians for inspiring daily congregational music. We turned the piano around for you.



John Bensinger teaches on Christ drinking our "bitter water" for us.

We can still listen, read the Bible & take notes—without computers!

Bonnie Monahan sings "If we are the body"

Bredehoft, Umberfield and Naasz families combine for special music.

Baby, mom, grandma at Family Day.

Family Day: all ages work together to build and race "chariots".

Family Day: the first racers cross the finish line as crowds watch.

More pictures p. 30

A football game right outside your front door: simple and fun!!

Several days, several games, and sometimes several hours!

"Wonderful Feast" from p. 19

children were standing up with excitement; some were singing along or pretending to play guitar or drums with their hands. A few times, people used an empty place at the back of the room for praise dancing (Psalm 149:3; 150:4). Add to this the occasional blast of the *shofar* (rams horn trumpet) in appropriate places, it was a Feast to remember and to hope to experience again.

The special music was equally stirring and even greater in variety, from vocal solos, to instrumental solos, to different sizes of vocal and instrumental groups to artsy sign language. Some numbers had been rehearsed for weeks before the Feast, others were put together at the Feast—with musicians from across the country. There were more songs available than there was time to schedule.

Activities

This Utica Feast had a wide variety of well-organized activities. See the pictures on pages 20-21 and 30. Around 250 people attended each of these major activities:

Picnic and Family day at Buffalo Rock State Park. Brethren grilled the meat and provided the other food for a very nice outdoor meal. Any brethren who wanted to participate—children to adults—were divided up into 13 teams for a "chariot race". They were given wood, rope, plastic, cardboard, paint, hammers, nails, saws and about an hour to build a "chariot"—more like a sled—and a safety helmet to certain specifications. At least one member had to ride on the sled, and the others had to pull them around the race course. It was a definite advantage to have a young child on the team—a lightweight rider. Some of the "chariots" were works of art, others were designed for strength and efficiency to win the race. One team finally won the race, but everybody had a good time learning to work with other brethren in new situations.

Group Lunch between Seminars. This certainly was a welcome break during a long day of seminars—and made it easy to have a nice meal and be on time for the first seminar after lunch.

Family Dinner Dance at Starved Rock State Park. The lodge was beautiful and the food was excellent. The dance included a limbo competition and a "moonwalk" competition. Dennis Gonzalo did an excellent job of putting together a variety of old and new music, with lots of energy, but avoiding the perverted messages that are so common in music. As might be expected, the young people made the greatest use of the dance floor. Much of the dancing was line and group dancing—not the competition for who is going to ask who to dance, as too often occurs.

Progressive Dinner at Brethren's Villas. Residents of six pairs of villas served appetizers, drinks, salad, soup, entree, and desert. The brethren wandered among the villas, eating their meal as they desired. More people volunteered to serve than were needed. They were well organized in shifts so the servers had a chance to go around and eat also. It was a very natural way to meet and have something to talk about with many different fellow-believers. Some places one might accept the food and eat it walking out the door, in other places one might sit down and talk for half an hour.

Feast Extravaganza 2009—the Family Fun Show. This show lasted over three hours and most Feast-goers stayed till the end. It was an entertaining mix of comedy, instrumental solos, dance, vocal solos and combos. All but a few of the participants were young people—some as young as six. But some 50-year olds gave it there best, too. Special instruments included the flute, violin, viola, cello, mandolin and conga drums. One young lady, who was attending the Feast for the first time said, "This was awesome. It was my first time to sing with a live band." The entire show program is posted at www.Feast2009.org.

Touch Football Games. These were not on the schedule, but football games were certainly took place several times on the field between the villas. There were as many as 10 on a team at times. It was spirited, energetic fun, muddy at times, but no injuries.

Friday Night Group Meal. The final group meal was held at the main lodge. It is a wonderful thing to be able to get up and walk among the tables and converse with old friends and meet new brethren, without the distractions inherent in secular restaurants. This must have been what it was like during the time of Joshua and the Elders, when God-fearing people came to Jerusalem to keep the Feasts.

Next Year

This writer will hope that the brethren who organized this Feast will continue to work together and plan another one for 2010. They are doing a good work, and the world needs more good works right now. This is one of the few Church of God works that is growing and one of the few that is attracting young people. Some Feast sites appear to be more of an eight-day infomercial for their sponsoring organization.

Economic times are getting more difficult, and it might be good to find less expensive surroundings—but still a place where everyone can stay, eat and meet together. More progressive dinners and brethren-run picnics would also help keep the costs down—and serve to improve the fellowship.

May the Eternal bless everyone who is planning to keep His Feasts with a good heart in this coming year.

Feast of Tabernacles 2009, Utica, Illinois

Teens' Message to Parents

Older believers should not think church teens are opposed to God and that we must force Him upon them. Most want to grow to live a righteous life and to responsibly take care of themselves. Here is how they are asking for help.

by Norman Edwards

Most of the teens at 2009 Feast in Utica, Ill, listened to the four sermons and the dozen teen seminars. This writer felt it was worth spending part of a study listening to the teens. Than happened at the Thursday, 10:30 a.m. seminar. It with a brief lesson, then the teens were asked to give their answers to six questions: what was going well and what needed improvement at this **Feast**, with their **church**, and with their **parents**. Their answers can be a great blessing to parents and servants in the Body of Christ.

The study started with a brief admonition to let living things forever remind us or our creator God. If we were to put old electronic circuit boards in a washing machine and turn it on, how long would it take to create a working electronic device? If a working device emerged—maybe a battery lodged in some metal that would light an LED—would we expect every part of this newfound gizmo to work? Or would we expect mostly junk with only a few parts working?

The young people agreed that only a small part of the device would have any function at all. Then they were asked to look at themselves, and living things in nature. They noticed that everything works: hands, feet, eyes, ears. Every part has a function and works very well. Would we expect that washing machine gizmo to be able to reproduce more gizmos like itself? That is utterly ridiculous. Yet, that is what we see in God's creation: millions of distinct species all reproducing themselves.

While scientists disagree greatly on the total number of distinct species on earth, 20 million is about the middle of the estimates. Evolutionists say that life has been on earth for about 2 billion years. What is 2 billion divided by 20 million? One young person quickly said 100 (right!). If evolution is true, a new successful species must be evolving on earth every 100 years. But if only one in ten thousand of newly evolved species are successful—able to reproduce themselves—then we should be seeing a hundred unsuccessful new species trying to evolve every year. Yet scientists never observe it. If it does happen by random chance, why can't scientist make new species evolve in the laboratory?

Teens Answer Six Questions

About thirty teens were present when these questions were asked. At the beginning, this writer began to type summaries of their answers on a computer connected to a projection screen so that everyone could see them. As the young people began snickering at all of the mistakes and corrections displayed before them, one of the teens, whom this writer did not know, volunteered to do the typing—which made the seminar so much easier to manage. Thanks a lot, Krissy!

Below, we list the responses given by the teens—edited slightly for easier reading. The young people were not prompted for answers—these are their suggestions. This writer added his comments at each section's end.

What did you like about this Feast of Tabernacles?

1. Lots of family activities.
2. Amazing talent of people.
3. Seeing friends that we have not seen in several months.
4. Having friends all close together in one area
5. Teen seminars with a variety of different teachers
6. Making new friends from the many people who come.

Comment: We could summarize this by saying that the teens want to be with their peers—and also their parents. They enjoy learning—and they like the diversity, rather than just the same person all of the time. They did not mention the water park, the fancy meals, or other entertainment. They liked having all of the people close together. Feast and church activity planners should take note of this: plan a family and friendly Feast, not a fancy and frivolous Feast.

How could future Feasts be improved?

1. Add some break time between seminars!!!
2. Allow more free time—which might mean less music, less announcements, etc.
3. Make sermons shorter—they can be concise and still have a good message.
4. Presentation people need to be more organized.
5. Add some organized teen socials or "mixers"—activities where new teens that did not know a lot of the other people would find it easy to fit in and get to know others.

Comment: The first teen suggestion here was probably the single most simple thing that could have been done to improve the Feast. Seminars were scheduled in hour blocks with no space in-between. Long-winded speakers (like this writer) tended to start at the beginning and talk right up the scheduled end. This left no scheduled time for setup, going to other rooms,

water/rest-room stops, etc.

The other suggestions again emphasize the theme of friendship and involving all teens who attend.

What do you like about your church services?

The young people were about evenly divided between those who attended church services 1) at home with just their family, 2) in homes with other people and 3) in a building with other people. Some teens who did not meet with others wished that they could. Others said the place doesn't matter, where you are is where God wants you to be.

1. Hearing from people who spoke because they wanted to, rather than a minister who speaks all the time.
2. Seeing a diversity of videos.
3. Good fellowship without conflict.
4. Being involved in reading through the books of the Bible and discussing them, rather than someone talking to you and trying to remember everything.
5. Hymns **and** new songs.
6. Open Bible study allowing people to bring up things they want to talk about.
7. Praise Worship.
8. **Variety** in Bible studies and sermons.

Comment: After considering this, I realized that church services should largely be geared for the teen and young adult. These are the ones who most need instruction to run their lives. The same messages will be useful to new believers who are just beginning to attend. Long-time believers are most able to study on their own and most likely to organize a study with other believers. The place for advanced and technical study is an adult Bible study.

How could church services be improved?

1. Keep "down time" to a minimum. Presentations should be thought out and organized.
2. Have more songs we know! Provide hymn books with words and music.
3. Avoid discussion about irrelevant stuff—no filibustering!
4. More youth stuff!!!!!!!!!!!
5. Churches should be more interactive, more interesting, keep your attention! People should want to go, not go because they think they should.
6. Work with (service projects, evangelism) or meet together with other groups!

Comment: Those who plan services must always keep in mind: what is interesting to all of the people who are listening. When a presenter runs out of time for organization or preparation, it is easy to think "the people will be patient with me, they are going to be their anyway". After too many difficult presentations, they may not be.

As a minor correction to point 2 above, the way most people learn new songs is to listen to songs that, initially, "they don't know". Nevertheless, services should contain a mix of songs familiar to those who attend (whatever their background may be) and new songs.

What do you like about your parents?

1. Encouragement.
2. Caring for us.
3. **Appreciation!**
4. Making sacrifices for us.
5. Doing things so we can have a good time.
6. Helping us do things with our friends: providing a place for our friends to come, buying food and yummies for us.
7. Being able to talk to them about anything.
8. Listening to us without judging.
9. Asking us positive questions.
10. **Having a voice:** listening to our opinions and concerns.
11. Not treating us like a dumb kid.
12. Trusting us to do the right thing.
13. Talking about God!!!!
14. Having expectations—preparing us for the rest of our life!
15. Giving us a reasonable amount of work.
16. Freedom to make some choices ourselves.

Comment: This list is a mixture of receiving nice things from parents and a demonstration that teens realize they need their parents to help them grow into adults. It is so difficult for parents to make the transition from telling their children what to do and to think when they are little, to asking them why they do and what they think when they are older. Even when a teen tells a parent they did something awful, it is better for the parent to ask: Is that what you wanted to do? Did it work out the way you expected? Would you do it again? What does the Bible say about it? Do you think it is what God wanted for you?

How could parents improve?

1. Explain their reasoning for what they do. "Because I said so!!" or "I'm in charge and that's the way it is" are not a good answer for young people learning to manage their own lives!!!
2. Do not run a family like a dictatorship.
3. **Give us more appreciation!!!**
4. Trust us more! It is unfair when we do everything right and we still are not trusted!
5. Listen to how ***we*** feel, especially when you are telling us "no".
6. Stop assuming!!!!
7. When you ask us something, don't forget it!!!
8. Stop expecting us to read your mind!!!
9. Realize that High School is different now than it was back then!
10. Things were not better in the old days.
11. Don't concentrate on the one thing we messed up on, when we did everything else right.
12. Let us know about the major things happening in your lives, do not spring major family changes on us (moves, loss of jobs, etc) at the last minute.
13. ***Do not fear our independence!*** It is not a personal attack! We are not being rebellious.
14. Stop interrogating us!!!!
15. Do not ask for our input and then get angry when we give it.
16. Our constructive criticism should not be interpreted as a

personal attack!

17. Have more family discussions! Do not have discussions about us when we are not even there.
18. Do not talk about us like we are not there when we really are.
19. Don't judge us over little things and ignore the big things.
20. **Do not deliberately give us GUILT TRIPS**!!!!! (We are in debt to you, etc.)
21. ***Let us make our own mistakes and learn***!!!!
22. Deal with us in peace, instead of yelling.

Comment: Most of these are good advice to parents. This is not to say that if parents were to do all of these things the difficulties with raising young people would suddenly be over. There are many areas where young people need to make changes also. But parents, with years of Christianity under their belts, and the controlling hand in the household, can do far more to bring peace to the household than their children.

Comments on a few of the specific points, above, follow:

#1. Parents of teens must always remember that it is their mission to explain biblical and successful principles to their young people so that they will continue in them by their own decision. Without understanding, they are not likely to continue. Parents tend to say "because I said so" when they do not want to get into an argument with their child—maybe they don't have the time right now. There may be times when a parent does not even know why they want something done a certain way, but they sure know. It is best for a parent to give whatever honest explanation they have and then say that you are doing it this way in your family, and when the child has their own family, they will be free to do it their way.

#4. Perfectionism is a very common and dangerous tendency in parents. They want their child to do everything right. While it would be wonderful to have a "perfect child", it is unreasonable and destructive to expect such. Children see their parents imperfections and their hypocrisy. Children of perfectionist parents tend to leave home (sometimes early) and not come back.

#5. A lot can be accomplished by acknowledging the feelings of our teens, even when we do not believe in doing what they want us to do.

#6. When children are young, they learn almost everything they know from their parents. It is reasonable for parents to assume the child doesn't know anything the parent doesn't know. But as the teen years progress, that concept crumbles as teens read and learn from school and friends.

#7. Two issues are probably at play here. Parents have a tendency to not remember answers they do not want to hear, so they ask their teen again hoping to get a different answer. This bugs the teen because they think they are being coaxed to change their mind. On the other hand, older people's memories are not as good as teen's and if they forget in innocence, the teen should be patient.

#8. It is easy for parents to think about things, talk about them between each other, but never actually say them to their teens--but still expect them to know.

#12. This writer has heard parents say they do not deliberately tell their teens about fun things the family is doing until immediately before because their teen will be so excited about it they will not get work done. That is saying: "my child will have to go elsewhere to learn the skill of doing their work while something exciting is planned". It also drives the child away from the parents who deprive them of the pre-excitement, and to their teen friends who would not withhold information like that from them. How much better is it to take the up-front approach of telling the teen, "we have something exciting planned, will you promise to try to get your work done if I tell you about it now?" Similarly, if parents have some difficulty, like a loss of their job or living place, teens want to know as soon as possible so they can make their plans accordingly.

#14. Parents who want communication with their children should not interrogate them till they confess to some mistake and then punish them for it. When parents discovers child's sin, it is good to bring appropriate consequences. But when a child realizes they have made a mistake and comes to confess it, consequences are often not helpful. The child's own repentance is often more valuable.

#15. This may sound trivial to the point of being unnecessary, but it happens frequently. When parents ask their teens what they think, they should not insist that the teens think like the parents. Even if the child's thinking is clearly unbiblical, the parent should not be angry at the child for thinking it. A peaceful teaching of the biblical truth, and asking of the teen to consider it is all that is necessary.

#21. Allowing young people to make mistakes—hopefully not destructive mistakes, is a good thing for parents to do. That does not mean that the parent should pull out the money box and continuously pay the cost of their teen's mistakes. Letting the teen pay for their own mistakes is a very worthwhile thing for someone who wants to be "grown up".

#22. Deal in peace instead of yelling. That is great advice for both parents and teens.

May parents strive to be better parents, and young people strive to be better children. May we all strive to be better children of our Father in Heaven.

> At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matt 18:1-4). 📖

Torah in the Garden...

by Bob Wells

Gen 2:8 And YHVH Elohym planted a garden eastward in Eden; 10 and a River went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads.

We see here that in the land of Eden G-d placed a garden, and from this land, [Eden], came a river and it flowed eastward "into the Garden". From there it flowed out and separated into four rivers.

Gen 3:8 And they heard the sound of YHVH Elohym walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the face of YHVH Elohym, [the presence of the LORD], amongst the trees of the garden.

This is quite clear that the Creator walked and talked with Adam in the Garden. And, as it was, so shall it be. G-d will once again dwell [tabernacle] with man, just as Revelation says.

Rev 21:3 21:1-2 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from Elohym out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of Elohym [is] with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and Elohym himself shall be with them, [and be] their Elohym.

"Behold, the tabernacle of Elohym"

Ezek 47:1-5 *Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward; for the forefront of the house [stood toward] the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the south [side] of the altar, Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the utter gate by the way that looketh eastward; and, behold, there ran out waters on the right side. And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the waters [were] to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters [were] to the loins. Afterwards he measured a thousand; [and it was] a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.*

Four times Ezekiel passed through the waters, except the last… "a river that could not be passed over". Four rivers just like the four rivers that flowed "from" the Garden in Eden where dwelt the presence of Elohym. There is the same Garden in Heaven, of which the earthly Garden is patterned after.

Ezek 31:8 *The cedars in the garden of God could not hide him: the fir trees were not like his boughs, and the chestnut trees were not like his branches; nor any tree in the garden of God was like unto him in his beauty. I have made him fair by the multitude of his branches: so that all the trees of Eden, that [were] in the garden of God, envied him.*

From the time of Adam onward, there was a specific place where God was to be worshiped. When we are told in Genesis 4: verses 3 and 4, that Cain and Abel *"brought an offering unto the Lord,"* the implication is clear that they came to some particular location. When we read that Abel brought *"the firstling of his flock and the fat thereof,"* we cannot escape the conclusion that there was an altar where the victim must be offered and upon which its fat must be burned. That place of worship appears to have been located at the east of the Garden of Eden. Exactly as it was in Jerusalem where you entered into the Temple, via the Eastern gate, and made sacrifice before the Holy place [Makom HaKodesh]. When Elohym told Cain that "sin waiteth at the door", this was not a metaphor that the door was to his heart. It was at the entrance via which Cain came into the Presence and via which he would leave. The inferences in verse 16, "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord," which can hardly mean less than that he was formally prohibited from the place where the presence of G-d was. For to go "out", you must first have come "in".

Now we know, according to Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, that it was only the High Priest who could go into "The Holy Place" [Makom Hakodesh], where the Presence of G-d was. And he could only do this once a year, on the Day of Atonement 'Yom Kippur'. At one time the "first born" was the Priest in every family. Cain was firstborn. This seems to be a picture of "the sons of Aaron, [Exo 28:1] and the

Editor's Note:

This article was printed without any editing in order to avoid changing the author's original intent. I understand that many believers accept concepts similar to this article, but I have noted my differences at the end. This article uses versions of the Bible which emphasize Hebrew words for important biblical things:

Torah - The first five books of the Bible. In a general sense, The Eternal's law or teaching.

YHVH - The Eternal's name, usually translated "LORD".

Elohym-Usually translated "God".

G-d - Used to avoid writing what some people consider to be the name of a pagan deity.

sons of Levi" [Num 16:8], being chosen for service.

Gen 4: 6-7 *And YHVH said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee [shall be] his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.* {be accepted: or, have the excellency} …..{unto…: or, subject unto thee}

We see by the above scripture Cain was to have the excellency. Now Cain was angry, not with G–d for not accepting his offering, but with Abel. G-d told him that he had the pre-eminence over Abel, and he had rule over him, being the first born. The last words in this scripture states to Cain "and thou shalt rule over him", this cannot refer to his overcoming "SIN".

In their commentary on Genesis, Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown translate the last verse of chapter 3 as follows: "And he [God] dwelt at the east of the Garden of Eden between the Cherubim, as a Shekinah [a fire tongue or fire sword] ……." The same thought is presented in the Jerusalem Targum, [Judaic commentary on scripture].. Thus it would seem, that when man was expelled from the Garden, God established a mercy-seat, protected by cherubim, the fire tongue or sword being the emblem of His presence, and whosoever would worship Him must approach that mercy seat with a bloody sacrifice. We may add that the Hebrew word "shakan" which in Genesis 3:24 is rendered "placed," is defined in Young's concordance "to tabernacle". Eighty-three times in the Old Testament it is translated "to dwell," as in Exodus 25:8, And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell [shakan] among them, and so forth. Cherubim are always associated with the presence of G-d. The Cherubim guarded "the way to the Tree of Life" not the way into the Garden.

Sacrifice for sin was established with Adam. The death of an innocent victim for the sin of Adam and Eve was prophetically given to them by the slaying of some animal and the shedding of its blood. The example was given to him by G-d.

Gen 3:21 *Unto Adam also and to his wife did YHVH Elohym, make coats of skins, and clothed them.*

The word "skins" is ['owr], which is translated "hides". It is possible that it could have been the hides of a lamb, being prophetic of "The Lamb of G-d". But, then again it could have been the skin of a goat……

Lev 4:23-26 *Or if his sin, wherein he hath sinned, come to his knowledge; he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a male without blemish: And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the goat, and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the LORD: it [is] a sin offering. And the priest shall take of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, and put [it] upon the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and shall pour out his blood at the bottom of the altar of burnt offering. And he shall burn all his fat upon the altar, as the fat of the sacrifice of peace offerings: and the priest shall make an atonement for him as concerning his sin, and it shall be forgiven him.*

Abel brought "the firstling of his flock and the fat thereof". The similarities between Abel's offering and those instituted during the Exodus are too striking not to be connected. Abel's sacrifice has a connotation as to being an offering for sin, Cain's does not. What all of this alludes to is that there was a place to worship G-d even before the Tabernacle in the Wilderness and before the Temple in Jerusalem. And that place was "the Garden in Eden".

[When G-d had removed His presence from off of the earth, we cannot be sure. I believe it was after the first "murder", or rather ***manslaughter,*** I do not believe Cain intended to KILL Abel]. G-d cannot dwell in the presence of Evil.

Noah's very first act on taking possession of the new earth was to engage in a service of solemn worship: *"And Noah built an altar unto the Lord: and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt*

offering on the altar" (Gen. 8:20).

My question is how did he, [Noah], know how to make the offering in the first place? This was an altar of burnt sacrifice that, supposedly, Moses introduced in Exodus 20:24, 38:1 etc. Noah, even before he built the ark had knowledge of what animals were clean and unclean, {kosher}.

Gen 7:2 *Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that [are] not clean by two, the male and his female.*

Yet, this seems to be introduced again, by Moshe [Moses] Lev 11:46-47 *This [is] the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moveth in the waters, and of every creature that creepeth upon the earth: To make a difference between the unclean and the clean, and between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten.*

Let us remember also Abraham, long before Moshe had the Torah…. Gen *26:5 Because that* ***Abraham obeyed*** *my voice, and kept my charge,* ***my commandments***, ***my statutes***, *and* ***my laws.***

The people that were destroyed by the flood, could have shouted…. 'what have we done wrong, there was no LAW for us to break, we are not guilty of anything". *Rom 4:15 Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, [there is] no transgression.* If there is no law against murder, then there is no punishment. If there is no law against speeding, then you can speed. Sin is the breaking of the law. Sin in Hebrew is "Khatta'ah" and means "an offense"! An offense against what? An offense against the Torah!

SIN ….{Khatta'ah} miss, miss the way, go wrong, incur guilt…..

TORAH….. direction, instruction, (human or divine) …root word, Yarah…. to lay or throw [spec. an arrow], i.e.: to shoot; to point out [as if pointing the finger].

The TORAH is the GOAL, and to sin is to "miss the mark". The word for LAW is …. (Heb. = Khok) ... {the Torah, [first five books of the Bible], is not "the law", it is instruction, it is the way, the target!]

So when G-d said to Cain, *"sin lieth at the door"* [Gen 4:6,7 above] He is stating that Cain was about to miss the mark of "THE TORAH". It existed in the Garden. It exists NOW, and will eternally exist. Jer 31:33 *But this [shall be] the [new] covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days saith the LORD, I* ***will put my TORAH [#8451] in their inward parts,*** *and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and* ***they shall be my people.***

ONLY those with the TORAH in their hearts will be HIS people! Selah.

Rev 2:7 *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Assemblies; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*

John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Torah and the Torah [Devarim] was with G-d and G-d was the Torah [Devarim]".

In the beginning, in the Garden, and forever.

Adam, Noah, and Abraham, had the Torah, [the Words of G-d, Devarim].

Jer 31:33 *But this [shall be] the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law [Torah] in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

Isa 2:3 *And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.* Micah 4:2

For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah! **[Not my words BUT G-d's].**

The Torah was in the Garden, and the Garden of G-d will be back upon the Earth, just as Ezekiel said. Prepare to KEEP the Torah! 📖

Our Father Works in Diverse Ways

by Norman Edwards

There is a certain comfort in believing that our Father in heaven has always had one set of expectations for His people, and that we, through study, now have a very good understanding of His expectations. How can He deny us salvation if we are sincerely living by them?

We should live by our understanding of what the Eternal expects of us. But we also must realize that the Eternal does not judge us only by what we do, but by what we do compared to what we know:

"And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. **For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more**" (Luke 12:47-48)

Those who understand the scriptures better cannot expect that they will somehow be judged far more favorably than those who understand little, but do what they know. The parable of the Talents show us that our Messiah judges an unfaithful steward not by the whole Torah, but by his own words:

"And he said to him, '**Out of your own mouth I will judge you**, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. 'Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my

coming I might have collected it with interest?'" (Luke 19:22-23).

The Scripture clearly shows us that our Father can conflict an individual of sin even if he does not understand the law:

> For as many as have **sinned without law will also perish without law**, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when **Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves,** who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) (Rom 2:12-15).

Whole Torah not in Garden

Adam and Eve did not need the Torah to know that they disobeyed the Eternal. They hid from Him like a guilty child (Gen 3:8). He told them what to do and they sinned. As stated above, "sin" is "missing the mark"—in this case, not doing what the Eternal verbally told them to do.

Cain knew that he sinned, too. The Scripture mentions no laws broken by the pre-flood people, only that they were "evil continually" (Gen 6:5). Yet the Eternal convicted them of sin because Noah preached righteousness to them (2Pet 2:5).

The verses used in the above article to "prove" that the Torah was in the Garden are either misinterpreted or mistranslated. Certainly, there were many similarities in the Eternal's teaching to Adam and Eve, including sin offerings, the priesthood, etc. But the only verse cited that seems to say that the Torah was in the garden was a mistranslation of John 1:1:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1)

The Greek word here translated "word" is *logos* which means the spoken word. The Greek word for law, synonymous with *Torah* is *nomos.* Later on in the same chapter, John use *nomos* to describe what Moses wrote (John 1:45), but he **does not** say that *nomos* or *Torah* existed from the beginning.

The Torah is not just law, it is also history. Almost none of the history of the Torah existed in the Garden. The Eternal said, "For **now I know** that you [Abraham] fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me" (Gen 22:12). Before Abraham was tested, the Eternal did not yet know. Just as He did not previously foresee some of the depraved evil recorded in the Torah:

> "And they built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, **nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination**, to cause Judah to sin" (Jer 32:35, see also Jer 7:31; 19:5; Lev 18:21; 20:1-5).

There are many other obvious areas where teachings of the Torah could not have been in the Garden of Eden. There were no Levites or Aaronic priesthood, so the dozens of commands that apply to them were not in the Garden. There was no death penalty for Murder carried out against Cain or Lamech, as it is not given until after the flood:

> "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man" (Gen 9:6).

While there may have been a place of worship in the Garden, and a temple in Jerusalem for worship, our Messiah showed a time when a specific place would no longer be necessary:

> "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you *Jews* say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when **you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father**. 22You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when **the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth**; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him" (John 4:20-23).

Does the Eternal actually change the way he deals with mankind at times? Undoubtedly!

> **God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past** to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds (Heb 1:1-2).

Writing Torah on our Hearts

The new covenant is the writing of the Torah (the law) on our hearts (Jer 31:33). The Messiah was to magnify the Torah and make it honorable (Isa 42:21). That magnification occurred in his teaching on the mountain (Matt 5-7). That magnified Torah is to be written on our hearts.

Having the whole Torah in one's mind does not necessarily help in writing it on one's heart. Most of the Scribes and Pharisees knew the Torah very well, but it was far away from their hearts (Matt 23). Yet there was one exceptional scribe who said little, but had much of that law on his heart because he was close to being ready for the Kingdom:

> "And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, **"You are not far from the kingdom of God...."** (Mark 12:33-34).

Even though the sacrifices and other rituals were complex commands, performing them perfectly did not write the Torah on one's heart. Loving one's neighbor as oneself—always—is much more difficult. May the Eternal give us hearts to do that! 📖

Utica Feast Pictures 2009 continued from p. 21

Family Dinner Dance: great food at Starved Rock State Park

Jeff Ledy makes a few announcements and opens with prayer

Lots of line dancing and other group dancing. The floor was often full!

The Ptacek family: Dad, mom & one daughter.

Everyone had a good time: dancing, watching, talking, eating...

Limbo contest, with Marisa Gonzalo receiving the award from Dad.

We print a representative sampling of our mail—both positive and negative. We do not include names unless we are fairly sure that the writer would not object.

To avoid any difficulty, writers should specify how much of their name and address they would like us to print.

Living His Way

LETTER: October 21, 2009

Dear Norman,

Tanuja and myself are sending you a a check for [amount removed] toward the Servants' News magazine and the work of your ministry at PABC. May our Father bless you all at PABC as you strive to live His Way. May His Kingdom come soon on earth!

With many blessings,

— Rahul, Illinois

RESPONSE: Thank you for your encouragement. The difficulties that we have suffered here at PABC give us a clear understanding of how far we need to go to be ready to rule with Christ at His return. Even when one lives among and ministers to people who claim to be believers, there are some major differences of opinion about the meaning and application of scripture. But if we look to our father in heaven to correct us, He does it.

> Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter (1Pet 4:12-16).
>
> If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us (2Tim 2:12).

—NSE

The Christian Way

LETTER: October 23, 2009

Norm,

This little offering is for you to use as you see fit. Thanks for the magazine. I see nothing wrong with what you are doing, helping and serving others: friends, family, strangers—it makes no difference. This is the Christian way, the way I've tried to live for 45 years.

—Jim, Ohio

RESPONSE: Thank you, also. It is amazing how similar your brief letter is to the one (above) that I received just two days prior. While truth is very important, our Savior said **other people** would recognize us as believers by our love:

> By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:35).

—NSE

Trying to Take Our Faith Away from Christ

[This letter contains quotes from the Worldwide Church of God's Bible Correspondence Course. They are in this bold typestyle. The "Comment:" paragraphs are also copied from that correspondence course.]

LETTER: October 14, 2009

Dear Norm,

Guy [writer's husband] and I left the Worldwide Church of God in 1980 just after Trumpets. We went with CGI and left when we found out what GTA was like. We went with United Church of God twice. Since I haven't attended with anyone. I have learned more and have grown more.

Lesson 49, printed in 1967 entitled "I will build My Church", page 9, subhead "What Was Peter's Job?", question 6:

On Peter's first trip, did John accompany him? Acts 8:14. Did the Church usually send out men by twos? Luke 10:1; Acts 15:39. Jesus Christ from the beginning designed John to be the one to supervise the whole Church after all the other apostles were dead. John 21:22-23.

Comment: This does not mean that Peter or John was ever the Head of the Church or in a pontifical office over the other apostles. Notice Peter and John were sent by the apostles collectively under Christ's inspiration.

Lesson 19, printed in 1983 (new one), "What and Why the Church", subhead "The Real Purpose of the Church", question 8:

What did Christ command Peter, who was to become the leading apostle of the early Church? John 21:15-17.

Under subhead "Government in the Church", question 1:

Who set government in the Church? 1Cor 12:28.

Comment: Just as ancient Israel's government, as established by God, was hierarchical, the Church of God today is organized under theocratic government, hierarchical in form. Government is from top down—the very opposite of democracy. The members do not set officials in the Church—God does, even as He sets lay members in the Church. 1Cor 12:18; John 6:44; Acts 2:47.

The government presently in God's church is the same form of government by which Christ shall rule all nations during the Millennium, and the Great White Throne judgment period. Those in God's Church today have voluntarily placed themselves under the authority of His government. Thus they are learning to rule in the Kingdom of God. How? By first being ruled by the government of God during their mortal lives. Spirit-begotten children learn to rule in preparation for the World Tomorrow by submitting to and administering God's government within his Church today.

Under the subheading "Salvation Outside God's Church?":

Can a person receive salvation outside of God's Church—the "mother" through whom His Spirit-Begotten children are being fed spiritual food?

(It was more like milk and pablum.)

In Question 1:

To what did Jesus liken Himself by analogy? John 15:1. And to what did He compare individual members of His Church? Verse 5. Can the branches bear fruit apart from the vine? Verse 4.

Comment: Jesus pictured Himself as the vine and those of His Church as the branches on that vine. Notice that Jesus is not several separated vines—He is the one vine! The members of the body of Christ are the branches—but not separated, isolated branches. All are joined to the one vine—the body of Christ.

Question 2:

But What happens to those branches that are separated and broken off from the vine—that separate themselves from the body of Christ? John 15:2,6.

Comment: Jesus was speaking to those chosen to be apostles in His Church. He told them that the Father is the husbandman—the vinedresser. John 15:1. Every branch of this vine (the body of Christ, the Church) that does not bear fruit for the Kingdom, the Father cuts off so that the organized, united vine may bear more fruit.

Jesus' analogy is a grave warning to those who would cut themselves off from His Church. They will stop growing, wither and finally die spiritually.

First Christ is the vine, next HWA has the Church as the vine.

God will not allow anyone into his Family who refused to be part of the Church receiving spiritual training. That's why it is so important for those who are called and begotten of God to grow

(which they didn't)

and be loyal

(which they were)

and obedient to the government of God in His Church—for the Church is indeed the Kingdom of God in embryo, soon to be born of God!

Where did HWA get this from? It is not in the Bible.

I Thought that you would find this interesting

Your sister in Christ,

—Brigitte Le Burel, Comox, BC, Canada

RESPONSE: You did a very good job of pointing out what happened in the WCG—and the same thing happens in hundreds of other churches. The Scriptures focus on Christ as being the Head of the Church, the vine, our savior, the chief shepherd, etc. Denominational teachers quote all of those verses. But then, they carefully transfer the object of those verses to their own church group or organization. Suddenly, one has to be a member of their organization to be in the Body of Christ. And the Bible says nothing about church membership rosters. Nor does it set up a church board or hierarchy which has the right to determine who is in the body of Christ.

From the change in text from the old Correspondence Course to the new one, somebody had to know what they were doing when they changed it from a scriptural explanation to a non-scriptural one. The claim that God gave ancient Israel a hierarchy is obviously false by reading 1 Samuel 8. It was Israel that asked for a king against God's wishes. He gave them judges, to whom they could go when they had disputes with others (Ex 22:9; Deut 1:16; 16:18-20; 19:16-19; 21:1-9; 25:1-3).

It is good to discover that we have been taught and accepted error, to repent of that error, and to depart from that error. Unfortunately, that is not **all** that Christ expects of us.

> "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (John 15:8).
>
> Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is (1Cor 3:13).

Many groups that erroneously taught that their church organization was the "body of Christ' still bore fruit and did good works. The WCG's correspondence courses contained much Bible truth and taught hundreds of thousands of people. Some of the information in them was not easily available elsewhere. Even though members there were primarily expected to "pray, pay, stay and obey", at least some significant part of the money they sent was used to do good work, and their prayers were probably heard (Jms 5:16).

When we appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2Cor 5:10), **we do not want Him to say:.** "I appreciated your tithes, prayers and service while you were in that church denomination. I was even happier when you studied your Bible and realized that you could come directly to Me and did not need a church denomination with its human government. After you left, you studied and learned so much more truth. But you never used all you learned to edify the brethren in My Church or to teach My truth to unbelievers."

It is **one thing** to learn that we do not need a church denomination with a schooled ministry to learn the Bible. Christ can teach us. It is **a different thing** to learn that we do not need a church denomination with a schooled ministry to be effective in

Christian service and evangelism.

Independent believers and their congregations have been improving in their efforts to do Christ's work. The Feast and other articles in this issue show that. But we still have a long way to go.

—NSE

Book of Galatians

LETTER: October 18, 2009

Hi Norm:

Regarding the letter about the Book of Galatians (SN July-Aug 2009, p. 33). I have no opinion about whether the Galatians were Jews, Israelites or gentiles, but the point was raised that the name derives from Celtic tribes of western Europe. You and your readers might be interested to know that these Celts were referred to variously as Gauls or Galatae which terms correspond with the Hebrew 'Gola' or 'Galut' which means 'the exile'. The term 'galut' is still used in common speech by Jews to refer to the Diaspora. (I wonder if slang terms like 'galoot' and 'guy' (goi) might have been Jewish witticisms aimed at non-Jews—just a thought!).

This fact alone makes it all but certain that the Celtic peoples of western Europe are descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes. The Galatians of Anatolia – who gave the region its name—originated with a Celtic invasion of that part of the world a couple of centuries before. Whether Paul or anyone else in the NT era made the connection I don't know. It might have some bearing on the vexed questions of exactly who were the Galatians referred to in Paul's letter and the nature of the controversy which he was addressing, because those questions are what makes the book so difficult to grapple with. Nevertheless it was widely believed that the Ten Tribes were scattered abroad in the areas north of Judea.

Best wishes,

— Dale Heslin, Australia

RESPONSE: I have not done any research on the history of this time, but the book of Galatians clearly shows that they were struggling with people teaching salvation by works of the law on the one hand, and with unbiblical customs on the other. Galatia may well have had some traditional rabbinic Judaism mixed in with the the beliefs of the ancient Israelites—which were probably false with a little truth mixed in. They had clearly departed from the true God long before they were sent into exile. Adding belief in Jesus might have been "liberal" for the Jews, but "strict" to the lax Israelites, which certainly could have been there.

—NSE

Sell Your Good Will to Us

LETTER: October 28, 2009

Port Austin Bible Church:

Your organization is an important part of our community: therefore, we are inviting you to join us in an innovative partnership that might raise money for your organization while helping your members and supporters get exceptional tax preparation services.

The program is easy and convenient. Just alert your organization's members and supporters that H&R Block can help raise money for your organization. For each new client referred who has their taxes prepared, H&R Block will provide a $25 reward to your organization.

To receive the program reward, the referred members must be new clients and they must bring the referral form to H&R Block when they have their taxes prepared. The more new clients you refer, the more money your organization can earn.

[details of program omitted]

We hope you'll consider this simple way to help your organization earn some extra money. Please call us at 269-9351 if you have any questions.

— Cheryl Halifax, H&R Block
Bad Axe, Michigan

RESPONSE: Thank you for your letter and offer of an "innovative partnership" to help raise money for our organization. We realize the state of the Michigan economy and understand the need to find additional business.

However, the truth of the matter is that you know almost nothing about us and we know almost nothing about you. We are almost certain that you obtained our address from a purchased mailing list. We have never used your company for tax preparation and have no idea if your service is the best in the business, the worst or somewhere in between. We do not believe that we have the time nor the expertise to evaluate which tax preparation organization would be the best for people—or whether they should use any such organization at all.

The purpose of a local church, or any organization is to benefit its members. We believe that the world is suffering greatly now because people put a short-term desire for money ahead of long-term faithfulness to others. The Bible teaches:

> A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, Loving favor rather than silver and gold (Prov 22:1).

We cannot in good conscience recommend your organization simply because we would receive $25 for each person who heeds us. We would be more honest to ask them to simply give us $25 and to encourage them to work together to negotiate the best deal they can with any tax preparer they may need.

We have prayed that our Father in heaven will take care of the people of your company and reward you for your faithful service.

> Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matt 6:26).

—NSE

And Life Goes On... Or Does It?

LETTER: October 27, 2009

To *Servants' News* with Best Wishes and hope you all had a lovely Feast of Tabernacles and look forward to the reign soon of Jesus Christ on the earth—The Great Reign.

We enjoyed your magazine and it was great again to see.

I hope you may be interested in my story as we head toward God's Kingdom on earth.

Here is a copy of it:

Bullfinch. I remember the gold min-

ing town of Bullfinch. I was about three years old when we came to 'live' here. We were city people and I was born in the city of Perth, Western Australia.

It is also near Kalgoorlie, another gold mining town. The towns remind me of cowboy towns as they are similar to the ones in the USA and the ones we see at the cinema often.

There was my sister, Jill, 2½ years old;, my brother, Bill, about 5 years older. My younger brother wasn't born until the middle of the 50's.

We owned a shop, a newsagent shop, and my mum and dad would work quite hard. It was quite rare to have a mother working so long hours.

My parents were from mixed religious backgrounds, being my father's side of the family was not accepting my mother because of religious difference—dad was often drunk.

I remember helping in the shop and getting shop experience plus riding my bike with a basket full of papers to deliver to the customers.

Hope I am not boring you. By the time I was 12 dad had educated himself to be a chartered accountant and we were off back to live in the city. It was about 1962. I was about 12 years old and Bullfinch had become a ghost town.

I remember my pet cats and dogs and always walking around it seems with a cat in my arms for comfort.

I will finish now as we head onward to that glorious reign of "you know who" and the the rule of God's Servants on the earth.

Here I am, living in England, happily married for 37 years and with 2 sons, Peter and Allister, bachelors in their 30's.

—Sue, Hampshire, United Kingdom

RESPONSE: Thank you for that captivating story. at first I wondered, "is there a point here?" Then I saw one—I hope it is a lesson that you intended.

Many people would read about the circumstances of your upbringing and say "a child should never have to go through that." Your parents had difficulties, you had to work as a child, etc. Nevertheless, they apparently loved and supported each other, and they raised four children.

You also happily married and raised two children.

Your children are not yet married and are not raising any children.

This same thing is happening all over Europe. Many young people are no longer marrying and raising families. The population growth is way below replacement levels.

The free running cats and dogs that you played with as a child often ate scraps or foraged for themselves. Today, they have been replaced by pets who are vaccinated, licensed, fed gourmet pet food and dressed in the latest fashions. So today, the natural process of child bearing and rearing has been replaced by a very long list of government, medical, school, legal and social costs—most of which neither make parents nor children happy.

All of our modern "social engineering" and technology have not made family life better—they have made it more expensive, more difficult and much less enjoyable.

We do need His Kingdom! Thank you for your letter.

—NSE

Is It O.K. to Pray in Public?

LETTER: May 20, 2000

Dear Norm:

Hope all is well with you.

As always, I have a question for you. What do you think about "people praying in public?" The Bible seems to condemn it.

I have a brother who likes to discuss religion. I gave him a tape that I thought would help him see the will of God. He was appalled by it because there was a prayer on it. He said this guy does not take the scripture seriously and he doesn't believe he should teach. I did not know what to say. Perhaps I am overlooking something?

Gerty Himes, Pennsylvania

RESPONSE: I have heard that philosophy from many different people. It is based on this scripture:

> "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Mat 6:6).

If that were the only scripture on prayer, I would understand why people would not want to pray in public. But there we need the context of this story as well as the many biblical examples of public prayer. If we read the previous verse, we see that Christ was not condemning public prayer, but prayer to show off to others:

> "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, **that they may be seen by men.** Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward" (Matt 6:5).

This is a useful admonition until today as many public prayers are orations to be seen of men—not humble requests to God. Even today, people who are praying to be admired by others need to realize their admiration is their reward.

Nevertheless, there are public situations where public prayers are appropriate. Here is an example of Christ's public prayer just before he raised Lazarus from the dead:

> Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me" (John 11:41-42).

Christ explains here the reason for public prayer: It is a witness to the people who hear it that the power of God was in Christ and in those who work in His name today. When people pray for the success of a church service or evangelistic project, the people who hear need to know that it is not human strength that made the event a success, but God who heard the prayers.

(In an effort to "get around" this example, some will claim that the above is not a prayer because the word "prayer" is not mentioned. But a prayer is talking to God and that is

"Letters" continued from p. 34

exactly what Christ did!)

Here are some other examples of public prayer in the Bible:

Solomon prayed in front of the nation at the dedication of the Temple. God responded with His glory to fill the temple and fire to consume the Sacrifice. I wonder if the "private prayer only" brethren have ever received a response like that to their prayers. (2Chr 6:12-7:22)

The Psalms call themselves prayers, dozens of times. Yet these "prayers" were written down for all to read, and were sung in temple and synagogue services. Peter and John went to the temple at "the hour of prayer" (Acts 3:1).

The Apostles prayed before casting lots to replace Judas (Acts 1:24-25).

Another longer prayer of the apostles meeting together is recorded in Acts 4:24-31. After they finished, the building shook and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Finally, Paul prayed with the elders of the Church at Ephesus (Acts 20:17).

There are other examples in the Bible, but these should suffice. I am not sure why some brethren have concluded the Bible teaches against public prayer. It might be a reaction to the people who do pray to impress others. Or, maybe they have difficulty praying in front of other people and are looking for a reason to avoid it. Certainly there are enough believers willing to pray in public when it is necessary that the Church is not handicapped by what I see as a mistake.

I will certainly pray that believers everywhere will understand God's true teaching on prayer. And I will pray for that in private. A public prayer should be to God; it is not a place to preach a doctrine to someone else who might be listening.

—NSE

People of the Passover

LETTER: April 20, 2008

Norm Edwards:

I finished reading your People of the Passover [published July-Aug 2008]. Thank you for the effort to show us in a more detailed way, how serious it was back then, and throughout history to the present days, to be the type of believer who will stand up and not worry about this world's reaction to righteousness.

I am very troubled by these leaders of this nation and in the churches who are dangerous to us. It is refreshing to read of the few in power who are trying to make a difference.

I also want to remember that as righteous Daniel prayed so that his individual sins would be forgiven (I wish I had Daniels' sins instead of mine), all of us should realize as you have shown, we all are part of this problem. So, I appreciate the description of the 10 categories of people and hope that this will give me much food for thought and provoke me to more godly action in the future.

Sincerely,

— Don

RESPONSE: Thank you for your encouragement. We received quite a few letters similar to yours. Our media and movies tend to paint people as "good guys" and "bad guys". I even hear military people use those terms a lot. The "good guys" are, supposedly, on our side and we trust them and do everything we can to help them. And the "bad guys" are, supposedly, all bad and we do not help them or trust them and, in the case of the military, we kill them.

God's judgments are not like that. He weighs both the good and the bad in everyone. People vary from very righteous to very evil with everything in between. That whole spectrum occurs in big business, in government, in the work place and even in church groups.

In the difficult times ahead, Christians might expect to be helped the most by other Christians, and maybe suffer the worst at the hands of big government or business, but sometimes the exact opposite may occur.

I would gladly send our remaining copies of People of the Passover to anyone who Requests one.

—NSE 🕮

"PABC Update" continued from p. 2

often times discussed at our PABC Bible studies. The answer does not always come easy. We have certainly met many individuals who believed that they were serving God in some manner—letting poor people stay with them and/or spending most of their time on some kind of evangelism. Yet they were deep in debt, their property was in need of much repair and they were always asking for help from others.

There are also ministries like that. Several people maybe working together for a worthy Christian goal, but they do not always have money for "essentials" and just survive on a day to day basis. **This ministry is like that!**

Is God working through individuals like that? Is He working through Ministries like that? Or are these simply irresponsible people who don't want to work and who are hiding behind religion?

The Difference Between Faith and Irresponsibility

A **person of faith** is one who serves God in a ministry and trusts God to take care of him. He either accepts the level of support which God provides for him, seeks God to receive more faith, or realizes that God may not want his ministry to continue.

An **irresponsible person** is one who does not support himself, but claims to do or actually does do ministry work. If he does not like the level of support he receives, he blames God or blames the people he thinks should support him rather than seeking to God to see if he should change or end his ministry.

In short, people who are neither supporting themselves nor doing God's work **should come upon** difficult financial times. It is God's way of correcting them. Even in the New Testament, the apostle Paul taught:

> For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall

continued on next page

he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies (2Th 3:10).

Paul expected that all Christians should be working, whether at some kind of physical work or spiritual work. Doing nothing and expecting God to take care of you is a mistake.

When God wants to build faith in a person, He sometimes makes it impossible for them to provide for themselves or commands them not to do it.

"So He humbled you, **allowed you to hunger**, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; **but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD**. Your **garments did not wear out** on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you" (Deut 8:3-5).

Then the word of the LORD came to him [Elijah], saying, "Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there" (1Kngs 17:2).

After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also,... Then He [Christ] said to them,... "Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road.... And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house" (Luke 10:1,2,4,7).

In none of these cases does our father give them money—gold silver or other things of value—and let them spend it as they choose. He simply says that He will take care of His people, and he does it in a variety of ways. He has taken care of us this way at PABC, and all of us may need to learn to similarly trust him in the near future as our economy collapses and difficulties increase.

This year, our garden produced the most ever, and has continued to provide us food even late into the fall. God has sent people with the skills to repair essential facilities here at very little cost. We had a furnace fail that would have cost hundreds for a repairman to fix, but I found a bad connection on its circuit board and fixed it for a few cents of solder. An old friend gave us a new computer, as the eight-year old one I used to produce *Servant's News* had hardware problems. Many others have given us things that we need. We have had some volunteer health help and no major medical expenses.

Even with all of these blessings, I still lose faith at times. I worried way too much this month when I had several hundred dollars worth of utility bills due and no way to pay them. Somebody unexpectedly sent $500 three days before it was due. We have been a lot closer than that in the past.

Faith for Everyone for the Difficult Times Ahead

The lessons we are learning here will be helpful to others. Most hard-working, frugal Americans are able to earn enough money to pay their bills, buy the things they want, and save a little for the future. That is commendable to a large degree, but frequently God's work has to fit in after all of the above. Sabbatarians are generally good at placing the Sabbath and Feast days above their jobs and personal desires. Other Christians may be better at placing evangelism and other ministry above their jobs and personal desires.

But in the not too distant future, it is likely that most Christians will need to develop faith to trust God for nearly all their needs. It is very likely that our economy and many of our governments will collapse. We can fear this, or we can look forward to the chance to build the faith we need to enter the Kingdom.

The future difficulties mentioned are not based on prophecy, but more on an analysis of the news of our time. The USA's current economic troubles are totally unprecedented in the history of our nation. Many state and local governments are likely to be unable to function during the next couple of years. As this goes to press, the state of Michigan is up to two months behind on Medicaid payments to nursing homes. A front-page article covered a local nursing home that will not be able to pay its employees if they do not get at least some Medicaid payments before their next payroll is due.

We can expect this kind of thing to happen in many places as our economy collapses further. "Stable" periodic payments from the Federal and State governments as well as private pensions and other funds may no longer be stable. Even large corporations may be unable to pay their current operating bills. We live in a time of "just in time" payments and "just in time" inventories. Neither individuals nor businesses have much in reserve. When one entity cannot pay, it creates a chain of others who do not receive, and cannot pay. The result will be financial disaster for many, and probably civil unrest or martial law.

The believer needs to be ready to have faith in God to take care of us. He needs to be ready to reach that faith to unbelievers—who may be seeking God in large numbers.

We are planning future *Servants' News* articles to help people be ready—both physically and spiritually—for the difficult times ahead. We thank our Father in Heaven for the lessons we have learned here: difficult lessons for a physical life, good lessons for eternity. 🕮

"Stones for an Unseen Building" continued from p. 1

ished at the quarry, so that no hammer or chisel *or* any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was being built (1Kngs 6:7).

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are (1Cor 3:16-17).

What is it that distracts us from the great eternal reality of our Father's purpose? It is the temporary "buildings" in the world in which we live. We are not being formed in a perfect stone quarry, but we are being formed **in this world** and its evil:

John 17:15 "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:15-16).

Some believers may now be parts of temporary "buildings" such as churches, ministries, businesses, governments and other organizations of men. Others may exist as "clusters of similar stones" living together with families or friends. Still others of us may be "stones" sitting out all alone. Even when we are together in churches or ministries, there are still "tares"—in this case "bad stones"—stacked in and amongst the chosen stones (Matt 13:24-30).

It is so easy to look at what we see now and wish that we had a better job, better friends, a better church, a healthier body, etc. We should not be so concerned about the appearance of our temporary "building", "group of stones" or "isolated stone"—whichever represents us. We should be more concerned about how we will fit into what the Father wants for His building.

Hewn in Humility

The great leaders of the Bible were "stones" hewn in humility. The following examples show the patience of these believers as their Father in heaven shaped them:

- Abraham was promised to be the father of many nations, but then had to wait 25 years for his first son to be born (Gen 12:2-4; 21:5).
- Moses was told he would deliver his people from Egyptian slavery, but first God sent him to tend sheep in the wilderness for 40 years (Ex 7:7).
- Joseph was shown that he would become the leader of his brothers, but then was sold into slavery and ultimately put into prison for something he didn't do (Gen 37:6-8, 28; 39:7-20).
- David was anointed to be king over Israel. He had initial success as a warrior, but then had to travel about as a vagabond for years fleeing from jealous king Saul (1Sam 17-2Sam 1).
- Mary, entrusted with the most important child-rearing job of all time, had a home-birth in a stable, subsequently had to flee to a foreign country to keep her baby out of a mass murder. Then she had

to raise her child in a town with a dismal reputation and was falsely accused of fornication all of her life (Luke 2:7, Matt 2:13-16; John 1:46; 8:41).

- Our Messiah himself suffered in his ministry: "For it was fitting for Him (Christ), for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Heb 2:10). Even after His miracle-filled earthly ministry was finished, only 120 disciples gathered on Pentecost to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:15).
- Those who believed in Christ were frequently cast out of the synagogue (John 9:22; 12:42). They were shunned by the others, which greatly limited where they could find work or buy necessities. Thus they formed Christian communities and had great peace there (Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37). But Saul raised up such a persecution that the entire Jerusalem church was scattered, except the apostles (Acts 8:1-4).

Why did our Father in heaven do these things this way? Could not He make His Work look a little more impressive to those who witnessed it? To continue the with last example, when God called Saul to His ministry, Saul stopped persecuting the church and became the apostle Paul (Acts 9:1-6). Only six chapters later, in Acts chapter 15, we read that there is again a substantial church in Jerusalem. So why didn't God call the apostle Paul "a couple of chapters sooner"—so that the Jerusalem church did not have to be first devastated and then rebuilt?

Because our Father was working with those people. He was hewing out His "stones" for His Spiritual Temple to be built in the future. He was not simply trying to build a big church in Jerusalem! The trials that came upon those brethren built their faith and expanded their opportunity to preach the gospel to others while simultaneously fashioning them into the "stones" that they will be in the Kingdom of God. By contrast, the physical temple in Jerusalem was completely destroyed in 70 A.D, just as Christ prophesied: "not one stone shall be left here upon another" (Matt 24:2).

For he [Abraham] waited for the city which has foun-

dations, whose builder and maker *is* God (Heb 11:10).

Our Lives Are Much the Same

It is tempting to think the trials of men and women in the Bible are somehow different than ours. It is easy to think that they had a clear vision that their actions were right and that they were suffering for a righteous cause. Whereas, our trials often seem far removed from God and the Bible—they are just difficulties and there is no spiritual right-versus-wrong principles to be upheld. But indeed our Father is still hewing the stones—teaching us through our trials to live by the Scripture, find work to support ourselves, overcome sickness and injury, and live peaceably with difficult people. We need to see His work for what it is. The examples of faith found in Hebrews 11 demonstrated that these men and women suffered human temptations, poverty, sickness, and the like:

> They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in* dens and caves of the earth (Heb 11:37-38)

There is no doubt this life can be very discouraging at times. This writer has spoken to young people who have grown up in very difficult circumstances and who cannot foresee a bright future. Similarly, he knows of older people who realize they have missed their chance to have a successful marriage and children. He remembers talking to a great-grandmother who had many offspring, but who was grieved that most had departed from God and were in so much trouble.

No person can tell us with certainty how much of our lifelong difficulties are a result of our own faults and how much were caused by circumstances beyond our control. But there are some things we can know with certainty.

- Our Father does not expect us to somehow go backward in time and change the past.
- We do not need to worry about our past. "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done" (Phlp 4:6, NLT).
- Even if we have struggled with sin for years, we can still repent and change now. Manasseh was king for 55 years—the longest reigning king in Judah and one of the most evil. Yet, he repented late in life and was restored to his kingdom (2Chr 33:1-20). Whatever sins have plagued our lives, it is never too late to face up to them, humble ourselves, repent and change (1Jo 1:8-10). This is how we allow our Father to make us into a "stone" that will fit into His future building in His Kingdom.

There is nothing wrong with praying for and working toward the pleasant things of this life such as good families, good friends and the physical needs of life. There are many good lessons of love, wisdom and stewardship to be learned. But the ultimate value of our physical lives is that which is being built for all eternity. Our Father is certainly watching to see where we place our priorities. That is what **this life** is about.

Don't Let the Church Discourage You

This writer has heard brethren say things much like this:

"I understand how the Eternal is working in my life. I have learned a lot of valuable lessons, but the state of the church discourages me. There are so many groups. Most cannot work together. They cannot agree on doctrine. They cannot even agree on what doctrine they would have to agree on in order to work together. Many groups are so small that they just do not have enough resources to accomplish much. Other groups are doctrinally tolerant and have more resources, but they have leaders or members with flagrant sins, about which they do nothing. The scriptures tell us not to keep company with certain people. I would like to devote myself to serving in a congregation, but something seems to be wrong with every congregation and ministry that I know about."

This person should pray and ask Christ to show them how and where they should serve with other brethren. The answer can vary greatly for each individual. Christ may send one to join a corrupt or erroneous group in order to help the people there. He may send another to a small group that he knows will do significant work in the future, and yet another He may use to gradually begin a new group.

Many people read the following Scripture and interpret it in the same way it has been viewed throughout history—that the Church is a big, powerful, observable organization.

> "And I [Christ] also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt 16:18-19).

But let us read the next verse:

> Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ (Matt 6:20).

Even though He was the head of the Church, He wanted his position, to some degree, hidden from the world at that time. Is it not also likely that the Church, His body, (Col 1:18) is also hidden from the world to some degree today? While the "gates of Hades" were not to prevail against His church, they may well at times get very close. Remember, He describes His church as a "little flock":

> "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

Similarly, the letters to seven churches (Rev 2-3) describe, not a powerful organization, but a strug-

gling body of believers with a variety of difficulties within each of them. But take heart, to each of the seven churches Christ promises that individuals, if they are willing to listen, can overcome and receive a reward. And yes, the rewards are all different, because the Master Builder is fashioning each stone for a specific purpose.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give [a different reward for each church] (Rev 1:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

Becoming a Good Stone for the Kingdom

Is there anything that we can do to become a stone for the Father's building in His Kingdom? Yes. Even though we cannot fashion ourselves to His specifications, we can yield to His work upon us:

Do you not know that if **you yield yourselves** to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? (Rom 6:16, RSV).

Anything that we let come between us and our Father's guiding hand becomes an idol.

And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among *them.* I will be their God, And they shall be My people" (2Cor 6:16).

Let Him form us through prayer, fasting and Bible study.

Let Him test our strength as we

- struggle to support ourselves and our families in a failing economy and deal with a corrupt world,
- struggle to resist the temptations and errors of the world, and
- struggle to do His work.

Let Him see how we will fit together with other stones as we

- pray for our brethren,
- use our gifts to serve in our congregations, and
- help our brothers whom we see in difficulty (Gal 6:1).

This article concludes with a few more verses from the many Scriptural analogies where believers are compared, in some way, to Stones for an Unseen Building:

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? (1Cor 6:19).

While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal (2Cor 4:18).

But Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are **if we hold fast** the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope **firm to the end** (Heb 3:6).

While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. **For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal** (2Cor 4:18). 🕮

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Winter Family Weekend 2009, Lexington, Ky

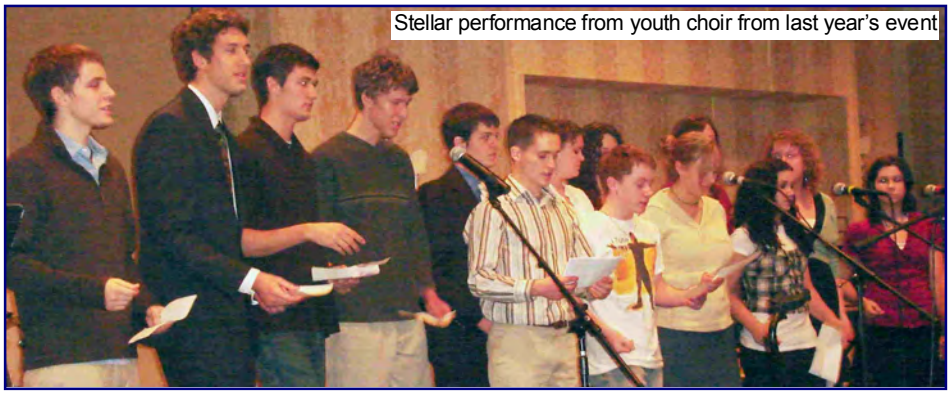
You're invited to the 13th Annual Winter Family Weekend in Lexington, Kentucky. The inspiring church services and list of insightful seminar speakers together with athletic and social events promises an exciting weekend for the entire family.

The host hotel is the fabulous Griffin Gate Marriott Resort at the low flat rate of $53 per night. It is unheard of to find a rate this low at any Marriott Hotel but the Griffin Gate is one of the finest in the country. This outstanding resort carries a Mobil four-star rating and normally charges over $175 per night for the same rooms. But it's only $53 for those attending the Winter Family Tournament, **Dec. 23rd - 26th** if you mention the Church of God. To reserve your room call the Marriott at 800-391-6690 or reserve on the web at this link: http://www.tinyurl.com/lexky09

When the page is opened, the church code will enter automatically. Look to the right on the screen for the space to enter the dates you are reserving. After reserving the specified dates, look for the **FIND** button below the dates and click on it. The screen will provide prompts to complete the transaction. The Marriott is located at I-75 and Newtown Pike in Lexington, Kentucky. Transportation to and from the hotel will be provided for those flying to the Lexington airport. To arrange pickup, or for more information contact us: 513-755-0040, jimobri@gmail.com or www.cogcincinnati.org.

Activities will begin at 7:00 pm Wednesday evening Dec. 23rd with the welcoming activities to meet and greet friends from around the country. A family dance is slated for Thursday night and live praise and worship music on Friday night. Sporting events for those days include: basketball, volleyball, soccer, flag football, dodge ball, ping pong, roller skating, laser tag and soccer. There will be games, crafts and shows for younger children.

Speakers for Sabbath, Dec. 26th activities include Ronald L. Dart, Bill Jacobs, Dave Havir, Pam Dewey, Guy Swenson and Mike James, coordinator of the Infuse Program for Church of God International. Church services are at 2:30 pm. and a home school meeting at 5:00 pm. Carnival, karaoke, bingo and other games will make Saturday evening unforgettable.



Stellar performance from youth choir from last year's event

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