

Contains **JULY** Nurturing Faith Lessons

Baptists ODAY

NEWS JOURNAL

JUNE 2012

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Cover photo: By John Pierce. The Board of Directors of *Baptists Today* met in San Antonio, Texas, to conduct business, honor Baptist leaders and launch an expanded publishing venture. **9**

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Pastor Mitch Simpson of University Baptist Church speaks at neighboring First Baptist Church of Chapel Hill, N.C. Host pastor J.R. Manley, who recently retired after 65 years at the church, looks on. The two congregations — with shared roots — have re-established ties in recent years. (Contributed photos)

‘Tramping down weeds’

Chapel Hill congregations share history, new relationships

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — There’s a lot of history at work when the congregations of First Baptist Church and University Baptist Church get together in Chapel Hill. There’s also a lot of optimism for the future.

First, the history: For one thing, there are the years the two senior pastors have put in serving those churches: 87, to be exact.

Pastor J.R. Manley retired early this year after 65 years of leading First Baptist. The church is under the care of an interim pastor now, but Manley is, predictably, staying busy.

He doesn’t think his 65-year tenure is particularly remarkable; his perusal of the church’s history, he notes, shows that one of his predecessors, L.H. Hackney, served for 60 years.

Over at University Baptist, pastor Mitch Simpson will mark his 22nd anniversary this summer, and he’s obviously not planning to

leave anytime soon.

Then there’s the shared history of the two congregations.

When Manley arrived at First Baptist in 1946, he was a 19-year-old student at Shaw University in nearby Raleigh who thought he was just filling in for a few Sundays for a pastor who had moved away. But one thing led to another, and he stayed.

When researching the history of his congregation early in his tenure, Manley discovered that the church had grown out of University Baptist church — a few blocks east down Franklin Street.

As was true of many churches in the South

before the Civil War, white slave owners and African American slaves worshiped together. But in 1865, with the end of the war and of slavery, the African American members formed their own church, now called First Baptist.

For the next 129 years or so, the two churches largely went their separate ways.

As an example of how separate the races were at church, as well as in the community, Simpson told about Martin Luther King Jr. coming to Chapel Hill in 1960 to speak at the invitation of the NAACP.

King was also invited to speak to the Baptist Campus Ministry that, at the time, met at University Baptist. But the deacons were split on whether it was appropriate for an African American to speak in their church. They compromised by deciding that King could speak in the fellowship hall but not in the sanctuary.

When Simpson arrived at University Baptist in 1990, he quickly learned to admire how Manley, his counterpart at First Baptist, had led his church to live out its motto of “Enter to worship, go forth to serve.”

“Dr. Manley has stood in the gap as a progressive voice for justice in this community for things that matter,” said Simpson. “He has been faithful in season and out of season.”

Through the years, Manley and his congregation have inspired others to join them in the struggle for fair wages, housing for the elderly, racial integration of the schools and other institutions, and social justice in general. Manley was the first African American member of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro school board.

So when University Baptist was planning a big celebration with a ceremonial ringing of the church bell for its 140th anniversary in 1994, Simpson thought it was only fitting that Manley and his church be a part of it. After all, it was really their 140th anniversary, too.

And the church’s bell had special significance relating to that shared history, recounted in a cherished historical anecdote: Toward the end of the Civil War, when the Confederacy was in dire straits, a call went out from President Jefferson Davis to donate church bells to be melted down for armaments.

The men of University Baptist decided to ship the church’s bell off to help the cause. But when the churchwomen, who had not been consulted, heard what the men had done, they set up a sewing circle and raised enough money to buy the church’s bell back from the Confederacy.

Simpson said he enjoyed being able to speak about the symbolism of Manley, an African American pastor of a church whose roots went back to that church where slaves worshiped with their masters, ringing the old bell.

“That symbolized that even in the most evil of times, there is always a ‘faithful remnant’ — in this case, the women of that church. And that bell had literally been redeemed by strong Christian women from being used to defend human bondage,” he said.

Simpson recalls the conversation the two ministers had that led to the closer ties between the two congregations.

“He said, ‘Mitch, some weeds have grown up in the path between our two congregations over the years. It’s time for us to tramp down those weeds.’”

And Manley remembers that as the two pastors talked, “We decided that if we were going to have a relationship, it was going to be Christianity, not black or white.”

After Manley joined during University

Baptist’s anniversary celebration, he invited Simpson to preach at First Baptist’s annual birthday celebration — and to bring his congregation along.

From that connection and shared history grew a new tradition: Every year on a Sunday night in November, the pastor, members and choir of First Baptist head to University Baptist for an anniversary observance. And on a Wednesday evening in late April each year, the pastor, members and choir of University Baptist head over to First Baptist for a fish fry and service that open that church’s birthday festivities.

Both pastors are a bit hesitant to publicly pat themselves or their congregations on the back about these shared worship services.

After all, the town where they live is home to the University of North Carolina, the flagship institution of the state’s higher-education system. The university has a profound effect on the atmosphere and politics in Chapel Hill.

“Dr. Manley and I never intended for this to be some sort of feel-good photo op,” Simpson says. “We never sought any publicity. But when Craig (McCoy, the church’s minister of music) came here in the fall of 2010, he saw what we were about. And he thought people needed to know this story.”

McCoy said he was impressed by the genuine relationship between the two churches, one white, one African American, both progressive.

“There is a great respect on both sides from these two gentlemen, and an understanding of their ministries to Chapel Hill ... with the struggles and rewards of ministering in a college town with such deep Southern roots,” McCoy said.

The relationship that started with the two annual anniversary celebrations — sharing

worship and meals — has grown into much more over nearly 20 years.

“We — the two congregations — have gotten to know each other,” Simpson says. “There has been a quiet growing of a relationship. This is not surface, but real.”

Members of the two congregations have joined together in various community projects, including building a Habitat for Humanity house. Perhaps equally important, Simpson says, has been the gradual development of real friendships, not just within the walls of one church or the other.

“People began to know each other, and to talk when they meet at Harris Teeter or anywhere in the community,” he said. “They genuinely care about one another, ask after each other, pray for each other.”

The growing relationships, said Simpson, began to make a difference in the community.

“This has been a part of how Chapel Hill has changed over time, how the relationship between the different racial communities has grown.”

It gives him hope for continued growth of friendships and of progress in the issues of justice that Manley has worked for so tirelessly.

Manley agrees. “We really enjoy when we are together, one with the other,” he said. “Our fellowship between the two churches has grown to the extent that we feel that we have one church at two locations.”

Come to think of it, those two churches were one, united in worship if not in social equality, back when it all began. **BT**

—Linda Brinson is a freelance writer in Madison, N.C.



Pastors J.R. Manley (left) and Mitch Simpson

quotation remarks



“I go to weddings and hear how the two people getting married were ‘incomplete and now they are whole.’ My heart breaks for those who are single sitting in the crowd who just heard publicly that they are not whole persons.”

—*Jeanie McGowan, associate pastor of single adults at First Baptist Church in Jefferson City, Mo. (ethicsdaily.com)*

“Overall, we find that for less religious people, the strength of their emotional connection to another person is critical to whether they will help that person or not. The more religious, on the other hand, may ground their generosity less in emotion, and more in other factors such as doctrine, a communal identity or reputational concerns.”

—*UC Berkeley social psychologist Robb Willer, co-author of a study of how religious and non-religious persons respond to human needs (NPR)*

“Rousing Sermon is a 50-1 long shot at the Kentucky Derby. Same odds on Sunday everywhere else.”

—*Pastor Chip Reeves of First Baptist Church of Evans, Ga., posting on Facebook in early May*

“It likely comes as little to no surprise that Jesus affirmed the dignity of women, treating them as those created in the divine image, and that women played a pivotal role both in Jesus’ earthly and post-resurrection ministry. It may, however, come as a surprise to some that Paul’s calling of women/wives to silence and submission is tempered — if not trumped — by his affirmation of mutuality, yea equality, of women and wives in marriage and ministry.”

—*Todd Still, the William H. Hinson professor of Christian scriptures at Baylor’s Truett Theological Seminary (ABP)*

“Discernment is the process of sorting out the voice of God from all the voices competing for our attention and indeed for our allegiance. It is very hard work. It must be done in Christian community...”

—*Sharyn Dowd, associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga., which hosted an April conference on sexuality and covenant, adding that Baptists often prefer democracy — which reveals only the will of the majority — to discernment that seeks the will of God (vimeo.com/40694848)*

“I see no reason why we should state (in the Book of Discipline) that we disagree. We disagree on almost every issue we consider.”

—*Former Asbury Theological Seminary President Maxie Dunnam on failed proposals to acknowledge disagreements over homosexuality among United Methodists as delegates to the General Conference reaffirmed homosexual acts as being “incompatible with Christian teaching” (RNS)*

“Showy followers of a Savior who said, ‘Don’t be afraid,’ make fear their weapon ... Instead of the actual gospel, they substitute a fear-driven secular agenda grounded in right opinion, harsh judgment and intolerance, and they call it ‘Christian.’ Never mind that Jesus said nothing about any item on their political agenda.”

—*Religion News Service columnist Tom Ebrich*

“An estimated 20 percent of NASCAR fans are not registered to vote. They tend to be pro-family, patriotic and conservative in their values.”

—*Ralph Reed on why his Faith and Freedom Coalition bought ad space on Reed Sorenson’s Ford for the April 28 race in Richmond to build support for presidential candidate Mitt Romney (RNS)*

“Perceptive citizens will notice that [American] exceptionalism is almost always appealed to as justification for unilateralism, which curtails or circumvents the Just War principles meant to give us guidance. It’s a roundabout way of dismissing accountability. Our exceptionalism apparently guarantees and justifies the truthfulness of our political judgments and actions.

However, this doctrine of American exceptionalism is at best unnecessary to, and at worse a perversion of, the Just War tradition ... When America claims to be

politically exceptional the international community perceives our actions as patronizing, supposing itself once again to be above other nations and exempt from the ‘normal’ rules of play.

... We as a nation can work for justice in the world without working from or appealing to this doctrine of exceptionalism; after all, the Just War tradition served perfectly well as a matrix for deliberations of this sort for nearly two millennia without an exceptionalist doctrine.”

—*Matthew Arbo, assistant professor of Christian ethics at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo. (Baptist Press)*

Respect and dissent

Respect for authority is important. Blind allegiance is dangerous. For all of our faults, and there are many, one of the compelling reasons for being Christian in the Baptist tradition is deep appreciation for our 400-year history as dissenters.

Not everyone appreciates dissent. It is usually those seeking to use their powerful positions of leadership to fulfill a personal agenda who equate disagreement with disloyalty.

But it seems especially troublesome — or at least out of character — when Baptist churches or denominational groups demand uniformity of thought and belief. In doing so, they miss out on a time-proven reality.

Dissent acknowledges that truth is not the sole property of those in positions of power. Truth often bubbles up from minority voices crying in the wilderness.

The Quaker writer Richard Foster was the first to alert me, I believe, to the important distinction between power and authority. Power is claimed; authority is earned.

Power is based on being in charge and having the leverage to impose punishment on others who might disagree; authority is based on expressing truth that cannot be squashed by even the rawest of power.

Not all faith traditions hold to dissent as an asset rather than a liability. Both the role of dissent and the distinction between power and authority resurfaced in my mind recently with the news that a prominent group of U.S. nuns was scolded by the Vatican for not toeing the theological and ideological lines.

In one sense, the internal actions of another Christian body — in this case Roman Catholics — are none of my business. Yet it does reveal some insights regarding the balance of respect and dissent as well as the distinctions between power and authority.

The Vatican charged that the American nuns — the Leadership Conference of Women Religious — were not expressing certain theological and political viewpoints (especially related to abortion, homosexuality and women's roles) as consistently and clearly as the Church desired. The nuns were reprimanded for holding and expressing perspectives that did not align with those of the male American bishops who align with the male church leadership in Rome.

Yet even in a hierarchal system by design — not like the top-down ways some Baptists function in violation of their historical distinctions — there are lessons.

Dissent is threatening not only because it is seen as disloyalty to top leadership. The greater threat is that these dissenting voices might reveal some uncomfortable truth that requires change.

In Baptist life it has been interesting to watch in recent years how denominational leaders — with institutional power that comes from positions and resources — have faced challenges from those with neither (think

bloggers). While not all dissenters bear truth or act constructively, the potential for shedding new light in dark places is there.

If Foster is correct, and I believe he is, then we can benefit from seeing the distinction between power that is claimed and authority that is granted. (For example, the Vatican has power; the late Mother Teresa had authority.)

That is not to suggest that everyone placed in a position of power misuses it. But we all know the temptation that comes with the possession of power.

The needed balance to power often comes from those dissenters who reveal truth not in edicts or demands for doctrinal uniformity but through service, insight and persistent efforts to be consistent with the life and teachings of Jesus. Yes, sometimes truth hurts — yet it also frees according to Jesus.

Jesus had no institutional power resulting from position, wealth or an army of defenders. Yet his authority came through service, sacrifice and expressions of love that were so inclusive that they offended those authorized to protect their understandings of truth.

The need in congregational and denominational life today is not a bunch of naysayers with little investment who pan everything that comes along as a bad idea or who try to undermine every effort devised by those in leadership roles. But we do need some faithful, loyal critics — those with a deep commitment to truth and enough humility to respectfully know that neither those with great power nor those with none have all the right answers. **BT**



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A wider embrace

Baugh, Ayres honored by news journal for service to Baptists



Left: Leadership with integrity — On behalf of her family, Babs Baugh accepts the Judson-Rice Award from *Baptists Today* editor John Pierce. She is joined (right to left) by her husband John Jarrett, daughter Jackie Moore and son-in-law Kim Moore. **Right: ‘Open hearts’** — A new annual award honoring the significant contributions of a Baptist layperson was presented April 26 to Patricia Shield Ayres of Austin, Texas. Executive Editor John Pierce hands her the award that was created by *Baptists Today* and named in memory of influential layman John F. Baugh. Photos by David Cassidy.

SAN ANTONIO — The family of John and Eula Mae Baugh received the annual Judson-Rice Award from *Baptists Today* — and a newly created laity award named for John Baugh was presented to lay leader Patricia Ayres of Austin.

In a festive dinner event on April 26 at the home of Babs Baugh — during San Antonio’s annual Fiesta — the Board of Directors and other supporters paid tribute to the late layman John Baugh and his wife Eula Mae and the continuing work of the Baugh Foundation in support of Baptist causes.

Church historian and *Baptists Today* Board Chairman Walter B. Shurden of Macon, Ga., recalled how leaders of the news journal had sought to give the first Judson-Rice Award to Mr. Baugh.

“Immediately after creating the award in 2000, the *Baptists Today* family moved quickly, enthusiastically, and unanimously to give the first award to Mr. John F. Baugh — who epitomized leadership with integrity among what he called ‘Mainstream Baptists,’” said Shurden. “Unfortunately, Mr. Baugh had health issues at that time, and he was unable to accept the award.”

Twelve years later, the award that recognizes leadership with integrity not only honors the memories of John and Eula Mae Baugh, said Shurden, but also the entire family.

“Tonight, *Baptists Today* returns to the historical roots of this award and fulfills the initial desire of the Board of Directors of *Baptists Today*,” said Shurden. “But this evening we present the Judson-Rice Award with a wider embrace.”

Receiving the award on behalf of her late parents and other family members — some of whom were present — Babs Baugh recalled the blessings of being the only child of parents who modeled Christian faithfulness, integrity and generosity.

“I almost feel guilty for having them all to myself,” she said.

Babs said she was grateful for the award that honors her parents and was presented to her larger family. She also expressed appreciation that a new annual award created by *Baptists Today* bears the name of her father.

In a very personal tribute, she spoke of being especially pleased that the inaugural John F. Baugh Laity Award was being given to Patricia Ayres.

She described Ayres as a selfless and generous person who cares deeply about others, especially children. She credited her longtime

friend with teaching her about leadership and generosity.

Ayres is a respected advocate for children and youth and a significant supporter of Baptist causes related to religious liberty, a free press and Christian ethics. She served as the second national moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and more recently chaired the T.B. Maston Foundation.

Inscribed on the plaque presented to Ayres was a quote from John Baugh’s book *Battle for Baptist Integrity*: “To experience renewal, we laypeople must open our hearts and minds and become a part of the new era in which God will do a new thing with us.”

Executive Editor John Pierce, in presenting the award, said Ayres had certainly opened her heart and mind to the “new things” that have developed in Baptist life over the last few decades.

Likewise, Shurden quoted the late John Baugh from a biography of the highly successful businessman: “Integrity and trust form the perfect breeding ground for innovation and creativity.”

A “marvelous gift,” said Shurden, comes from those who provide “fertile ground where good seeds can be planted, where they can grow and where they can bear abundant fruit in Baptist life.” **BT**

Baptists Today launches expanded Nurturing Faith publishing venture

SAN ANTONIO — An expanded publishing venture that will include books and other church resources was announced April 26 by the national news journal *Baptists Today*.

This effort follows the recent success of the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies — found in the center of the news journal — being used by a growing number of Sunday school classes.

Nurturing Faith Inc., formed as a subsidiary of *Baptists Today*, is working in close relationship with Faithlab, a creative services firm led by longtime publisher David Cassady, to produce the new resources using the latest publishing technology and marketing strategies.

“By joining hands with Faithlab, we have created a formidable team of writers, editors, designers and marketers with extensive experience in every aspect of publishing,” said

Baptists Today executive editor John Pierce, who serves as publisher for Nurturing Faith Inc. “Our work will be marked by creativity, collaboration and contemporary methodologies.”

The first Nurturing Faith book titles will be available this month. Details on this unique approach to book publishing, book sales, as well as information on author submissions, can be found at nurturingfaith.net.

Other church resources — including a new Sunday school curriculum called “Nurturing Faith for Children” — are in the works.

“We have a large vision for what Nurturing Faith can become,” said Pierce. “The future is as big as the support and partnerships that develop. Ultimately, our goal is to provide the high quality resources that churches desire to advance Bible study and spiritual growth.”

The launch of Nurturing Faith, Inc., was announced at a dinner event at the home of

First books available this month!



Babs Baugh in San Antonio held in conjunction with the *Baptists Today* Board of Directors meeting. **BT**

‘The Voice’: New Bible translation focuses on dialogue

By Bob Smietana
USA Today

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (RNS) The name Jesus Christ doesn't appear in *The Voice*, a new translation of the Bible.

Nor do words such as angel or apostle. Instead, angel is rendered as “messenger” and apostle as “emissary.” Jesus Christ is “Jesus the Anointed One” or the “liberating king.”

That's a more accurate translation for modern American readers, said David Capes, lead scholar for *The Voice*, a complete edition released by publishing company Thomas Nelson. Capes says that many people, even those who've gone to church for years, don't realize that the word “Christ” is a title.

“They think that Jesus is his first name and Christ is his last name,” says Capes, who teaches New Testament at Houston Baptist University in Texas.

Seven years in the making, *The Voice* is the latest entry into the crowded field of

English Bible translations.

Unlike the updated New International Version or the Common English Bible — both released last year — much of *The Voice* is formatted like a screenplay or novel. Translators cut out the “he said” and “they said” and focused on dialogue.

So in Matthew 15, when Jesus walks on the water, scaring his followers, their reaction is immediate:

Disciple: “It's a ghost!”

Another Disciple: “A ghost? What will we do?”

Jesus: “Be still. It is I; you have nothing to fear.”

“I hope we get people to see the Bible not as an ancient text that's worn out but as a story that they participate in and find their lives in,” Capes said.

The title for *The Voice* came from the New Testament Gospel of John and from the Greek word *logos*. It's usually translated as “word” in verses such as John 1:1, which

reads: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” in the New International Version, one of the most popular English translations.

In *The Voice*, that passage reads: “Before time itself was measured, the Voice was speaking. The Voice was and is God.”

Frank Couch, executive editor and publisher of *The Voice*, said that translation better captures what *logos* means.

Mike Norris of Franklin Road Baptist Church in Murfreesboro, Tenn., disagrees. His congregation follows the belief that the King James Bible is the most accurate translation in English. Other translations, he says, don't stick to a word-for-word translation.

“They say the other translations are easier to read and more accurate,” he said. “We disagree.” **BT**

—Smietana also reports for *The Tennessean* in Nashville. Heidi Hall of *The Tennessean* contributed to this story.

*“Today’s ministry students not only need to be good theologians
but creative church planters and cultural exegetes.”*

Yellowstone Theological Institute

New seminary in Montana to tie training to adventure, arts

By John Pierce

BOZEMAN, Mont. — Some Baptists in Big Sky Country are forming a new theological seminary with a unique connection to outdoors adventure and the fine arts. Conferences will be held in the fall of 2012 with classes set to begin in August 2014.

Organizers say they want Yellowstone Theological Institute to work in partnership with other moderate Baptist seminaries — and hope to establish relationships particularly with American Baptist Churches, USA, and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The Gilhousen Family Foundation is providing significant funding for the from-scratch creation of the school that will be part of the Bridger Community — related ministries that include the First Baptist Church of Bozeman, The Rock Youth Center and Copper Spring Ranch Ministries.

“The vision of YTI is to provide creative and relevant theological education for



ministers in the 21st century,” said Jay Smith, pastor of Bozeman’s First Baptist Church, who will serve as principal of the new seminary.

Organizers have use of facilities in Bozeman and are negotiating for a large tract of land near Montana State University.

With close proximity to Yellowstone National Park and numerous ski slopes and other popular outdoor activities, Bozeman also is home to poets, authors, musicians and other artists. Therefore, organizers are describing “the first uniquely Baptist and generously evangelical seminary in the Rocky Mountain West” as a place “where faith meets adventure and the arts.”

Preparation is underway to offer the Master of Divinity and Master of Theology degrees as well as certificate programs in recreation ministries, Western heritage ministries, creative worship, and innovative church planting, said Bruce Gourley, who will serve as vice

principal and professor of church history.

“We’re a Baptist seminary rooted in the best of the Baptist tradition,” said Gourley, who is also executive director of the Baptist History and Heritage Society and online editor for *Baptists Today*.

“Baptists at their best have been a spiritual community of innovators, a people of experiential faith, and champions of diversity in Christ,” he added. “Our vision honors these traditions by focusing on generous theology, innovative ministry and holistic spirituality.”

Smith and Gourley said the curriculum will address both traditional studies as well as understanding current cultural settings for ministry.

“Today’s ministry students not only need to be good theologians, Bible scholars and pastoral caregivers, but creative church planters and cultural exegetes,” said Smith. “They need to understand Bono as well as Barth, artistic talents as well as aorist tenses.”

Smith, who formerly taught at Carey Theological College and Howard Payne University, co-authored with Stanley Grenz the *Pocket Dictionary of Ethics*.

Negotiations with other faculty are underway. Information on the early formation of the school and upcoming conferences will be posted at yellowstonetheology.org. **BT**

Preparation is underway to offer the Master of Divinity and Master of Theology degrees.



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Plagiarism charges: SBC's Land accused of lifting Trayvon Martin comments

Richard Land, the Southern Baptist Convention's top public policy ethicist, apologized April 16 for failing to give proper attribution for material he used on his live radio show in which he criticized President Obama and black civil rights leaders for exploiting the Trayvon Martin shooting.

Land, president of the SBC's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, said, "On occasion I have failed to provide appropriate verbal attributions on my radio broadcast, *Richard Land Live!*, and for that I sincerely apologize," in a written statement.

"I regret if anyone feels they were deceived or misled. That was not my intent nor has it ever been."

In his radio show, Land described activists Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton as "racial ambulance chasers" who, along with fringe groups like the Black Panthers, are fomenting a "mob mentality" in the Trayvon Martin case that is akin to what the Ku Klux Klan used to do to blacks in the South.

"This situation is getting out of hand," Land said. "There is going to be violence. When there is violence it's going to be Jesse Jackson's fault. It's going to be Al Sharpton's fault. It's going to be Louis Farrakhan's

fault, and to a certain degree it's going to be President Obama's fault."

The plagiarism came to light when Baptist blogger and Baylor University Ph.D. student Aaron Weaver posted a partial transcript from one of Land's shows on his blog, *TheBigDaddyWeave.com*. The unattributed remarks were made on Land's March 31 show about media, race and Trayvon Martin, the unarmed black Florida teenager who was shot and killed by a neighborhood security guard.

Weaver discovered that more than half the material for Land's short segment was quoted nearly verbatim from Jeffrey Kuhner's March 29 *Washington Times* Op-Ed, "Obama foments racial division."

After that discovery, Weaver listened to the third hour of the same program and discovered that Land again used unattributed material, this time from an article in *Investor's Business Daily*. He discovered a third example in Land's Feb. 4 show in which Land quoted from a *Washington Examiner* editorial.



Richard Land



Aaron Weaver

Land said it is his practice to post the articles he uses on his website, and the show for March 31 does include a link to the Kuhner column on the "full show notes" page. Weaver called the link insufficient.

"Land made no mention of Kuhner during the segment," Weaver said. "Listeners did not know that he was quoting Jeffrey Kuhner word for word."

In his statement, Land explained that listeners familiar with the show understand his methods.

"While I do not use a script," Land wrote, "listeners familiar with the program know that both the audio of the program and material I reference during the program are posted on the program's website during or immediately following the broadcast. During the program I encourage listeners to share these links and content among their circle of influence. This has been standard operating practice for the program since its launch in 2002."

Weaver said he suspects more examples will come to light. In an interview with *The Tennessean*, Weaver said, "This isn't someone stealing a few lines. It's his whole commentary. He was so smooth doing it — it has to be something he has done in the past."

Land concluded his statement by saying he is grateful the "oversight" was brought to his attention. "One can always do better, and I certainly pledge to do so," he wrote. **BT**

Land, under investigation, apologizes for 'damaging words'

(RNS) — Southern Baptist leader Richard Land issued a lengthy public apology May 9 — a week after a five-hour meeting with African American leaders and other Southern Baptist officials — for his racially charged comments about the Trayvon Martin case. The meeting included Fred Luter, the New Orleans pastor expected to be elected this month as the SBC's first African American president.

Because of that meeting, "I have come

to understand in sharper relief how damaging my words were," Land wrote in the statement released through Baptist Press.

The latest apology included references to his "insensitivity" towards Martin's family, and a clarification that "racial profiling is a heinous injustice" and that he does not believe U.S. racism is a myth. Land also confessed that he "impugned the motives" of President Obama and civil rights leaders Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton.

"It was unchristian and unwise for me to have done so," he wrote, adding that he sent them letters of apology asking for forgiveness. "God alone is the searcher of men's hearts. I cannot know what motivated them in their comments in this case."

An investigatory committee is looking into charges that some of Land's comments may have been plagiarized, according to Steve Faith, trustee chairman of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Council that Land leads. **BT**

'Historical fact differs from myth,' said historian Lambert

MACON, Ga. — “Most countries construct myths of their origins ... and speak of those myths in divine hues,” said Franklin T. Lambert, professor of history at Purdue University, during an April 18 lecture at Mercer University.

The United States is no different, said Lambert, who focused his concluding presentation during the annual Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State on the Constitutional Convention of 1787.

The four-month gathering in Philadelphia that produced the U.S. Constitution has been called “the miracle of 1787,” Lambert noted. But that may have been overstated.

“Historical fact is always a bit different from the myths,” said Lambert. He acknowledged that the gathered delegates were “principled, yes, but protecting private interests” as well.

The religious orientation of the delegates has been misrepresented at times, he said. Nearly everyone in the hall was a professing Christian — with the possible exception of Benjamin Franklin who denied the divinity of Jesus.

“They were neither Bible-thumping evangelicals or Deists,” he said, as they are sometimes portrayed.

The physically diminutive James Madison

played a very strong role, said Lambert, in raising the question, “How do you balance power and liberty?” — and in answering it: by the separation of powers that led to three branches of government.

The “nominal Anglican” who had been at the forefront of the religious liberty battle in Virginia was also the most vocal proponent of a federal commitment to the separation of church and state. Madison was “even more consistent and insistent than Jefferson.”

Aware that dissenting groups such as Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians were growing faster than the Anglican Church, and with a commitment to religious freedom, the delegates embraced the “radical” notion of church-state separation while personally believing that God’s law is the highest law and that morality flowed from Christian teachings.

Recordings of the lengthy discussions and debates reveal very few references to religion, said Lambert. And the rare mention of “God” was used more in vain to express dismay with another delegate’s opinion than to honor the Creator.

Likewise, delegates rejected the idea of imposing a religious test for officeholders — which some states embraced. South Carolina, for example, required an affirmation of belief

in Jesus Christ, said Lambert.

The convention was held in secrecy with no room given for amendments. The final draft — containing “no mention of God at all” — was sent to the states for an up-or-down vote on ratification.

And while the phrase “separation of church and state” does not appear in the Constitution, Lambert said the delegates clearly embraced that concept. Yet some state convention delegates wanted a more explicit commitment to religious liberty.

So Madison sent a signal to the state conventions: if they would ratify the draft, he’d personally see that a Bill of Rights was added that guaranteed religious freedom.

“In Madison’s view, separation of church and state worked for the benefit of the spread of the gospel,” said Lambert.

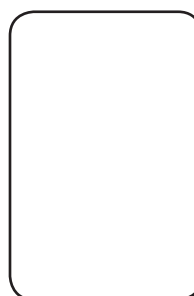
While not everyone agreed with Madison and Jefferson, the Constitution was ratified — miraculously or not.

Lambert said there is a lot of concern today about America as a divided nation.

“We’ve always been divided,” said Lambert. “...I worry when we’re not divided.”

However, he added that the value of dissenting opinions suffer when not expressed with the right spirit — a concern within the American political climate today. **BT**

—*The Shurden Lectures were established through a gift to the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (bjconline.org) that coordinates the annual series.*



Franklin T. Lambert

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Churches attacked in Kenya, Nigeria

By Fredrick Nzwili
RNS/ENInews

NAIROBI, Kenya — Kenyan churches tightened security after a lone attacker exploded a grenade inside an evangelical church in Nairobi on April 29, killing one person and injuring 15.

Meanwhile, a string of bombings in Nigeria during Sunday morning worship services killed at least four people in Maiduguri and 15 in Kano, with many others injured.

The Kenya attacks at the God's House of Miracles International Church occurred days after the U.S. embassy warned of an impending attack by al-Shabab, a militant Islamist group in neighboring Somalia.

"We condemn this attack in the strongest terms possible. This is a cowardly act that tells us that we need to be vigilant," moderator David Gathanju of Presbyterian Church of East Africa told ENInews.

With church centers coming under increased threat since Kenyan troops entered Somalia last October in pursuit of the militants, Gathanju said churches have been reviewing their security, including increased screening of vehicles and people arriving at worship.

Muslims leaders condemned the attack, with Sheikh Mohammed Khalifa, the organizing secretary of the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya, saying it was "insane" to attack places of worship.

"This is not a religious war. Christians and Muslims in this country have been living in peace. But these are people who want to interfere with our co-existence. I am happy Christians have been peaceful and we pray for them," said Khalifa. **BT**



RNS photo courtesy Murray Close/
Disney Enterprises and Walden Media.

Narnia or Neverland? Christians choose their favorite fantasyland

By Daniel Burke
Religion News Service

Evangelicals prefer Narnia, Catholics have a wanderlust for Wonderland, and mainline Protestants are split between hitching a ride to Hogwarts, Narnia or Neverland.

Those are the results from a unique poll by the television show *60 Minutes* and *Vanity Fair* magazine. The survey asked 1,000 Americans what fantasyland they'd most like to visit (Washington, D.C., excluded).

Evangelicals showed a clear preference for Narnia, the fantastical world of talking beasts entered through an enchanted wardrobe in C.S. Lewis' series *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

Lewis, an Anglican, topped the list for 28 percent of evangelicals. Both his fiction — commonly interpreted as Christian allegories — and also his nonfiction have become touchstones in contemporary evangelicalism.

Just eight percent of evangelicals said they would like to visit Hogwarts, the school of witchcraft and wizardry from the Harry Potter series.

Alice's Wonderland was many Catholics' cup of tea, with 21 percent saying they'd like to take a trip down the rabbit hole. Peter Pan's Neverland (18 percent), Hogwarts (18 percent) and J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle Earth (16 percent) weren't far behind.

Mainline Protestants were similarly split between Neverland (19 percent), Narnia (18 percent) and Hogwarts (18 percent).

Among those listed as "other" religions, Hogwarts was the clear favorite (31 percent). And Middle Earth led the way for those who professed no religious affiliation (23 percent).

The survey, conducted in late 2010 and recently highlighted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, includes a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. **BT**

Methodists to end guaranteed clergy appointments

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

In a move that will give bishops more flexibility to remove ineffective pastors, the United Methodist Church voted on May 1 to end guaranteed clergy appointments.

Clergy appointments have been guaranteed since the 1950s, when they were instituted to protect ministers from discrimination or arbitrary abuse, supporters say. But critics say those original goals have helped mediocre clergy retain their posts. A commission studying the appointments said a more

"nimble" process was necessary.

The Study of Mission Commission recommended the change in policy, as the UMC searches for ways to stanch a decades-long decline in U.S. membership.

"We acknowledge the difficulties associated with this vision such as uncertainty, loss of security, caring for those in employment transitions, concern about episcopal authority, and loss of historic protections," the commission wrote in its report to the General Conference. "We feel strongly, however, that this vision is critical for the fulfillment of the church's mission." **BT**

Supreme Court decision on religion upends campus religious groups

When the Supreme Court ruled that a Christian student group could only be recognized at a small public law school if it accepted non-Christians and gays as potential leaders, some lawyers and campus advocates grew nervous.

While the 5-4 decision in *Christian Legal Society v. Martinez* was primarily aimed at public colleges and universities, some conservatives say the decision has upended university religious life, with both public and private schools reconsidering nondiscrimination rules.

Now, nearly two years after the decision involving the University of California's Hastings College of the Law, the case is causing strife across U.S. college campuses:

- InterVarsity Christian Fellowship says 41 of its campus chapters have faced challenges since the Supreme Court decision. Many have been resolved, but the IVCF chapter at the State University of New York at Buffalo plans to appeal its loss of official recognition for asking a gay student leader to resign when he would not accept its belief statement.

- In one of the most visible debates, private Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., has said some religious groups won't be officially recognized if they require certain beliefs or do not allow all members to compete for leadership roles. On the website about its nondiscrimination policy, the school cited the 2010 Supreme Court ruling in defending the constitutionality of the rules.

- Lawmakers in Ohio and Arizona passed bills to ensure that public colleges and universities didn't go down the same road as Hastings. Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam, a Republican, said he would veto similar legislation only because it also included private universities that receive more than \$24 million in state funds — namely, Vanderbilt.

David French, senior counsel with the American Center for Law and Justice, said there's been an uptick in challenges to religious campus activity since the 2010 case, but he expects Vanderbilt to be the exception rather than the rule. He argues the so-called "all-comers policies" for religious groups, such as Vanderbilt's, are unfair as long as sororities or all-male glee clubs can discriminate based on gender.



Baptist Collegiate Ministries (BCM) at Vanderbilt University is removing itself as an official student organization due to the university's new non-discrimination policy that requires recognized student groups to open membership and leadership to all persons regardless of religious beliefs.

"Very few universities have tried to implement all-comers policies in the aftermath of *CLS v. Martinez*," said French, who has defended student religious groups for more than a decade. "They recognize the fundamental absurdity of an all-comers policy."

More than a dozen religious groups have determined they cannot or will not comply with Vanderbilt's stance, which prompted members of the Congressional Prayer Caucus to complain to school officials that religious student groups are being targeted. They cited a now-unrecognized campus group that was told it must remove a requirement that its leaders have a personal commitment to Jesus.

"Belief-based or status-based requirements are inconsistent with our nondiscrimination policy," said Vanderbilt spokeswoman Beth Fortune when asked about that group. She also said the policy "does not target specific student groups."

Jim Lundgren, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's senior vice president, said his organization is currently helping several chapters beyond Vanderbilt and Buffalo that are facing questions about their policies. IVCF officials argue that allowing chapters to determine how to pick their leaders helps maintain their values.

"We just want to have a place on college campuses and allow our perspective to be there in the kind of mix of ideas and beliefs," said Lundgren. "We think that's part of what a great college education is about."

Robert Shibley, senior vice president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), said the Vanderbilt controversy confirms what his organization cautioned against after the Hastings case when it wrote 271 schools to say the decision did not require a policy change on their campuses.

"This is along the lines of what I feared, that Vanderbilt is effectively establishing that some religions are acceptable on its campus," he said, "and others are now beyond the pale at Vanderbilt."

Although there have not been wholesale changes across academia, there has been substantial debate over potential or actual policy changes on some campuses.

Jeremy Tedesco, senior counsel for the Alliance Defense Fund, sees the *Martinez* decision "lurking in the background" of other cases. He filed suit in February on behalf of the Christian anti-abortion group Make Up Your Own Mind at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro. The school, which does not have an all-comers policy like Hastings, was not going to formally recognize the group because officials deemed it nonreligious.

The school has since officially recognized Make Up Your Own Mind; Tedesco said the ADF is working on a settlement.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which last fall permitted the Christian singing group Psalm 100 to retain its recognition after a dispute over its exclusion of a gay member, is now reviewing its nondiscrimination policy.

The Christian Legal Society chapter at the center of the Supreme Court case became so small when it lost recognition that it no longer exists, said Kim Colby, senior counsel with the CLS' Center for Law and Religious Freedom. Other chapters have been questioned without losing their status.

"If you can give a broad exemption to the fraternities and sororities, you can't give a narrow exemption to the religious groups," she said. **BT**

Classifieds

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Fire destroys Burmese Bible school

(ABP) — Fire destroyed a Bible school and other buildings at a Baptist-run refugee camp on the Thailand/Myanmar border April 28.

The Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible School and College was founded in the Mae Le refugee camp by Saw Simon, recipient of the Baptist World Alliance Human Rights Award in 2000, according to a BWA news release. The blaze also destroyed Simon's home.

According to Karen News, camp residents

managed to put out the fire in about an hour.

American Baptists are accepting contributions to help rebuild the school, started in the Karen state of the country formerly known as Burma and forced to relocate to Thailand due to Myanmar's long-running civil war.

International Ministries, the first Baptist international mission agency in America, dates its history to 1814, when it appointed its first missionaries, Adoniram and Ann Hasseltine Judson, to Burma. **BT**

In the Know

Jerry Chiles retired last month from Forest Hills Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C., where he served as associate pastor to adults. He plans to continue in ministry through Christian life coaching and working in the field of Emotional Intelligence.

Scot McKnight has been appointed as professor of New Testament at American Baptist-related Northern Seminary, in Lombard, Ill. He is a speaker and writer whose books include *The King Jesus Gospel* and *The Jesus Creed: Loving God, Loving Others*.

Joanne Hoffman Powers died April 17 at age 58. She was the longest tenured employee at American Baptist Home Mission Societies where she worked for almost 41 years, having begun at age 17.

Keithen Tucker is pastor of First Baptist Church, Eatonton, Ga., where he has served as interim pastor since January 2011. Previously he was director of marketing and development for *Baptist Today*.

Associated Baptist Press presented its Founders Award posthumously to Ed Vick April 30 at First Baptist Church of Raleigh, N.C., where he had been an active member. ABP Executive Director David Wilkinson called Vick a "true friend and trusted adviser." Laura Anne Vick received the award on behalf of her late husband. **BT**

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Popular Bible teacher and writer **Tony W. Cartledge** writes each of the weekly Bible studies in *Baptists Today* (beginning on page 18). Themes are based on selected texts from the Revised Common Lectionary.

These lessons — found exclusively in this Nurturing Faith section of *Baptists Today* — form the foundation for the teaching resources for all age groups. **Each class participant should have a copy of *Baptists Today* with these lessons in hand.**

Christian educator **Rick Jordan** of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina provides a teaching plan for each lesson, available at nurturingfaith.net. His FIT FAITH approach to teaching allows for class engagement with the biblical texts as well as with one another.

The Youth Lessons — found on pages 22-23 — build off of Tony's Bible studies and direct these biblical truths to the daily lives of students. Curriculum developer **David Cassady** writes the youth lessons in the news journal, and student minister **Jeremy Colliver** provides the online teaching guides for each lesson found at nurturingfaith.net (or linked from baptiststoday.org).

Thanks sponsors!

These Bible studies for adults and youth are sponsored through generous gifts from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (Bo Prosser, Coordinator of Congregational Life) and from the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation. Thank you!

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

2 Samuel 1:1-27

July 1, 2012

How the Mighty Have Fallen

Today's lesson continues a string of eight lessons from 1-2 Samuel, and begins a stretch that one could call "The Rise and Fall of David." Although the narrator clearly loves David and considers him to have been an amazing king, he wants the reader to understand that even the great King David was subject to temptation and failure. ↓

For our first four lessons, David is on the way up, demonstrating the spiritual devotion and political acuity that would propel him to the throne as the leader of all Israel. To get there, however, he would have to overcome significant obstacles.

When bad news arrives (vv. 1-16)

The lectionary text for today skips vv. 2-15, but the story is incomplete without them, so we'll consider the entire text. As 2 Samuel begins, we realize that it is so tightly bound to the end of 1 Samuel that the first word, in Hebrew, is "and" — "And it happened that, after Saul's death, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained in Ziklag for two days" (v. 1, my translation). ↓

This bit of background reminds the reader why the arrival of a messenger bearing news of Saul's death put David in a very awkward situation for a man who would be king over all Israel.

David was living in Ziklag because, in order to escape Saul's clutches, he had actually allied himself with Israel's archenemy, the Philistines. David had



become a vassal to Achish, who ruled the territory around Gath, and had been given charge of the southern city of Ziklag (1 Samuel 27).

As the Philistines and Israelites mustered their forces for a decisive battle, Achish had called up David and his 600 fighting men to join the Philistine forces in fighting Israel, something David clearly did not want to do (1 Sam. 28:1-2). Fortunately, the other Philistine lords did not trust David — for good reason — so he and his men were sent back to Ziklag (1 Sam. 29:1-11). ↓

During their absence, a band of Amalekites had plundered Ziklag and captured the women and children for the slave market. Despite weariness from their forced march home, David and his men pursued the Amalekites, ambushed them, and rescued their families and goods (1 Samuel 30) before returning to Ziklag.

First Samuel, then, ends with a triumphant victory for David, even as Saul goes

down to a bitter defeat, dying on his own sword in the climactic battle surrounding Mount Gilboa (1 Samuel 31).

This necessary background helps us to appreciate David's delicate position when a certain Amalekite approached, claiming to have "escaped from the camp of Israel," which would imply that he had fought on Israel's behalf. The man's torn clothes and dirt-strewn appearance bear all the marks of ritual grief, as if he had served the fallen king (vv. 2-3). ↓

We note that the Amalekite's account of Saul's death (vv. 4-10) differs from the previous story, in 1 Samuel 31, in several ways. The Amalekite mentions the deaths of Saul and Jonathan only, for example, while 1 Samuel 31 records the death of three royal sons. The armor bearer who refused to kill Saul in 1 Samuel 31 does not appear in the Amalekite's tale. Also, 1 Samuel 31 suggests that Saul fought from the mountain crags, where only the Philistine archers could reach him.

Additional background information online where you see the "Digging Deeper" icon



In 2 Samuel 1, however, the Amalekite insisted that the Philistine chariots and horsemen were bearing down on Saul. The chariots, at least, could not have traversed the mountain paths where 1 Samuel 31 says Saul had chosen to make his last stand.

The first story insists that Saul feared capture, and had fallen upon his own sword when his man-at-arms refused to slay him. The Amalekite, however, said that Saul was wounded, leaning on his spear and enduring convulsions (or perhaps, dizziness). At Saul's plaintive request, the Amalekite claimed, he took pity on the doomed man and put him out of his misery. Not wanting Saul's crown and royal armband to fall into Philistine hands, he had brought them to David (vv. 6-10).

While this may suggest nothing more than a variant tradition, another possibility is that the messenger was lying all along — that he was no mercenary fighting for Israel, but a battlefield scavenger who hoped that David would reward him for dispatching Saul and bringing the royal insignia. He was, after all, an Amalekite, and thus automatically suspect.

David had nothing else to go on but the Amalekite's word, and granted the unexpected reward of a quick execution for having harmed "the Lord's anointed" (vv. 13-16), something he himself had studiously avoided (1 Sam. 24:6-7, 26:11).

David's actions also had a strategic purpose. As someone known and loved in Israel, but who was currently allied with the Philistines, he was in a delicate position. If he was to have any future as a leader in Israel, it was crucial that he emphasize his own innocence in Saul's death and his displeasure with it, lest others think of him as being complicit in the king's fall.

All of us meet unexpected obstacles from time to time. David proved to be a quick thinker who was skilled at making the best of a bad situation. Can you think of a time when you were able to convert an apparent impediment to your advantage?

When it's time for grief (vv. 17-27)

David's grief for the loss of Saul and Jonathan appears genuine, born of his deep love and friendship with Jonathan, and his respect for King Saul. When he heard the news, his first reaction had been to tear his clothes, weep openly, and begin a period of fasting as he mourned their loss (vv. 11-12).

We should never run from sorrow or fear our tears. Some of us may feel that we've had more than our share of loss, but all of us must face loss and sorrow: it is a part of life. David was unashamed to grieve the death of his liege and the loss of his closest friend. If we try to "be a man" or "keep a stiff upper lip" and stifle our grief, it won't go away. Unexpressed grief can manifest itself in any number of stress-related illnesses, in impatience with others, in broken relationships.

Grief should not be unending, and the sort of self-pity that leads some to wallow in their grief is unhealthy, but good grief allows us to work through loss and move on to what is next.

In the midst of his own grief, David managed to use the occasion to his political advantage by writing and publicizing a plaintive, heart-rending lament. 📖 Note that he ordered "The Song of the Bow" (v. 18, NRSV, perhaps a popular title of the song, or the tune) should be taught throughout Judah, the large tribal area that was his homeland. 📖

Samuel had anointed David as the future king years before (1 Sam. 16:1-13), so he would have had a sense of destiny that he was to become king. He understood, however, that he could not expect God to do everything for him; he would have to be wise in his actions and speech. Saul's death opened a door of opportunity for David, but he knew it was important that the populace should know that he grieved and honored both the former king and his heir.

David may have sensed that he would be the next king, but he did not wish to appear eager for the job, or to give the appearance that he sought the position.

The lament consists of two unequal stanzas that are bracketed by the recurring refrain, "How the mighty have fallen!" The first section speaks to the loss of Saul and Jonathan together (vv. 20-24): the "glory" of Israel lies slain upon the high places, he says. 📖

"Tell it not in Gath ... proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon" is a fruitless wish that the Philistine women would not learn of Saul's death and dance in the streets of those major Philistine cities.

In v. 21, David utters a mournful curse against the mountain of Gilboa, where Saul died, calling for it to become barren of rain and fertility. He recalls Saul and Jonathan as valiant soldiers who would have killed their share of Philistines and not have surrendered without a fight (v. 22-24).

The second stanza mourns Jonathan alone (vv. 25b-26), voicing David's distress over the death of Jonathan, not only as a champion, but also as a dear friend. "Greatly beloved were you to me," David laments, "your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (v. 26, see "The Hardest Question" online for further comment).

The thrice-repeated refrain (vv. 19, 25a, 27) may have been voiced by the congregation if the lament was read or sung in a public setting, allowing them to participate in the community expression of grief. 📖

David's genuine expression of sorrow reminds us of the importance of integrity. While some may have questioned David's motives, few could question his grief.

The text also reminds us of how God may work with us to bring something good even from tragic situations. The Israelites' defeat and Saul's death were national disasters, but they set the stage for David's rise as God's chosen leader over a renewed nation. Saul was dead, but David was also the Lord's anointed. **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

2 Samuel 5:1-10

July 8, 2012

Well, If You Insist

Have you ever had a dream come true? How did it feel — and what did you do next? That's the problem with dreams-come-true: unless you have new goals beyond them, everything else will be a letdown.

The story in 2 Samuel 5 brings us to the moment when David's dreams — or at least, the promise he'd been living into — finally came true. Fortunately, David recognized that he hadn't reached the end of the road; there was still much work to do. 📌

King over Judah

We can't appreciate the significance of 2 Samuel 5 without a brief review of what has happened since the death of Saul and David's plaintive elegy in chapter 1. David had been busy.

David's first move was to seek God's guidance regarding his political affiliation: Should he remain in Ziklag as a Philistine vassal, or "go up into any of the cities of Judah"? In an unstated fashion, Yahweh instructed David to go to Hebron. David left Ziklag and the Philistines then, moving his wives and his private army to Hebron and the towns surrounding it. Soon, the elders of Judah, who had long admired David, anointed him to be king over Judah (2:1-4).

Note that this means the kingdom had officially become divided. David was king over the large southern tribe of Judah, while Abner, Saul's military chief, had set up Saul's son Ishbaal (pejoratively called "Ishbosheth") as king over Israel. 📌 Ishbosheth's



two-year tenure as king seems to have been more rump than reality, however. He lived in the relatively remote town of Mahanaim, on the eastern side of the Jordan, and is portrayed as a weak ruler in every way, while Abner remained the power behind the throne.

Soon after David became king in Judah, he began reaching out to potential allies. When he heard that men from the city of Jabesh Gilead, tightly allied with Saul, had risked their lives to recover the bodies of Saul and his sons from public display on the walls of Beth-shean, he sent congratulations and a promise of loyalty to them (2:5-7).

David personally stayed in the background during a period of civil war between the north (Israel) and the south (Judah), leaving skirmishes in the hands of Joab (2:12-32) while he ruled Judah from Hebron, took additional wives, and had sons by six of them — the narrator's way of emphasizing that "the house of David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became

weaker and weaker" (3:5).

David found himself in a pickle, however, when Abner turned against Ishbaal and offered to deliver Israel to David. David met with Abner, agreed to the plan, and sent him away in peace — but Joab murdered Abner at the city gate, gaining vengeance for Abner's earlier killing of Joab's brother Asahel (3:6-30).

Once again, David had to do damage control, publically cursing Joab for his actions while mourning openly for Abner, burying him with honor, and publishing a brief elegy lamenting his death (3:31-39).

This was followed by yet another conundrum when two Benjaminite renegades assassinated Ishbaal and brought his head to David in hopes of a reward. David honored them as he had rewarded the Amalekite who claimed to have killed Saul, except even more dramatically. He ordered his guards to kill the two men, cut off their hands and feet, then hang their bodies beside the

Additional background information online where you see the "Digging Deeper" icon



pool at Hebron (4:5-12). David buried Ishbaal's head with due honor, demonstrating again that he had no part in the dispatching of the Israelite king.

King over Israel (vv. 1-5)

This, then, brings us to chapter 5, in which "all the tribes of Israel" (presumably in the form of representatives) voluntarily came to David in Hebron, making suit for his leadership. 🇺🇸

Downplaying past differences, they spoke to David as "your bone and flesh" (v. 1), emphasizing kinship ties just as a contemporary American might speak of relatives as "their own flesh and blood." Attempting to persuade David to accept the crown, the tribal leaders fondly recalled the days before Saul turned against David, when "it was you who led out Israel and brought it in" (v. 2a), the purpose for which Israel's elders had originally sought a king (1 Sam. 8:19-20).

The leaders shifted to a more spiritual appeal in the latter part of v. 2, stating that "The LORD said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel." 🇺🇸 While this appears to be a reference to David's anointing in 1 Samuel 16, the divine promise they cite is otherwise unknown. Samuel had originally anointed David in relative secret. Had the event become widely known? We can only speculate.

Multiple sources have apparently been woven into this account, for with v. 3 we come to an alternate telling of the same story, in which the "elders of Israel" came to David, who "made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD," after which they anointed him as king over Israel as well as Judah.

Little is said about the anointing. Since the covenant was made "before the LORD," we may guess that a priest would have been involved, but the text does not say so. In either case, the act would have been considered a sacred event.

Note how David's activity in this story is muted. The narrator has

carefully constructed the account to establish that David was not a glory-grabber who sought the throne on his own, but was brought to it by Yahweh's choice and invited to serve by Israel's elders.

The end result, however, was the same: David was no longer a future king, secretly waiting for his chance to rule. After his invitation and anointing by the elders of Israel, he stood as the popular and powerful ruler of all the tribes, the first king of a truly united Israel, destined to rule for 40 years. 🇺🇸

King over Jerusalem (vv. 6-10)

Now that David was king over both Israel and Judah, he had decisions to make and things to do. He knew that he could not rule the far-flung nation from the Deep South city of Hebron, but neither could he afford to alienate his southern supporters by moving to a city in the north.

David found the solution in the city of Jerusalem, a Jebusite enclave that had never been conquered by the Israelites (Josh. 15:63, Judg. 1:21). The city was conveniently located near the border between Judah and Israel, but not allied or identified with either. Seizing the opportunity, David led his private army to conquer Jerusalem and declared the city to be the personal property of the king, an autonomous seat of government not beholden or belonging to either Israel or Judah. 🇺🇸

The account of how David's men conquered the heavily fortified city, located atop a steeply sloped hill, is extremely difficult to translate (vv. 6-9). If the reading of *tsinnor* as "water shaft" is correct, it appears that David perceived that the city was vulnerable to attack through a nearly vertical water shaft from a point inside the city wall to the Spring of Gihon, which could be accessed from outside the city.

Scaling the water shaft would have been incredibly difficult, especially if it had been guarded. The implication is that David's men climbed the shaft unobserved and surprised the Jebusites, allowing them to open the city gates from the inside.

Having captured Jerusalem with his personal army, the new king named it "the City of David," indicating its independence from tribal loyalties. The Hill of Ophel, where the original city was located, bears that name to this day.

It is unlikely that any of us will become king of anything, or face the challenge of establishing a new capital city. What, then, can we learn from a text like this?

The elders' appeal to David points to the importance of overcoming past grievances and working together for mutual benefit. David and the elders of Israel had been putative enemies, but they were willing to put past enmity behind them, recognizing that they were the same "flesh and bone."

As a former pastor (for 26 years), I can remember multiple instances in which a disagreement led to feelings of enmity between church members, including church leaders. Perhaps you can recall similar situations. For the church to move forward and do the kingdom work to which it is called, alienated members must remember that they are "flesh and bone," part of the same family of faith.

Sometimes the opportunity for cooperation comes in times of transition, as the church seeks to call a new pastor-leader and looks for someone with proven leadership skills. As Israel's leaders expressed their belief that God had chosen David, so church members seek a consensus of belief that God is leading them to a particular pastor. Pastors are not kings, but they play important leadership roles, and work best when they have the congregation's support.

Whether in the church, the family or the workplace, working cooperatively and recognizing others' leadership gifts are key to a promising future. **BT**

Youth

July 1 – July 29, 2012



David Cassady and Jeremy Colliver

Youth lessons are made possible through the generous support of the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation.

Grief Redeemed

JULY 1

The hero's head is flung backwards with his face to the heavens, a guttural scream echoes in the silence of the scene — all as the hero falls to his knees ripping his shirt open. The rain that is usually falling in this scene is a foreshadowing of the tears that begin to flow from the eyes of the hero. The grief is evident. The pain is experienced. The loss has paralyzed the hero.

Death is not a common reality in the lives of most youth; we cheer for our friends as they compete instead of mourning them at their funeral. But when death does occur, it brings the life of a youth to a standstill.

In today's scripture, 2 Samuel, David must feel this way too as he is told that both Saul and Jonathan have been killed in battle.

When David hears of these deaths, whether out of pain or to make a political statement, a young man of service is called over to have the messenger struck down. David accepts no responsibility for the death of Saul, Jonathan or the messenger he has had slain, but instead intones a lament that would later be taught to the people of Judah.

The message in this passage is twofold: 1) Grief is real, and 2) God can bring good from situations where we see no hope. David does not try to hide his grief, but rather makes it public as he rips his clothing. This story ultimately leads to David being chosen as the Lord's anointed one and God's redemption coming through David's kingdom.

Think About It:

The death of Saul and Jonathan were crippling to David, bringing him to his knees. David could have hidden his emotions to put on a show of strength. Why do you think David revealed his emotions so freely?

Make a Choice:

David could have chosen to remain frozen in his grief, but he chose to rise from his grief so that he could become God's anointed king. Will you choose to act in a way so that God can use you?

Pray:

Offer a prayer asking for God to redeem the situations you mess up.

Crown and Conquer

JULY 8

Being named captain of your team, earning first chair in the band or orchestra, winning a debate competition, finishing the final task of your favorite video game for the first time, your favorite sports team winning the championship game ... All of these can be mountaintop experiences for youth, but what happens after the mountaintop experience is over? Hopefully, you looked over and saw that there was another mountain to climb.

In the first part of 2 Samuel 5, we read that David is crowned king, but as we continue to read, we see a military challenge to David. David is crowned king by both the people and by God. The people are represented by "all the tribes of Israel" that come to anoint him king. They are his people, and they are of the same flesh. But David is also anointed by God. The people of Israel

remind him of his calling to be a shepherd of the people (read about it in 1 Samuel). It is with this calling that the people of Israel and David covenant with God for David to be their king.

We read next of David's reign as king of Israel for 40 years and of his family becoming stronger and stronger. There is a quick turn back to the present in the next verse of the text as David marches to Jerusalem. David recognizes the weakness of the city and attacks. Jerusalem is conquered, and subsequently named for its conquerer: The City of David.

David succeeds because his gifts are recognized and affirmed by other people in his life. He accepts the role of leadership God has anointed him with, and calls those around him to action.

Think About It:

The first thing we hear about David after he was anointed king is that he went and served. How easy would it have been for David to celebrate and then rest from his climb to power?

Make a Choice:

When we are placed in a position of leadership, we can choose to lead with the gifts we have been blessed with by God or we can serve ourselves. Which will you choose?

Pray:

Pray that God will place you in positions of leadership where you can effectively use your gifts to create the Kingdom of God.

Bringing It Back

JULY 15

How do you worship? Are you more of a traditionalist with hymns and an organ? Do you worship more freely with guitar riffs and drum solos? Or do you worship the best when you are alone so it can be just you and God?

Today's scripture, 2 Samuel 6, may reveal how David liked to worship, or at least how he worshipped as the Ark of the Covenant was brought into Jerusalem.

This passage doesn't begin with the same exuberance in which it ends. The

30,000 people David has chosen to bring the ark back to Jerusalem hit a rocky patch along their way. Uzzah reaches up to steady the ark and when he touches it, Uzzah is struck dead by God! For three months the journey stops until it is revealed to David that the blessings of the ark have returned.

The journey ends in Jerusalem with David leading the way, the ark in tow. Six steps into the city, David offers sacrifice and then dances with joy at the return of the ark to Jerusalem.

Think About It:

Uzzah was struck down because he touched the ark. What do you think is revealed of Uzzah and God from this encounter?

Make a Choice:

David was unhindered in his worship before God by leaping and dancing. How will you choose to worship today?

Pray:

Pray that God will give you a heart that is open in its sharing of joy and love.

I Promise

JULY 22

Shaking on it, Spit and shaken, the pinky promise, "I swear," placing your hand on the Bible ... I'm reminded of all these ways I've sealed promises during my life as I read 2 Samuel 7:1-16. The kicker is that this promise God gives to David via Nathan doesn't need any of those extras. God just says, "I promise."

David has finally settled in to Jerusalem and has some time to think. As he sits in his grand home, he realizes the ark that has been carried now sits in a simple tent.

He decides he wants to build a home for the ark and thus God. God on the other hand wants to build a people.

God's promise to David is for David's people to rule forever. The promise is not an "if ... then" promise, but one built on grace. If the people of David fail, the consequences will come from persons, not God. God will give grace. God doesn't want a grand, ornate palace but rather a grateful people.

Think About It:

We are not asked to build a house, but to bring people into relationship with God. How can we help build a people for God?

Make a Choice:

David was trying to honor God with his idea. What choices do we make to honor God that may be different from what God desires?

Pray:

Offer in your own words this prayer: "O God, let my desires be your desires."

Read All About It!

JULY 29

Have you ever read a story and thought, "This needs to be made into a movie"? As I read through 2 Samuel 11, that thought crosses my mind.

David has sent everyone off to battle, but he remains home. His feet are kicked back on the rooftop when his gaze is drawn to a woman bathing. He sends a servant over, she comes back with him, and soon the woman announces she is pregnant. Whoops! It might have been safer for David to go off to battle. The cover-up begins.

David brings Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, home from battle to be with his wife. This doesn't work, so David gets Uriah drunk. This doesn't work, so David sends Uriah into battle to die. This does work.

Bathsheba mourns her husband's death and then is brought to David's house to be married to him and have her child. David rationalizes his actions as a byproduct of war, a rationalization Yahweh does not agree with as the chapter concludes: "The thing that David had done displeased the Lord."

Think About It:

What do you think caused David to continue to try and cover up what he had done?

Make a Choice:

David chose not to lead his army into battle. What choices do you make that have long-term consequences?

Pray:

Offer a prayer like this in your own words: "May I follow in your path instead of the one I blaze on my own."

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

2 Samuel 6:1-23

July 15, 2012

The Profits and Perils of Worship

The title of today's lesson may be a bit misleading, because the text is not about the routine sort of worship most of us experience week by week. David's decision to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem — amid purposeful but perilous worship celebrations — was an extraordinary event that involved multiple dynamics, not all of them related to worship. Even so, we may learn something about worship from traveling with David on that daring expedition. 📖

Have you ever danced before the Lord with all your might, or attended a worship service in which someone else did? Is your personal worship style very staid and reserved, or unbound and exuberant?

Do you ever feel judgmental toward persons whose worship style differs from yours? Read today's text: Would your response be more like David's or Michal's?

An aborted attempt (vv. 1-11)

The materials in 2 Samuel 6, along with 1 Samuel 4:1-7:1, are generally attributed to an early source that Leonhard Rost first labeled "The Ark Narrative." The tragic-comic story of 1 Samuel 4:1-7:1 recounts how Eli's sons carried the ark from its resting place in Shiloh into battle against the Philistines. The ark was captured and taken to a Philistine temple, where Yahweh began to wreak such havoc against the Philistines that they sent it back to Israel on an unmanned cart drawn by two nursing cows. 📖

Additional background information online where you see the "Digging Deeper" icon



When the ark arrived in Beth Shemesh, the people rejoiced greatly until an otherwise unknown group called the "sons of Jeconiah" showed disrespect to the ark, with disastrous results. Yahweh's anger broke out and many died, leaving the Israelites so afraid that they put it in quarantine in the hill town of Kiriath Jearim.

For 20 years, according to 1 Sam. 7:2, the ark remained out of sight, while "all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord."

This account provides needed background for understanding today's text. Israel had been in religious disarray, lacking a central shrine and fearful of their primary symbol of God's presence with them. David intended to change all of that.

We cannot discount a sincere desire to better Israel's spiritual life, but David clearly had other motives in bringing the ark to Jerusalem. He had already made his city Israel's political center; now he set out to make it the religious heart of the nation, too. David appeared to hope the combination of temple and throne in Jerusalem would increase loyalty to both, strengthening

the monarchy and the nation's religious life. 📖

David understood both the power of publicity and the risk of dealing with holy things, so he led the expedition to recover the ark, bringing with him a large honor guard as they traveled to Baale-Judah, apparently an alternate name for Kiriath Jearim (vv. 1-2). 📖 Since the ark had last traveled by cow-cart, perhaps, David had prepared a new cart to transport the ark, guided by the sons of Abinadab, who had been consecrated to care for it (v. 3-4).

In a joyful atmosphere of worship and praise, David "and all the house of Israel" demonstrated their respect for the ark and their celebration of its presence by dancing before it, accompanied by an assortment of musical instruments (v. 5).

Despite David's careful preparations, however, tragedy struck. As the cart traversed a hilly and unlevel path on the outskirts of Jerusalem, it appeared poised to tip over and roll down the hillside. An attendant named Uzzah reflexively put his hand on the ark to steady it, and was struck dead on the spot (vv. 6-7) because "the anger of

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An angry wife (vv. 16, 20-23)

the LORD was kindled against Uzzah.” (For more on this, see The Hardest Question in the online resources.) Puzzled and angry, David called an immediate halt to the march, lest he bring trouble into the capital. He returned the ark to quarantine, this time at the home of Obed-Edom, a man from the Philistine city of Gath (vv. 8-11).

Uzzah’s experience may lead us to wonder not only whether we have shown disrespect to the symbols of God’s presence or misbehaved in church, but also why we haven’t been zapped for doing so!

A successful return (vv. 12-15, 17-19)

David was sorely disappointed with the outcome of his first attempt at bringing the ark to Jerusalem, but Yahweh’s anger was not lasting. Three months later, word came to David that Obed-Edom had experienced nothing but good fortune during the time he hosted the ark. Believing the curse to be spent, David decided to try again.

On his second attempt at bringing the ark to Jerusalem, David took extra care to avoid any offense. The use of a cart had proven disastrous, so this time David had the ark, which was equipped with two golden poles designed for transport, carried into the city on the shoulders of men specially chosen and consecrated for the task (v. 12).

A corresponding text in 1 Chron. 15:11-15, written many years later, focuses on how carefully David followed the prescribed rituals. In that expanded text, David concludes that the previous tragedy was due to his failing to have Levites carry the ark. Thus, he ordered the priests and Levites to consecrate themselves, and the Levites bore the ark, “as Moses had commanded according to the word of the Lord” (1 Chron. 15:15).

As an additional gesture of respect, the ark had not gone more than six paces before David stopped the procession to offer sacrifices. Perhaps he saw the successful six steps as a sign that Yahweh had given permission for

the ark to proceed to Jerusalem; thus the sacrifices expressed both relief and gratitude (v. 13).

In the first attempt, all the people leapt and danced before the Lord, but in the second, David alone danced on behalf of the people, clad only in a linen ephod, the equivalent of an undershirt. In doing so, David revealed (literally) an exuberant side of himself that had not been seen before (vv. 14-15).

David’s scanty clothing is made more sedate in the Chronicler’s version, where the linen ephod becomes a fine linen robe (1 Chron. 15:27). In both versions, however, the combination of David’s dress and David’s dance causes great offense to David’s wife (2 Sam. 6:16; 1 Chron. 15:29).

After all of the preceding excitement, the arrival of the ark is anticlimactic (v. 17). They brought the ark into the tent David had pitched for it, put it down, and that was it. Perhaps David was relieved that the process went so smoothly, with most of the excitement resulting from his dance rather than any divine signs regarding the ark.

To celebrate, sacrifices were offered to God, with David himself distributing portions of bread, meat and raisin cakes to all who were in attendance. Is it any wonder that the people loved David?

Note the narrator’s insistence that David assumed the high priestly role of offering the sacrifices and blessing the people. David had a priest at hand in Abiathar, but apparently wanted to be known as a king who bridged the political and religious worlds. We presume that he could do this, because Israel’s king was ideally Yahweh’s representative (God’s adopted son, according to Ps. 2:7). Whether this gave David a recognized right to undertake priestly functions — or whether there was simply no one with sufficient authority to tell him no — remains a matter of speculation.

David’s triumphant day must have been soured considerably when he returned to the palace, where he was confronted by Michal, the daughter of Saul who had been his first wife, then taken from him, and later returned. ♣

We know little about David’s relationship with Michal after her return except for this episode, in which she is portrayed as a bitter woman intent on spoiling David’s party. Listen to her dripping sarcasm: “How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants’ maids, as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself!” (v. 20).

Had Michal watched David’s celebratory dance from the window as from a box seat, or because she pointedly refused to attend the ceremony in person? The narrator doesn’t say, but implies that Michal, representing Saul’s house, had made one last attempt to harm David’s reputation. David rejected her criticism and insisted that his high-spirited dance had been appropriate (vv. 21-22).

There is no question that the writer thought Michal’s response was harsh, unjustified and worthy of punishment. A simple historical note spells out her penalty: “And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death” (v. 23).

This note echoes earlier passages that emphasized David’s virility and fertility, pointing out that “the house of David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker” (3:1-5, compare 5:13-16). Saul’s house was dying out, and Michal’s failure to have children with David contributed to its decline. ♣

Does David’s worshipful dance before the LORD “with all of his might” suggest anything about the effort we should put into worship? Dancing isn’t always appropriate, but there are other ways to worship “with all our might.” Do we? **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

July 22, 2012

I Promise: Forever!

Has anyone ever made you a promise that seemed too good to be true? If so, how did you respond? With trusting gratitude, skeptical suspicion, or something in between?

And what about the converse? Have you ever made a promise that you intended to keep, but didn't?

Today's text records a promise from God that changed Israel's future. This text is among the most significant episodes in all of the Old Testament, an important interpretive bridge for understanding the relationship between Israel's prophetic hopes, messianic expectations, and an amazingly unexpected act of fulfillment — so pay attention!

A thoughtful king (vv. 1-3)

Imagine what it would be like to sit where King David sat in the early years of his reign in Jerusalem. For the first time in a long while, David had time to think, time to plan ahead. That was something new. From the day God had called him from following his father's sheep, through the time he served under Saul, and on the long road to kingship after Saul's death, there had been precious little time to sit or rest or think about anything beyond daily survival. David's life had been a whirlwind for years. 📌

A day came, however, when things had calmed down, according to our text: "the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him" (v. 1).



Finally, David had time for some forward thinking, and as he sat ruminating in his handsome new palace, he was overwhelmed by a single thought: "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." (v. 2). David saw the incongruity of it all, enjoying his own fine house while the Ark of the Covenant, where Yahweh was thought to dwell above the cherubim, was still consigned to a tent.

David knew that everything he had accomplished was due to the power of God at work within him, and like other kings of the ancient world, he wanted to show devotion for the god he believed had blessed him by building a temple. 📌 Certainly, David was not ignorant of the political advantages of such a move, which would have brought even more prestige to his capital city, but he also appears motivated by a genuine sense of respect and reverence for God. It didn't seem right to him that he should live in a fine cedar house while Yahweh lived in a portable tent. And so, he thought: "I will build a house for Yahweh." 📌

David knew, however, that such projects would require a building permit, and in this case, the permit would have to be acquired from God himself. So, David took his plans to the prophet Nathan. This is the first time we meet Nathan, who appeared to be close to David, speaking to him on Yahweh's behalf even as Samuel had relayed divine guidance to Saul. Initially, Nathan agreed with David's plan, encouraging him to do whatever he had in mind, "for the LORD is with you" (v. 3).

An awesome God (vv. 4-11a)

That night, however, Nathan could not sleep. David had been given rest, but Nathan had lost it. He learned that a prophet can speak too soon. In a vision of the night, God directed Nathan to tell David that God didn't need a house.

Yahweh's question, "Are you the one to build me a house to live in?" (v. 5), may hint at the claim in 1 Chron. 22:6-11 that God wanted Solomon to build the temple rather than David,

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because David had shed so much blood while Solomon was considered a man of peace. The main point in 2 Samuel 7, however, is that Yahweh doesn't need a house.

"I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day," Yahweh told Nathan to say, "but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle" (v. 6). God insisted there had never been a divine request for a house (v. 7). God had no desire to be limited — even in the people's minds — to a physical structure with walls.

Careful readers may note a little inconsistency here. God's question "Did I ever live in a house before?" implies that the ark had always remained in a tent. There was a period, however, when the ark was in the temple at Shiloh, but evidently that was considered just a temporary stopover, like the 20 years in Abinadab's house in Kiriath Jearim, or the three months in Obed Edom's house just before arriving in Jerusalem. Or perhaps, God was pointing out that where the Ark of the Covenant dwells and where God dwells are not necessarily the same thing.

In any case, God's message to David was "Thanks, but no thanks. I don't need a house." Nathan was then instructed to remind David of all that God had done for him, taking him from the pasture to the palace, and giving him victory over all his enemies (vv. 8-9a).

Despite all the past blessings, God had more to give, promising to make for David "a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth" (v. 9b), and to establish a place for Israel, giving David rest from all his enemies (vv. 10-11a).

**An amazing promise
(vv. 11b-16)**

As wonderful as the previous promises were, God had yet one more pledge to make: "Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house" (v. 11b). Yahweh promised to raise up a son after David and establish

"the throne of his kingdom forever" (v. 13). David's son would build the house for God, and their relationship would be like father and son (v. 14a).

Note that the whole story turns on a powerful play on words: "I don't need you to build me a house, David; I will build you a house." David wanted to build for God a house of wood and stone and mortar. God wanted to build for David a house of security in which his descendants would rule Israel forever. David wanted to build God a temple. God wanted to build David a dynasty.

The promise that David's descendants would rule forever was an amazing notion. Still, neither Solomon nor other descendants would have a free pass to do whatever they liked. The lectionary text for today stops at v. 14a, but we need to go a bit further, for God added an important qualification: "When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings, but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you" (vv. 14b-15 [this part is absent from the parallel account in 1 Chronicles 17]).

With this caveat, the author never backed completely away from the theological belief that Israel's fortunes would rise or fall with obedience or rebellion, while continuing to assert that God would never completely give up on David's descendants: "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever" (v. 16).

That was an incredible turn of events. What began as an act of personal piety and political power was transformed into a promise of divine and unconditional grace. Think about the significance of this event: Nathan's dynastic oracle in 2 Samuel 7 can be seen as the turning point, not only of the

Deuteronomistic history, but also of the entire Old Testament.

In this story we step onto the theological bridge that leads from law to grace. In essence, this account lies at the root of all evangelical theology, for it is the beginning of the gospel.

To this point, God's relationship with Israel had been one of master and servant, a conditional relationship in which God was faithful, but blessings were entirely dependent on Israel's obedience. The Israelites, however, were no more inclined to obedience than we are. From Joshua through 2 Kings, the same story is told time and again, with different characters and circumstances. When Israel was obedient, God's blessings were abundant. When Israel turned away, so did God. The relationship turned on the word "if."

With 2 Samuel 7, however, things changed. A new element entered the picture: the element of grace. To David, God made a promise that was not conditioned by his obedience, or the obedience of his children. Rather, it was an unconditional promise of undeserved grace. Yahweh would bless David's house and establish his dynasty. If David's descendants proved disobedient, God would allow them to experience the natural effects of their sin — punishment "with the rods of men" — but God's steadfast covenant love would never be withdrawn: the operative conjunction changed from "if" to nevertheless."

It is this new covenant, full-blown through the work of Jesus, known as a son of David, that calls us to God. And, as much as we love our church buildings, it is not up to us to build God a house. Instead, God invites us to participate in an eternal house, the Kingdom of God.

David responded to God's promise with an impassioned prayer of praise (2 Sam. 7:18-29). How we will respond to the awesome, amazing grace of God? Are we still trying to build a house of good works, or will we accept the house of grace and promise God has built for us? **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

2 Samuel 11:1-27

July 29, 2012

How the Mighty Have Fallen — Again

Scandal: the word alone has an uncomfortable feel to it. We don't have to wait long or look far to see news stories about some prominent or trusted figure — including religious and political leaders — who has been caught in unbecoming behavior or downright illegal activities.

When the person caught up in the scandal is someone we have admired, we may experience bitter disappointment in our fallen hero. We also may be reminded of our own humanity, and times when we could say “There, but for fortune, go I.”

Among Bible readers, there is no more classic scandal than the story of how the great King David gave in to selfish desires, metaphorically falling on his own sword. The one enemy David could not defeat was himself. 📖

David and Bathsheba (vv. 1-6)

In Israel, “the spring of the year” marked the end of the rainy season and the harvest of winter grains, leaving farmers with time on their hands and seasonably dry weather suitable for outdoor living. Thus, spring was “the time when kings go out to battle” (v. 1). 📖

The notable thing about this particular spring is that David did not go out to battle or lead his troops into the field. He was no longer acting as the king Israel had asked for, who would “go out before us and fight our battles” (1 Sam. 8:20). Instead, he sent Joab out to fight for him, leading “his officers



and all Israel.” 📖 The statement “But David remained in Jerusalem” is as dramatic as it is incriminating.

The narrator's note that David was “on his couch” in the late afternoon implies that the king had left his work to others for the sake of personal pleasure. Rooftop rooms tended to be cooler, catching the afternoon breeze, and were common in the ancient Near East. The palace's rooftop veranda, no doubt, would have been an appealing spot.

David's palace would presumably have been the tallest house around, so the palace roof allowed David a clear view into the courtyards of homes below. Remains that some archaeologists identify as the ruins of David's palace are perched on the edge of the Hill of Ophel, which still overlooks houses built on the steep slopes on the opposite side of the narrow Kidron Valley. Typical Israelite houses were rectangular, with rooms for sleeping, eating, and storage that surrounded an open courtyard used for cooking, bathing, and other activities.

Thus it was, we are told, that David spied Bathsheba as she went about an extended ritual bath marking the end of her “impurity” at the end of her menstrual cycle. 📖 The woman was “very beautiful” (v. 2, literally, “of exceedingly good appearance”). David sent someone to learn the woman's identity and discovered that she was the daughter of Eliam, and the wife of a man named Uriah, who was known as a Hittite (v. 3). 📖

Both Eliam son of Ahithophel the Gilonite and Uriah the Hittite are listed among David's most renowned soldiers, known as “the thirty” (2 Sam 23:34-39). This may or may not be the same Eliam, but Uriah's presence is unmistakable. On the list, his name comes last, probably for emphasis. Thus we are reminded that David's liaison with Bathsheba involves the wife of a man who had risked his life on David's behalf.

The narrator describes David's indecorous conduct in the space of one short statement built on four active verbs: “David sent messengers ... she came to him ... he lay with her ... then

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she returned to her house” (v. 4). Short encounters, however, can have long results. The parenthetical note that Bathsheba had been purifying herself after her menstrual cycle (cf. Lev. 15:19-24) reminds the reader that Bathsheba could not have been pregnant before the tryst, and was at a point in her cycle that was favorable to conception.

Bathsheba’s following announcement that she was with child (v. 5) comes as no real surprise to the reader. As a popular king, David had sufficient power to have survived politically even if he had taken Bathsheba from Uriah by force (despite Lev. 20:10 and Deut. 22:22). David, however, knew the importance of his reputation as a disciplined and righteous leader, and he did not want it sullied, so he quickly attempted a cover-up.

David and Uriah (vv. 6-13)

David’s task would have been much easier if Uriah had not been so pious and loyal. David called him home from the front on the pretext of seeking news from the war (vv. 6-7), . Then, after hearing Uriah’s report, David told the soldier to go home and “wash his feet” (v. 8) — possibly a sexual idiom common among bantering soldiers, since “feet” was a Hebrew euphemism for genitals.

Despite David’s invitation, Uriah refused to sleep with his wife, choosing instead to camp out on the steps of the palace (v. 9). When David tried again to send him home (v. 10), Uriah reminded him of the pledge Hebrew soldiers took to remain pure during a time of Holy War (v. 11; see Deut. 23:10-15; 23:9-14; Josh. 3:5). Uriah’s words must have stung, for David had once been scrupulous about the same practice (1 Sam 20:6).

Uriah underscored his commitment with an oath: “As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing.”  David was a powerful man, but his careful plan could not overcome Uriah’s steadfast piety.

David tried his ploy again the following night, inviting Uriah to a banquet where he “made him drunk” (drinking did not violate the battle oath) in hopes that an inebriated Uriah would lose his inhibitions, but the soldier was unwavering (v. 12). The great David who could slay giants and conquer strong enemies could not defeat the will of unyielding Uriah.

David and Joab (vv. 14-27)

The third act in this sad drama reveals an ugly and desperate side of David, who determined that if Uriah would not cooperate, he would have to die. If Uriah died soon, David could quickly marry the widow and pretend, when the child was born, that it was premature.

David wrote a message to Joab, instructing him to send Uriah to the fiercest part of the battle, then have the other soldiers pull back, leaving Uriah to be killed. The reader can’t miss the irony: David took advantage of Uriah’s loyal obedience to entrust him with the sealed warrant for his own death (vv. 14-15).

Joab adapted David’s instructions so that he could engineer Uriah’s death without letting the other troops know that he had knowingly betrayed one of his most valiant fighters. Instead, Joab sent Uriah’s entire unit to a spot near the wall where the battle was so fierce that Uriah would surely be killed sooner or later (vv. 16-17). The price of maintaining the soldiers’ trust is that many other troops also died to cover Uriah’s final fight.

Afterward, the cagey Joab contrived his report of the apparent blunder so that if David questioned the patently poor strategy, the messenger would respond: “Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead too” (vv. 18-21). Joab knew this would cool any intemperate response over the needless loss of so many men

(one Greek version says there were 18 dead).

David got the thinly-veiled message, and told Joab not to worry, blaming Uriah’s loss on the arbitrariness of battle, in which “the sword devours now one and now another” (v. 25).

The narrator draws an artful contrast in vv. 25 and 27 that is unfortunately lost in nearly all of our English translations. “Do not let this matter trouble you” (NRSV) renders the idiom “Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes.” David tried to pretend that neither he nor Joab had done anything evil, ascribing Uriah’s death to business as usual in a time of war. But, the last line of the chapter, read literally, is an emphatic word of judgment: “But the thing David did was evil in the eyes of Yahweh.”

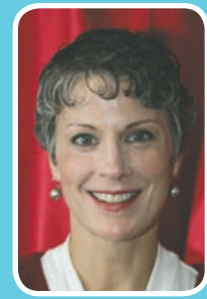
The closing scene tells much in short order: Bathsheba grieved for her husband (v. 26), probably for the typical period of seven days (cp. Gen. 50:10; 1 Sam. 31:13; 1 Chron. 10:12). Afterward, “David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son” (v. 27a). One might think David’s cover-up had succeeded, except for that last telling phrase: “The thing David did was evil in the eyes of Yahweh.”

How many of us, like David, have fallen short of our ideals and commitments, abandoning obedience for the allure of pleasure? Imagine what factors might have contributed to David’s spiritual downfall. Might we need to watch out for similar patterns or entanglements?

The narrator constantly reminds us that Uriah was a Hittite rather than a native Hebrew. Yet, he is clearly the most inspirational character in the story. Can you think of unsung heroes in your world — people whose sincere piety is unwavering? Might one of them be you?

A final thought: How can we tell if something is good or evil in the eyes of God — and how is it that we can know the answer, but convince ourselves otherwise? David’s fall was not the last. **BT**

Adventures with LULER the Hound



Kelly Belcher



I

Luler the hound loves her bed, tucked snugly in the laundry room, where she feels safe. But in the morning she can't wait to get out of there! She is made to run free, and this is what she loves best — to run across the yard, to take a long walk, to bound into new territory with new smells and new adventures.

This is the way God made her, and also the way God made us. We are meant to be free in every way: to run, to think, to dream, to worship, to choose, to learn, to grow. We are not meant to stay stuck in our little beds. Jesus told his followers that he came so we might live abundantly, a word that means everything free, rich, full, deep and wide.

Baptists in history have worked hard to make sure we have as much freedom as possible in every way. Famous Baptists such as John Leland (1754-1831) helped decide how our American Constitution and laws would keep our freedoms strong. Celebrate freedom and independence, and be proud you are a Baptist — a champion of freedom!

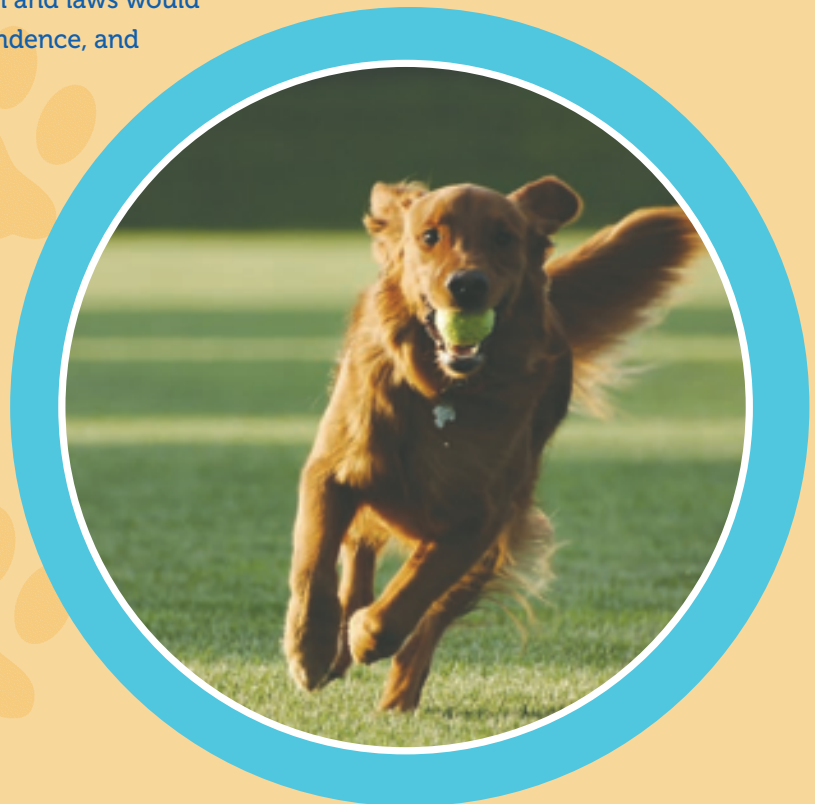
The Bow-Wow

Luler says our freedom is a treasure we can celebrate and enjoy together. Be a good Baptist: bark if you support freedom!



The Question Box

How many Baptists can you find who have helped Americans protect our freedom of worship, keeping church separated from government?



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‘Bad Religion’

Q&A with columnist and author Ross Douthat

New York Times columnist Ross Douthat doesn't mince words in his new book *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics*.

Since the 1960s, Douthat argues, institutional Christianity has suffered a slow-motion collapse, leaving the country without the moral core that carried it through foreign wars, economic depressions and roiling internal debates.

In its place heresies have cropped up — from the “God-within” theology of Oprah to the Mammon-obsessed missionaries of the prosperity gospel, says Douthat, a Roman Catholic.

This interview has been edited for space.

Q: Why did you write this book?

A: The idea for the book came to me late in the Bush presidency, when the debate over religion in America was generally dominated by the clash between the New Atheists — Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris and Daniel Dennett — and conservative Christians. In many ways, the debate over the existence of God is the most important debate there is, but I thought it would be useful to step back and consider what kind of shape American religion is taking.

Q: And what did you see?

A: In some ways, depending on what kinds of measurements you use — such as belief in God or spiritual experiences — the country might be more religious than ever. But that doesn't mean that there are more traditional, orthodox Christians. Instead you have heresy: religions that draw on Christianity and yet are still miles away from the historic core of the Christian faith.

Q: How do you define heresy?

A: Looking at Catholics, Protestants and Eastern Orthodox Christians, there is an intellectual core in the Christian faith. Sometimes that core gets blurry in various places, but you have the Nicene Creed, the belief that the Bible is the inspired word of God, that the four Gospels are the best sources of information about Jesus of Nazareth. There are a lot of religious movements and ideas that diverge from that core enough to be heretical but not to be a different religion entirely.

All of this is totally debatable, and people can look at the same landscape and disagree about who a heretic is. But the term is still quite useful in describing the reality of a country that is neither traditionally Christian nor post-Christian in any meaningful way. We are in a zone between those two things.

Q: You're not going to start another Inquisition, are you?

A: (Laughs) Well, controversy is good for book sales. Obviously the hunt for heretics has a long and horrible history.

An orthodoxy that doesn't leave any room for heresy is dangerous and destructive; and a world that is all heresy and leaves no room for orthodoxy is dangerous as well. But I don't see any particular danger in using the term to describe America today.

Q: Even if heretics are no longer burned at the stake, it seems that many Americans have an aversion to labeling others heretical, no?

A: And I would disagree with that very strongly. The promise of a liberal society is that we agree to a kind of truce where nobody will impose their religion on anyone else and the government will not set up an established church, or the Spanish Inquisition.

But part of religious freedom is the freedom to have arguments about religious beliefs. People who take religion seriously should have serious public arguments.

Q: You quote Philip Rieff's idea of a modern prophet who denounces the rise of a therapeutic, ego-driven faith. Do you see yourself in that role?

A: (Laughs) I don't think I'm comfortable calling myself a prophet. I'm more comfortable calling myself a critic.

Even though I use pretty strong language to criticize trends in contemporary theology, I also want to get at what it is about — *Eat, Pray, Love*, for example — that so many people respond to.

It's very easy to be mocking and dismissive from a more highbrow perspective. But there is a coherent theological core at the heart of the prosperity gospel and the “God-within” schools, and I take them seriously.

Q: Why do you say this book was written in a spirit of pessimism?

A: As a practicing Catholic, I have an obvious bias in favor of institutional religion. But if you look at Christian history, the belief that everyone can follow Jesus on their own is not a particularly realistic approach to religious faith.

It is a faith best practiced in community with doctrine passed down through generations. What makes me pessimistic is that all the trends in contemporary American life are toward deinstitutionalization, not just in religion but across the board. **BT**



Ross Douthat

Riches & Rewards

Conversations about human sexuality emerge amid fear, hope

BY JOHN PIERCE

Can a congregation or a fellowship of churches talk about human sexuality — even the highly divisive topic of homosexuality — in a helpful, hopeful way? Despite the risks, some are attempting such constructive conversations.

In April the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Mercer University sponsored a highly anticipated two-day conference on covenant and sexuality. Some church leaders praised the planners' efforts as directly and boldly addressing issues that Christian individuals and congregations are clearly facing today.

Others expressed concern that the conference would fuel divisiveness over homosexuality that would weaken inter-church cooperation and raise the temperature on an already hotly debated subject. Some feared any public discussion of these issues — particularly homosexuality — would simply advance another unwelcome congregational struggle.

Most accounts of the conference suggested that more light than heat was generated — although a few conservative voices wanted more representation. Interested persons can decide for themselves by viewing the presentations at thefellowship.info/conference.

Homosexuality — while not the sole focus of this particular conference — is one of the hottest topics in contemporary American Christianity. And it is not going away soon.

Studies reveal that younger evangelical Christians who share their parents' conservative positions on abortion and other social issues are much more accepting of their gay and lesbian friends. And even many older, conservative Christians are seeing a different face of homosexuality as children and grandchildren reveal same-sex orientations.

Some Baptist bodies and other denominational groups have firmly established positions on both ends of the spectrum: either denouncing homosexuality as sin or embracing homosexual unions according to the same

standards as heterosexual commitments.

Yet, in the broad middle, great debates and potential division are occurring where consensus is not found — and sides get chosen even over whether discussions of such matters are in themselves an act of division.

However, not all congregations are waiting for the subject to erupt before beginning conversations. For example, the First Baptist Church of Christ in Macon, Ga., has held forums to address homosexuality going back to 2009.

Then-pastor Bob Setzer said the discussions were not about whether to welcome gay and lesbian persons — “that’s just something Jesus’ people do” — but the full inclusion of homosexual persons in such regards as marriage and ordination.

The church-wide series of presentations and conversations had some real benefits, said Setzer.

“That way, all these independent conversations could be drawn together and various factions on the issue could hear what others, unlike themselves, were saying,” said Setzer, noting that some Sunday school classes and other small groups had not shied away from the subject.

Most presenters were church members with a particular expertise or related experience. Participants were asked to submit written

questions, said Setzer, “to keep the loudest, most strident voices from dominating the discussion [and] ... to minimize rabbit chasing.”

Nikki Hardeman, a church member and young minister, said the series offered relevant information about homosexuality but also personal experiences.

“I had a seminary professor who said that when someone asked him what he believed about homosexuality, the first thing he would ask that person is if she or he was talking about a real person or a generic issue,” she recalled. “My professor understood that when we put real faces on controversial conversations, we fundamentally change the conversation. That is the reason we chose to close the homosexuality series with personal stories.”

While such testimonies did not bring widespread consensus about the proper Christian response to homosexuality, said Hardeman, it did personalize the issue.

“By making the discussion more personal, we were able to see more clearly how our attitudes, judgments and personal perceptions affect real people,” said Hardeman. “This does not mean that we all suddenly began to agree about the issues surrounding our discussion of homosexuality. However, our discussion about general issues closed with a human face, and that makes all the difference.”

Setzer said the discussions were an attempt at respectful dialogue, not an effort to make a pronouncement or create policy.

Many church and denominational leaders are in agreement that it is the latter that carries the greater risk of division. Yet few would argue that concerns over homosexuality will simply go away if no one talks about them — or that discussions eventually get tied to practice. **BT**



Bob Setzer



Nikki Hardeman

Covenant best model for sexual relationship, says ethicist Gushee

By Bob Allen

Associated Baptist Press

DECATUR, Ga. — The co-convenor of a conference on sexuality and covenant said April 20 that long-term committed relationships are the best model for Christians struggling to make sense of changing morals about sex.

“I believe that covenant is a, if not the, single best way that has emerged in the great Christian tradition to talk about what we are supposed to do with our sexuality, and for that matter, our relationality,” said David Gushee, an ethics professor at Mercer University, co-sponsor with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of the April 19-21 conference at First Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga.



David Gushee

Gushee defined covenant as a “voluntarily entered sacred pact between two persons and between those two persons and the God to whom both are committed.” In Christian-influenced countries such as the United States, he said, it also has legal status and is the socially approved context for having and raising children.

For adults, Gushee said, covenant is a “divinely given response to human nature, human potential and human sin.”

“If we lived in a sinless Eden, we would not need covenants,” Gushee said. “Our hearts would always be true. Our relationships would be always sturdy. We would never be so angry as to want to give up. We would never be attracted to another lover. We would just follow our sexual-relational urges to the first available attractive person and then mate for life, like pigeons or ducks.”

“Gushee said he thinks children have a natural expectation that their parents will remain together.”

He described covenant as both a concession to and provision for sin. “Covenants are the best possible arrangement for binding human bodies and lives in this not-best-of-all possible worlds,” he said.

Gushee said covenant is also better for children. “It is good news for children when they never need to wonder who or where their father or mother might be,” he said. “It is good news because their father and mother are far more likely to be bonded permanently to each other than in any other adult sexual-relational arrangement.”

Gushee said he thinks children have a natural expectation that their parents will remain together. “The adults may not be aware of that expectation, but their children are deeply aware of it, especially when it breaks.”

“Children want to know their parents,” Gushee said. “They want their parents to love them and be involved in their life. Children want their parents to treat each other right and keep the promises they made to each other, which is one reason why children of divorce so often fantasize about their parents getting back together.”

Gushee said he doesn’t think the main issue facing the church today is which groups of people are to be viewed as eligible to make covenants. “The main issue is to rescue the very practice of covenant before it disappears forever, not only in society but in our own house,” he said.

There was a time, Gushee said, when churches would have covenants committing members to walk together instead of moving from church to church. Today, he said, church is often viewed as just another product to be consumed.

“I call on churches to be better and more faithful covenant communities, not casual drive-up products but covenanted communities of brothers and sisters in Christ there for each other in good times and bad,” he said. **BT**



Opposition to gay marriage lower in 2012 campaign

By Adelle M. Banks

Religion News Service

Opposition to gay marriage is significantly lower in 2012 compared to the previous two presidential campaigns, a survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press shows.

For the first time, the level of strong support for gay marriage is equal to the level of strong opposition, researchers report. In the April survey, 22 percent of Americans say they strongly favor permitting legal marriage for gays and lesbians; an identical percentage said they strongly oppose it.

In 2008, strong opposition was twice as high as support — 30 percent vs. 14 percent. In 2004, when a host of anti-gay marriage ballot measures helped propel social conservatives to the polls, opposition was more than three times higher than support, 36 percent to 11 percent.

In comparison to the changes in views on gay marriage, not much has changed concerning support for legal abortion. In 2009 less than 50 percent of Americans favored legal abortion, but that support rebounded to more than half of the U.S. population and has generally fit trends dating to 1995.

This time around, as in recent election cycles, voters say social issues — such as gay marriage and abortion — are not as important as the economy and jobs. While more than 80 percent of Americans cite the economy and jobs as top voting issues, far fewer rated abortion (39 percent) and gay marriage (28 percent) as very important.

The survey on gay marriage was based on interviews with 1,514 U.S. adults and had a margin of error of plus or minus 2.9 percentage points. **BT**



Israel's Conservative movement OKs gay and lesbian rabbis

By Michele Chabin
Religion News Service

JERUSALEM — In a landmark decision, the Israeli branch of Conservative Judaism announced that its rabbinical school will begin to accept gay and lesbian candidates for ordination.

Board members of the Schechter Rabbinical Seminary in Jerusalem voted April 19 to enroll gay and lesbian students starting in September. The decision follows years of disagreement between leaders of the Conservative movement in the U.S., which permits openly gay and lesbian rabbis, and Masorti leaders in Israel, who have long resisted demands to be more inclusive.

The disagreement came to a head about two years ago, when some gay and straight rabbinical students from two U.S.-based seminaries began to refuse to study at Schechter during their mandatory year of study in Israel.

While more liberal than the Orthodox stream of Judaism, the Masorti movement typically has been more traditionalist than its U.S. counterpart.

A Schechter statement said its board made its decision following a “long process” of deliberation.

“The Schechter Rabbinical Seminary views the serious process leading to this decision as an example of confronting social dilemmas within the framework of tradition and halachah (Jewish law),” said Rabbi Hanan Alexander, chairman of the seminary’s board. “This decision highlights the institution’s commitment to uphold halachah in a pluralist and changing world.” **BT**

Sexuality conversations need all voices, ears

By Mike Glover

As one of few attendees who is — and intends to remain — traditionalist in my ethic of sexuality, I found the April Conference on Sexuality and Covenant a unique experience.

I heard many speakers tell stories and make challenges to the Baptist world, claiming that a massive rethinking and retooling of our sexual ethic must take place in order to remain relevant and compassionate in our sexually confusing culture. I heard heart-wrenching stories of men and women who, when they needed a community of faith in the midst of deep questions about their sexuality, were shown the door in the name of congregational and denominational purity.



Mike Glover

While I experienced much at this conference, what I did not experience was the presence of other traditionalist ministers. Where was their voice? Why were they not represented?

In our breakout and plenary sessions I heard Christians calling for greater compassion to unmarried adults, divorced persons, sex-trafficking victims and those in the LGBTQ community. What I did not hear were many traditionalist voices speaking to these same realities. Of speakers who presented on the matter of LGBTQ inclusion, I heard only two openly claim that they believe sex must occur within the context of heterosexual marriage.

There was a lot of informal conversation about why more conservative clergy and laity were not there. Some had felt the matter was decided and conversation was unnecessary. Some desired to come, but their congregations didn’t approve. Others may have felt that even attending a conference like this was acquiescing to the culture in a too real and dangerous way.

And, maybe, some hesitant pastors thought their traditionalist ethic would be

shouted down in a sea of liberal policy making. While I cannot speak for everyone, I never felt judged or condemned for my more conservative beliefs about sexuality.

I openly and honestly admitted my opinions and my desire to hear and understand those of others. This was met not with the defensive posture of an “angry agenda,” but rather an open embrace of love and gratitude.

Once we as “liberals” and “conservatives” stepped beyond the framework of trying to convert each other, real conversation began to take place. Real stories were shared. Real friendships were forged.

In all honesty, these are the conversations that need to be occurring across the Baptist landscape regardless of theological conviction or denominational identity. Even if we as ministers feel “the homosexuality issue” has been settled, the uncomfortable truth is that for many in our congregations, it is not.

Perhaps what is needed is a safe place for everyone — conservative or liberal, gay or straight — to be heard; not to be fixed but merely understood. We must admit that if the issue is real for our congregations, it is real for us as well.

My hope and dream for the future of Baptists is that conversations like (but not limited to) this will continue, but that they will continue with an equal desire among conservatives and progressives to share the burdens and testimonies of one another.

There was a time when conservative and liberal Baptists worked together within the holy bonds of covenant, pledging that despite their disagreements and divergence they were bound in oneness as the body of Christ.

Perhaps it is fitting that at a conference on sexuality and covenant, the Scripture that passed through my mind continuously was “what God had joined together, let no man [or woman] separate.” **BT**

—Mike Glover is an ordained Southern Baptist minister and recent graduate of Mercer’s McAfee School of Theology. This column was distributed by Associated Baptist Press.

This is not your parents' Baptist church

By Joe Phelps

It seemed appropriate that the Baptist Conference on Sexuality and Covenant met in Atlanta, home of the late columnist Lewis Grizzard, author of *Shoot Low, Boys* — *They're Ridin' Shetland Ponies*.

I had followed Grizzard's advice, assuming this gathering, co-sponsored by Mercer University's Center for Theology and Public Life and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, would haggle once again over selective Bible verses cited to refute inclusion of Christians from the LGBT community. As pastor of a congregation that is welcoming and increasingly affirming, I made plans to attend the meeting in order to defend our space from possible low-riders.

I wanted our voice heard, suspicious that the framework of "covenant" within which the conversation was to occur would be little more than a smokescreen. To my great delight, I must report how wrong I was, how narrow my vision was, and how undeservedly pessimistic I was about Baptists talking meaningfully about divisive issues.

This gathering, attended by as many as 500 people, was part conference, part dialogue, and part renewal weekend. It was chocked full, from the first presenter to the last amen, of depth, honesty, information, hard questions, harder testimonies, painful realities and hopeful possibilities.

We spoke — and everyone was invited to speak in breakout groups. And we listened. And we prayed. Laced between each presentation was song and silence for prayer, not as filler or to break the monotony, but as a sacred catalyst for what was happening; God's transforming love was becoming palpable among us.

Beautiful old First Baptist Decatur was the site of a kind of revival, as heads and hearts met together, scripture was interpreted, traditions and experience were named, and God's Spirit helped us hear each other like on the day of Pentecost.

The sessions crackled with energy. People seemed excited to be there and anxious to meet each other. It was a far younger crowd than most denominational gatherings (a good thing in church life, I concluded, once my ego recovered), confirmation that this generation is deeply invested in this matter, and not just because it has to do with sex.

What makes this "sexy" for this generation is not the sex part as much as the recognition that this is a matter of justice. This is their civil rights moment. This is an important value upon which to test the mettle of the faith they've been given.

It felt daring and courageous. This mostly younger crowd was going for broke, taking talk of Jesus and scripture into what many consider the belly of the beast: sexuality. They went there trusting the command to love God and neighbor, and believing the way, truth and life that is Jesus had the capacity to move them beyond rigid categories into a deeper, bigger and more honest-to-God faith.

And it did. The 14 presenters spoke from prepared texts, but with a freedom and winsomeness that kept listeners engaged and enthralled. The lineup was a collection of brilliant young and used-to-be-young ministers and laypersons, some gay but mostly straight (not that orientation was listed on the conference name tags) who recognized that the matter of the church and the reality of sexuality cannot be dispensed with by dueling interpretations of the usual proof texts.

They covered a range of topics from

changing mores in culture; to the church and reality of LGBT persons among us; to the nature of marriage; to the challenge of divorce and broken covenant; to senior adults and sexuality; to the horrors of human trafficking.

Those whose convictions and conclusions differed from others did so with such a spirit of vulnerability and humility. This made it easier to grant the validity of their points of concern and to ponder a perspective previously dismissed because of disagreement.

"I might be wrong" became frequently repeated mantra, said in a spirit of openness rather than false humility.

We were reminded that our agenda did not include coming to conclusions, making public statements, or attempting to resolve intractable matters of scripture and culture. We were there to begin a deepened conversation, not to bring it to conclusion. We came away confident that it is better, and more hopeful, to talk about complex issues than to avoid or polarize because of them.

I'm tempted to call the conference a "historic" moment, but that language places it too immediately in the past. Rather, I wonder if someday we'll look on this event as a launching pad from which we were propelled "to boldly go" where we've not gone before — to riff on a television show intro from a day before many of these bright and Christ-committed people were born.

Which brings to mind another television oldie from a car commercial: "This is not your father's Oldsmobile." That's a good thing. The old one got us to where we are today, thanks be to God. But the old one was a gas guzzler. It was unsafe, not designed for today's needs, and wore out after 150,000 miles.

Thanks be to God, this is not your father's or your mother's Baptist church. It's a new day. Bring it on. **BT**

—Joe Phelps is pastor of Highland Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky.



Joe Phelps

I'm tempted to call the conference a "historic" moment, but that language places it too immediately in the past.

BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

In an effort to capture the Confederate capital, Union Gen. George McClellan in his Peninsula Campaign continues a slow and halting march to Richmond, only to be outmaneuvered by Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee by the end of the month. McClellan's retreat spares Richmond for now, while the successes of Lee and Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson further elevate the generals as heroes of the South.

One of the Southern successes of the Peninsula campaign this month is the Battle of Seven Pines in Henrico County. Yet the ebullition of victory is mixed with the bitter sorrow of death. A Confederate Baptist soldier thus describes the scene near Richmond following Seven Pines:

The road was thronged with carriages of every kind bearing off the dead and wounded while the "crash of resounding arms" saluted our cars just a head of us. Men with wounds, the most ghastly lay agonizing in their blood, piles of human limbs lay by the road side, where the surgeons were at work. The scene beggars description, and made the blood almost curdle in our veins to witness such horrid suffering of our fellow soldiers. But there were some things that relieved these sad reflections; All along the road, squads of miserable looking Yankees were driven along at the point of the bayonet, going to Richmond—not as they expected. Many wagon loads of the spoils from the enemy—fine rifles, ammunition, elegant ambulances, (quite a number,) tents, provisions, &c., joined in the throng and cheered our boys greatly.

On both sides, battlefield casualties and deaths from wounds and illnesses are rapidly mounting. In addition, soldiers sometimes face



National Battlefield Park, Malvern Hill, Richmond, Virginia

150 YEARS AGO

June 1862

danger in places unexpected, such as this incident in Richmond:

A soldier took shelter in the portico of the First Baptist Church on Saturday, during the rain, and placed his gun against one of the pillars. Shortly afterward, by some accident, the weapon was knocked down, and exploding, lodged the ball in his shoulder. An army surgeon passing at the time rendered the necessary assistance. The wound inflicted upon the unfortunate soldier was very severe.

Increasingly, Baptist church buildings near the front lines are being pressed into service as Confederate hospitals. Such is the case with the Scottsville Baptist Church of Virginia. Taken over by the Confederacy, the church building receives its first soldier patients this month. Church members are forced to worship elsewhere during the 16 months the building is utilized by the Confederate Army.

Confiscation of church buildings by the Union Army is also commonplace. The Shiloh Baptist Church of Washington, D.C., an African

congregation, temporarily loses the use of its facilities as the Union army converts the building into a hospital in advance of an attack upon Fredericksburg, Va., planned for later this year. On the other hand, church membership swells with freed slaves from D.C. and Union-occupied areas in nearby Virginia towns and cities.

Meanwhile, members of the Third Baptist Church in Stonington, Conn., an African congregation, reflect on the war thus far:

We are not indifferent spectators of the dreadful strife now raging in our country ... Two of our members were for many years slaves. Though denied the privilege to enter the army to fight, we will pay our taxes when demanded ...

Later, in the final year of war, they also declare:

whenever we are permitted to vote, we shall be sure not to vote for bondage or oppression in any form ... We have a destiny in common with all the sons and daughters of Africa which we are bound to fulfill.

Thus, as the war enters its second summer, white Baptists remain hopelessly divided North and South, while African Baptists throughout the broken land are united in fervent hope for freedom. **BT**

My helpful recommendations

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is accepting résumés for **executive coordinator**. Applicants should be 40 years old and have 35 years of experience, inspire people who are not sure they want to be inspired, and enjoy playing guitar with teenagers and piano at the nursing home. The new coordinator should be hard as nails, but also soft and fuzzy. He or she should have vision, vision, vision, but not the kind of vision with which people might disagree.

Stacks of résumés of qualified, capable and competent candidates are piling up on the search committee's desk. The 10-member committee looking for a replacement for Daniel Vestal is receiving tons of helpful feedback, and a plethora of brilliant nominations, but if we are not careful we will be so thoughtful that we only think of candidates who make sense. Here are several not-even-in-the-same-zip-code-as-the-logical-possibilities recommendations:

Tony Campolo: He would appeal to those who care about the poor, to American Baptists, and to bald people.

Bill Moyers: He's ordained and a seminary graduate. One negative is that he hasn't been a member of a Baptist church in a while, but he has his own television show and it is not on TBN.

Barbara Brown Taylor: Anyone who points out that she's Episcopal is nit-picking.

Tim Tebow: He would be the first Heisman Trophy winner to serve as executive coordinator. His parents were Baptist missionaries in the Philippines, but he's not accurate past 20 yards.

Anne Lamott: She has experience as a political activist, public speaker and novelist. Her newsletter columns would be well-written, and she seems to be cursing less lately.

Barack Obama: He has extensive administrative experience and cute children. Like Jesus he was a community organizer, and it's possible that he will be looking for a job soon. One negative is that he got into an argument with his last pastor.

Jeremiah Wright: He was once Barack Obama's pastor.

Bill Gates: If he were our executive coordinator, we would not need a fundraiser. On the downside, he is a college dropout — though in his defense it was Harvard.

Hillary Clinton: She's a Methodist, but dealing with rogue leaders around the world is excellent preparation for working with ministers.

Mike Huckabee: He was president of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, so maybe not.

Bono: The lead singer of U2 works hard to make the world a better place. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, but he didn't win.

Jimmy Carter: He won the Nobel Peace Prize, and he's an excellent Sunday school teacher.

Rosalyn Carter: She's a deacon, but she has many fine qualities.

Jon Stewart: One hitch is that he's Jewish, but he's smart and funny.

Stephen Colbert: He's not as funny as Jon Stewart, but he's a Sunday school teacher.

Tom Hanks: His roles in *Philadelphia* and *The DaVinci Code* might lose him a few votes, but he saved Private Ryan and Buzz Lightyear.

Garrison Keillor: This captivating storyteller grew up in the Plymouth Brethren, an Irish fundamentalist denomination, which might be strangely helpful.

Carol Younger: My wife is a seminary graduate and has substantial church experience. Everybody loves her. She already lives in Atlanta.

Clarice Younger: My mother would appeal to the Sarah Palin wing of the CBF.

Sarah Palin: She's not a Baptist, but she has some of the same advantages as my mother.

Pope Benedict XVI: He's Catholic, 85 years old and pretty austere, but it would be a pretty big story if he took the job and the CBF would loosen him up.

Justin Bieber: I keep hearing that we need someone who appeals to young people. Would being Canadian disqualify him?

Feel free to inundate the search committee with my suggestions. (It would also be a fine idea to pray for the committee.) If any of these recommendations actually become the executive coordinator, remember you heard it here first — unless it's Justin Bieber. **BT**

—Brett Younger is associate professor of preaching at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology.



Calling all Christians

Toward a compelling theology of lay ministry

By Ann A. Michel

The number of laypersons with serious involvements in ministry, both professional and volunteer, has grown dramatically in recent decades. The lay empowerment movement, the growth of multi-staffed mega-churches, and the demand for specialized programmatic ministries are part of this trend.

In smaller congregations, particularly those that cannot support full-time clergy, laity assumes many vital ministry functions. And in some denominations, a clergy shortage has resulted in a growing percentage of laypersons in the ecclesial workforce.

While the theology of pastoral identity is well established, the identity of laypersons in ministry is often less clearly understood. Many find themselves running afoul of deeply engrained cultural expectations: that ministry is the work of the clergy, while laity are objects of ministry; that clergy attend to sacred matters, while laity concern themselves with the secular world.

This dualistic paradigm still lingers in the collective consciousness of church and society. It limits the practice of ministry at a time when the service of God requires more — not less — ministry.

Given the ways the Spirit is moving the church toward a more inclusive approach to ministry, there is a need to counter the vestiges of this division by articulating a robust and compelling theology of lay ministry.

Ministry

A theology of lay ministry begins with the clear understanding that ministry is the work of all Christians. The English word ministry has its origin in the Greek word *diakonia* (in Latin, *ministerium*), which is best translated as service.

Baptism, not ordination, initiates a life of Christian service modeled after Jesus. Martin Luther's insistence on "the priesthood of all believers" is an outgrowth of the biblical verity that God's people are a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9), and the word laity (from the Greek *laos*) is properly defined as "people of God."

Calling

Although call theology is prevalent in the literature and language of pastoral identity, many lay leaders are never challenged to consider their call. Many, in fact, are led to believe that call does not apply to them because our understanding of call has been distorted by the notion that it is reserved for certain categories of "holy people" — priests, monks, nuns, clergy.

We have lost sight of the fact that in the Bible, particularly the New Testament, calling is a central and dynamic theme that encompasses the life of faith itself, as expressed by Os Guinness in *The Call*.

Taking great care to address the issue of clerical calling within the larger context of God's call to all Christians prevents laypersons from feeling that God's call does not extend to them.

Community

Late 20th century theology has reclaimed the doctrine of the Trinity. This relational, non-hierarchical image of the triune God provides a compelling model for collaborative ministry — a model for how laity and clergy can minister side-by-side in a relationship that is mutually affirming.

George Cladis's book, *Leading the Team-Based Church*, offers a practical guide to how the theological model of God as Trinity can

inform effective leadership practices in collaborative ministry.

Paul's poignant image of the church as the body of Christ composed of a variety of interdependent, indispensable parts (1 Cor. 12) is another potent model of collaborative ministry. As with the Trinity, this model has the advantage of allowing for the distinctness of various ministries, while reinforcing mutuality and mutual respect. It reminds us again and again that Christ is the head of the body (Col. 1:18) — not a particular category of ecclesial servants.

The New Testament is replete with examples of the openness of the invitation to ministry that make manifest the proclamation that "God's Spirit is poured out on all flesh" (Acts 2:17).

Efrain Agosto, in *Servant Leadership*, has observed that both Jesus and Paul "refused to work alone." Their interactions with other disciples provide a compelling and tangible witness to the inclusiveness of ministry.

These theological images and ideas are not new, but they require renewed emphasis as laypersons in ministry seek to articulate a clear theological identity. They can be used by lay servants to shape the ways we testify about how God is at work in our lives. And they can reform our use of language to counteract exclusive and exclusionary understandings of call, ministry and church leadership.

They can empower us to move with the Spirit of God that is calling so many laypersons to ministry in this day. **BT**

—Ann Michel, who previously worked in government relations, is a seminary-educated layperson serving in professional ministry with the United Methodist Church. Since 2005 she has served as associate director of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership. She blogs at in-ministry-together.com.



Shifts seen in support for death penalty

WASHINGTON (RNS) — The campaign to abolish the death penalty has been freshly invigorated in a series of actions that supporters say represents increasing evidence that America may be losing its taste for capital punishment.

Gov. Dannel Malloy signed a bill into law April 25 repealing the death penalty in Connecticut. A separate proposal has qualified for the November ballot in California that would shut down the largest death row in the country and convert inmates' sentences to life without parole.

Academics, too, have recently taken indirect aim: The National Research Council concluded recently that there have been no reliable studies to show that capital punishment is a deterrent to homicide.

That study, which does not take a position

on capital punishment, follows a Gallup Poll last fall that found support for the death penalty had slipped to 61 percent nationally, the lowest level in 39 years. (Editor's note: Opponents of the death penalty say that number is even lower when those surveyed are given "life without parole" as an alternative sentence.)

Even in Texas, which has long projected the harshest face of the U.S. criminal justice system, there has been a marked shift. Last year, the state's 13 executions marked the lowest number in 15 years. And this year, the state — the perennial national leader in executions — is scheduled to carry out 10.

Capital punishment proponents say the general decline in death sentences and executions in recent years is merely a reflection of the sustained drop in violent crime, but some lawmakers and legal analysts say the numbers underscore a growing wariness of wrongful convictions.

In Texas, Dallas County alone has uncovered 30 wrongful convictions since 2001, the

most of any county in the country. Former Texas Gov. Mark White said he continues to support the death penalty "only in a select number of cases," yet he says he believes that a "national reassessment" is now warranted given the stream of recent exonerations.

"I have been a proponent of the death penalty, but convicting people who didn't commit the crime has to stop," White said.

"There is an inherent unfairness in the system," said former Los Angeles County district attorney Gil Garcetti. He added that he was "especially troubled" by mounting numbers of wrongful convictions.

A recent convert to the California anti-death-penalty campaign, Garcetti said the current system has become "obscenely expensive" and forces victims to often wait years for death row appeals to run their course. In the past 34 years in California, just 13 people have been executed as part of a system that costs \$184 million per year to maintain.

"Replacing capital punishment will give victims legal finality," said Garcetti. **BT**

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The internal communication skills will be led by either Dr. Bill Wilson, President, or Dr. Chris Gambill, Manager, Congregational Health Services. The external communication skills portion will be led by Natalie Aho, Communications Specialist.

CENTER for CONGREGATIONAL HEALTH. Register at www.healthychurch.org or *with Robin Danner at 336.716.9722; congreg@wakehealth.edu.



“Respectful acceptance of one another is the objective.”

Pastoral *perspectives*

BT: How would you briefly describe your leadership style as a pastor?

SJS: I decided I better ask my staff this question as their perception of my leadership style and my perception might be two different things. After their immediate teasing of my being authoritative and that they serve at my pleasure, I was humbled by their responses. They talked of a hands-off approach that empowered them to do their jobs. They spoke of trust that allowed each one to use their gifts. And they spoke of the importance of our ongoing communication that allows for us to unite in our efforts to support and encourage one another.



From Sarah Jackson Shelton

Pastor, Baptist Church of the Covenant in Birmingham, Ala.

BT: What do you know now that you wish you had known earlier as a pastor?

SJS: I wish that I had realized how much of our time is taken with administrative duties.

BT: Are denominational identity and engagement important to you? To your congregation? How do you engage with other churches — and what value does that bring?

SJS: Denominational identity is becoming less important as a whole, I believe. Autonomy of the local church seems to have become very important, especially for churches like mine that seem to make decisions that are often unpopular with the larger bodies. There are still loyalists in my congregation to specific denominations/fellowships. While education is given, I find that most members are still

confused by all the Baptist bodies and they seek clarity around stewardship time when they must determine how their missions giving will be divided up on their individual pledge cards.

BT: How do you keep a balanced life that allows for personal time and study while being accessible to your congregation?

SJS: I wish I had a secret formula for a balanced life! Some weeks are better than others, and it just depends on what occurs in the life of the church that is not expected — i.e., a funeral or serious hospitalization.

BT: Every church member knows exactly the right time for scheduling worship and the proper format of the service. The problem, of course, is that these are as different as the people. How do you, as a pastoral leader, plan worship with such varied expectations?

SJS: Our worship is at 9 a.m. on Sunday mornings. It seems to work for our congregation for no one has been to Sunday school and engaged in any conversation that may have “set them off.” We come to services ready to worship without distraction.

BT: What keeps you coming back for more?

SJS: What keeps me coming back for more is when there is evidence that the Spirit is moving, grace is working, and healing is moving a believer into a fuller relationship with Christ. **BT**

EDITOR'S NOTE:

In this series, experienced pastors are asked the same seven questions about the important and sometimes misunderstood work they provide in congregational leadership and care. The monthly feature is designed to help pastors learn from one another and to give others greater insight into the multi-faceted work of pastors in changing times.

BT: Can you identify a couple of the biggest challenges in pastoral ministry today and share how you and your congregation are facing them?

SJS: I believe the greatest challenges in ministry today are to find the places of commonality that bring us together rather than focusing on the ways we might be different. Respectful acceptance of one another is the objective.

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More churches turning to high-tech outreach

No matter where you live, you can go to church, so to speak, with Christ Fellowship in McKinney, Texas, which is on board with almost every high-tech gambit under heaven.

Find the church by going online — the 21st-century version of sighting a steeple on the horizon. Beyond its website, Christ Fellowship has a Facebook page to give it a friendly presence in social media.

You can download the worship program by scanning the customized-with-a-cross QR code. The worship services are streamed online from the Internet campus — with live chat running so you can share spiritual insights in real time.

Afterward, says Senior Pastor Bruce Miller, “Someone will ask you, ‘How did it go? Did God help you today? How can we help you?’ Just like we do when people come to our building in McKinney. We are here to help people find and follow Christ, wherever they

are starting out from.”

And wherever they are in the digital world, Christ Fellowship exemplifies most of the latest ways churches dramatically extend their reach of church beyond any one time or local address.

Such congregations signal “a willingness to meet new challenges,” said Scott Thumma, of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research. He’s the author of a study by Faith Communities Today (FACT) of how churches, synagogues and mosques use the Internet and other technology.

FACT’s national survey of 11,077 of the nation’s 335,000 congregations, released in March, found seven in 10 U.S. congregations had websites, and four in 10 had Facebook pages by 2010, Thumma says.

The use of QR codes — which allow users to scan a bar code with their cell phone and go directly to a related website — is too new to be measured yet, Thumma said. He recently

began tracking churches that stream their worship — about one percent of congregations, Thumma estimates.

Future surveys may also measure the explosion of digital applications. Christ Fellowship has an app for donating online and another one for swapping goods and services to help others in the community.

Believers have always been early adopters of every new form of communication since the first printed book was the Gutenberg Bible.

Today the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, a pioneer in print, radio, television and satellite-broadcast outreach for decades, now employs search-engine algorithms to steer people toward salvation.

Technology should ultimately be an enhancement, not a replacement, for gathering in person for worship, discussion, debate and service to others, said Drew Goodmanson, CEO of Monk Development, which helps churches use the Internet to fulfill their missions. **BT**



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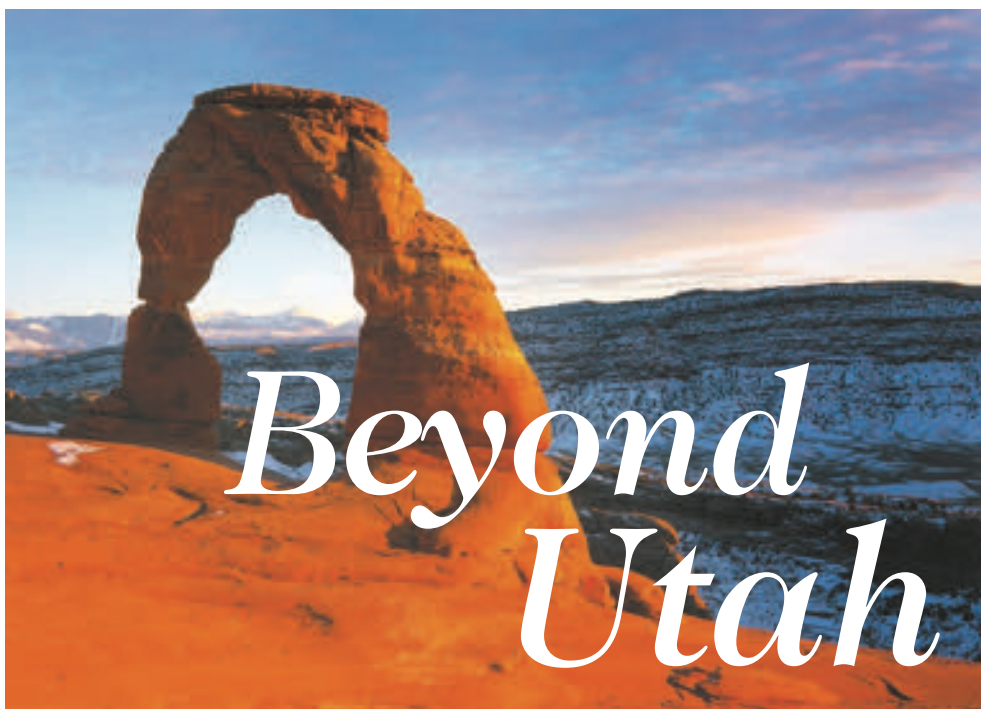
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Beyond Utah

Study shows Mormonism is now the fastest-growing faith in half of U.S. states

CHICAGO — Mitt Romney may or may not become the first Mormon to move into the White House next year, but a new study shows that Mormonism is moving into more parts of the country than any other religious group, making it the fastest-growing faith in more than half of U.S. states.

The 2012 Religious Congregations and Membership Study, released May 1, shows that the mainline Protestants and Catholics who dominated the 20th century are literally losing ground to the rapid rise of Mormons and, increasingly, Muslims.

The study is conducted once every 10 years and can track Americans' religious affiliation down to the county level, from the largest (Los Angeles County, where Mormons grew 55 percent while Catholics shrank by 7 percent) to the smallest (Loving County, Texas, which is home to 80 people and one nondenominational evangelical church).

Romney's Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reported 2 million new adherents and new congregations in 295 counties where they didn't exist a decade ago, making them the fastest-growing group in the U.S.

Mormons were the fastest-growing group in 26 states, expanding beyond their historic home in Utah to the heart of the Bible Belt and as far away as Maine.

Muslims came in second, with growth of 1 million adherents in 197 new counties, to a total of about 2.6 million. Overall, non-Christian groups grew by 32 percent over the past decade.

"Mosques have multiplied at a growth rate of about 50 percent," said Dale Jones, a researcher with the Church of the Nazarene who worked on the study as part of the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies. "They have more religious centers, and simply moving into the suburbs puts you closer to where a lot of your folks are living."

While other studies tally total membership, beliefs or worship attendance, the RCMS study counts the actual number of people who are affiliated with U.S. congregations — or, as Jones put it, the people who are "involved enough to the point where they know to count you."

The study found that while upwards of 80 percent of Americans claim to be Christians, only about 49 percent are affiliated with a local congregation. And that, Jones said, should concern church leaders.

"In some ways, our chickens have come

home to roost," Jones said. "Churches have talked about needing to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ — what you hear is, 'I need a relationship, I need to be born again,' but not 'I need to be involved in a congregation.'"

Overall, the survey identified nearly 350,000 religious congregations in the United States, from Albanian Orthodox to Zoroastrian. Those churches, temples and mosques are the spiritual home for 150.6 million Americans, and researchers say they were able to capture 90 percent of all U.S. congregations.

Like most surveys, the RCMS study relies mainly on self-reported data from churches and denominations. Some, including several historically black churches, failed to submit information on new numbers. Researchers were able to reach only one-third of U.S. mosques and had to estimate the rest.

The survey did not track growing numbers of secular or religiously unaffiliated Americans — estimated at about 16 percent of the country, according to other studies — because they do not belong to a local congregation.

Jan Shippo, a respected non-Mormon scholar of Mormonism who's now retired from Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, said Mormons' "astonishing" spread into new counties is likely due to church leaders' decision to split large wards (congregations) into separate smaller wards on opposite sides of a county line.

The study also tracked the growth of nondenominational and independent evangelical churches, which combined represent the nation's third-largest Christian group, at about 12.2 million adherents across 35,000 congregations.

Catholics, while losing about 5 percent of adherents in the past years, nonetheless remain the nation's largest religious group, at about 59 million. The Southern Baptist Convention came in second, at 19.8 million, but its 50,816 congregations made it the group with the most churches.

The rapid growth among American Muslims likely has several explanations, researchers said: growth in the suburbs, an increased willingness by U.S. Muslims to stand and be counted, and more mosques being built to serve more worshippers. **BT**



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Stacy Muller '08 and Saida
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