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# Church *and the* Arts

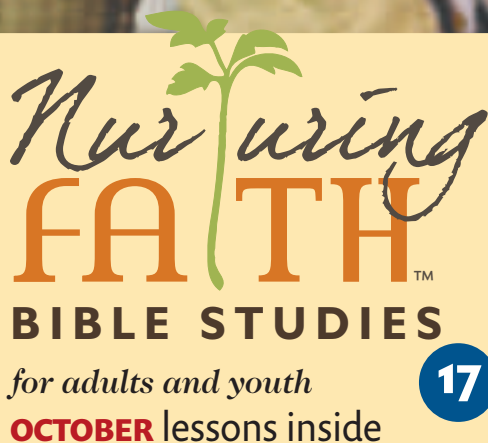
CAMP WITH AN  
ARTISTIC FLAIR | 4

MINISTRY AMONG  
'CULTURAL CREATIVES' | 6



Which Bible study  
lessons will you dig  
into next year? | 16

Turbans: Proud symbols,  
tragic targets | 37



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**OCTOBER** lessons inside

**17**

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**MIXED MESSAGES: Survey on social media raises more questions**

**IN THE NEWS**

Poll: Majority of Americans would vote for an atheist for president **12**

Bible museum to locate just off Washington's National Mall **12**

SBC's controversial public policy spokesman to retire next year **12**

Black churches split over gay marriage, politics **13**

Amish report staggering growth in Midwest **41**

Five things to know about religious violence in Nigeria **42**

**FEATURE**

PROJECT RUTH: Two decades of ministry to poorest of Romania's poor **39**



Koinonia to host Clarence Jordan Symposium

**PERSPECTIVE**

Widening the gap or closing the gap? **9**  
*John Pierce*

Am I welcome at your church? **14**  
*Jerry Chiles*

Courage, common sense should follow Colorado shooting **15**  
*Bob Ballance*

Navigating the land of giants **33**  
*Bill Wilson*

**NEW SERIES!**

WHY? Answers to Baptist questions from a historical perspective **10**

**Cover photo:** Marcia Spivey directs this year's MOSAIC Art Camp at First Baptist Church of Cornelia, Ga. (page 4). Behind her is a painting by artist Kerry Jackson who ministers among Atlanta's "cultural creatives" (page 6).

Quotation Remarks	8
Editorial	9
Media	29
Classifieds	30
In the Know	30
Baptists and the Civil War	31
Lighter Side	32
Reblog	40

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STORY BY JOHN PIERCE

PHOTOS BY THE MOSAIC ART  
CAMP PHOTOGRAPHY CLASS

# MOSAIC

## *Church camp with an artistic flair*



CORNELIA, Ga. — A few years ago David Turner noticed the various sports camps being offered each summer and wondered: What about the kids who are interested in the arts?

The current church member, who then served as long-term interim pastor of the First Baptist Church of Cornelia in the hills of Northeast Georgia, shared his thoughts with others. The idea of a summer arts camp was quickly embraced and then fleshed out by Donna Trotter, a church member and retired dance studio owner.

The first MOSAIC Arts Camp was offered in June 2008 as an afternoon option for children attending Vacation Bible School.

“It soon overwhelmed VBS in attendance,” said current pastor Eric Spivey. “It became its own camp.”

### **THIS SUMMER**

The 2012 MOSAIC Arts Camp, directed by Marcia Spivey, drew more than 200 students and offered classes in 20 disciplines with a wide variety of art forms. Among the new offerings this year were classes in handbells, weaving and interpretive movement.

Cake decorating, also offered for the first time, “turned out to be a very popular class,” said Marcia.

Sandwiched between opening and closing large-group gatherings, each participant (from kindergarten through completed sixth grade) chose three classes — much like registering for college courses. In fact, church member Dalton Sirmans, who owns a local technology business, wrote software to make class registration easier.

Marcia said some teachers with special artistic gifts were recruited, while others volunteered. All classes, she said, emphasize that each person is created by God and uniquely gifted to be creative.

“It meets a need in the community,” she said of the summer arts camp. “The challenge for us is [to explore] how to introduce or foster a life of faith through the arts.”

To accomplish that purpose, each daily session concludes with a gathering in the activities building where an artist or group of performers — painters, musicians, dancers, etc. — shares an art form and discusses how faith is expressed through each medium.

## AWAKENING TO ARTS

Children arrive at the church each day around 8:45 a.m. and gather for the opening session. Sleepy eyes are awakened during the energetic, yet worshipful, celebration that features a wide variety of music and a dramatic theme interpretation.

Approximately 75 volunteers from the church, larger community and beyond provide staffing needs — including instruction in classes that teach pottery, scrapbooking, photography, creative writing, quilting, sculpting, music, drama, painting and other art forms.

Even camp alumni can get involved. Jacob Trotter, whose mother was the first director, was introduced to the guitar through MOSAIC. This year, he returned to assist in teaching the class.

Costs are kept very low, and students without the needed funds are given scholarships to attend.

MOSAIC — an acronym for Mentoring Our Students Artistically in Christ — has a distinctive ministry purpose, the pastor said.

“We don’t do art just for art’s sake,” said

Eric. “When the church does it, ... it’s really important that it introduces children to Jesus, to talk about faith.”

The result, he said, is that “kids see the gifts they’ve been given by God and can be used by God for the sake of the world.”

## TAPPING RESOURCES

Eric credits his predecessor for being a visionary and “accomplished artist.” Turner credits the many gifted church members who took the idea of a summer camp and made it into something so effective.

“I’ve always been interested in the arts as an expression of faith,” said Turner, who came to Cornelia after retiring as pastor of neighboring Clarkesville Baptist Church. “I think that’s been left out in most churches.”

The summer camps, he said, give children the chance to integrate arts into their personal faith for the rest of their lives. But he’d like to see arts permeate more church experiences.

Churches are sometimes boring, he admits, because “we don’t give them enough variety.”

Turner said congregations often leave out a lot of available resources that could be used effectively in worship. And not only does worship improve when more artistic expressions are included, he said, “but you get to utilize the gifts of church members.”

## CLOSING ACTS

Families of camp participants are invited to the church on Friday evening where they enjoy seeing the arts on display — first during a program featuring performing arts by the students and then an exhibit of visual arts. In Georgia-like fashion, everyone is treated to peach cobbler and sweet ice tea.

“As a church, we have realized this is a way of reaching out to families,” said Eric, who



also plans the next Sunday’s worship service to include various art expressions from the camp experience.

Mosaic Sunday services have included offerings by the guitar class and readings by the creative writing class as well as dance and drama.

While the camp continues to grow and expand to include new art forms, Eric said he is not content to keep riding the wave of enthusiasm. He wonders if there might be more opportunities for the church to incorporate arts into other aspects of ministry.

“I think we are just on the cusp of what this concept can be,” he said, noting how the church is already incorporating more of the arts into Wednesday church activities.

And seeing how well the MOSAIC Art Camp has impacted children, he is wondering: “How do we do this with adults?” **BT**



Artist ministers  
within Atlanta's  
art community



# CULTURAL Creatives

Artist-minister Kerry Jackson (right) with Tom Key who co-wrote and starred in the off-Broadway hit *Cotton Patch Gospel* and is executive artistic director of Atlanta's Theatrical Outfit. Jackson leads Bezalel Church that meets in the theater company's Balzer Theater and provides volunteer services to this and other art venues. Photo by John Pierce.

**A**TLANTA — It didn't come quickly or easily, but Kerry Jackson has embraced his calling to be both artist and minister. The ministerial pull and his artistic giftedness are no longer in conflict.

So he cherishes opportunities to go into churches and other settings where he shares his faith while creating art — such as when he took his paint and brushes to the First Baptist Church of Cornelia, Ga., this summer to participate in the congregation's annual MOSAIC Art Camp. (See story on page 4.)

Downtown Atlanta, however, is where he brushes up against other creative persons in a daily effort to minister among those engaged in the arts.

## CALLING

"I thought I had to give up art to be in ministry," said Jackson, a Mississippi native whose divine call "scared [him] to death."

At age 9, he illustrated a book. And later he earned a degree in art from Mississippi State University.

"I knew I was going to be an artist while growing up," he said. "I had no doubt."

But the call to ministry caused him to sell his art supplies and head to Fort Worth, Texas, to attend seminary. He was willing to give it all up for a new calling — that he first understood in very narrow terms.

While in seminary, however, Jackson said he gained a clearer understanding of his calling: to "communicate the gospel in visual form."

## MISSION

As seminary graduation neared, Jackson found a position as exhibit designer for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board). He took the job in Atlanta and served in that role for 14 years.

During a mission trip to Europe in 2002, he started talking with street artists and was

surprised how easily they moved into "really interesting conversations about God." Then he asked himself: Who's trying to reach artists?

Returning to Atlanta, he shared with his mission board colleagues that he was sensing a call to become "an artist missionary" — one who "lives among the artists." But things moved slowly over the next five years, he said.

In 2006, however, he was appointed as a national missionary to "cultural creatives" — an affinity group with whom he easily identified. The goal was to engage with the various art communities in Atlanta, to start a congregation, and then to share what he learned with those seeking to minister in similar settings in other cities.

## MINISTRY

After five years of engaging in this ministry, however, the funding for his position was eliminated. But Jackson felt his ministry calling was continuing.

So he and his wife, Twyla, a dietician at Shepherd Spinal Center who loves music and theater, were commissioned as Mission Service Corps volunteers who raise their own ministry support.

“I’m still doing what I’ve been doing,” said Kerry, whose ongoing ministry is now funded by gifts from individuals and some churches, as well as “travels around the country doing live art” and selling some of his works.

The Jacksons have spent several years now immersing themselves in Atlanta’s creative community (or communities) by attending various art venues and volunteering as needed. Those relationships led to the formation of Bezael Church — “a creative community of faith.”

In the Old Testament book of Exodus, Bezalel oversees a team of artisans charged with building and decorating the temple. Kerry notes that it is no coincidence “that the first person listed in the Bible as being filled with the Spirit of God was an artist.”

Bezael Church meets in the Balzer Theater at Herren’s — a former restaurant site famous for its cinammon rolls and voluntary desegregation — next to the Rialto Center for the Arts at Georgia State University. It is home to Theatrical Outfit that bills itself as offering “Stories that stir the soul.”

The executive artistic director is Tom Key, well known for co-writing and starring in the off-Broadway musical *Cotton Patch Gospel*. Also, he has brought C.S. Lewis to life and given a one-man performance in which he uttered every word from the Book of Revelation.

The church is granted free use of the theater for Sunday worship and, in turn, assists the Theatrical Outfit in many ways from serving as ushers to polishing the stars embedded in the sidewalk to honor donors.

## CREATIVITY

Worship at Bezael Church is as creative as those who plan the weekly gatherings and those who attend.

“We do a lot of participatory art,” said Kerry, noting that the service may conclude with each participant being handed some clay. “We sculpt with Play-Doh what God has said to us that day.”

Kerry said that he encounters people who long for a faith community but don’t know how or where to find one. Some, he said, felt abused by congregations that only wanted them and their gifts when a bulletin board needed to be changed or a set created for a church play.

Others simply found worship to be too limited, too confining.

“We try to keep it varied,” he said of worship at Bezael Church. “Artsy people don’t like patterns.”

So on a given Sunday, worship might be

facilitated by storytelling, photography, dance, visual arts or video — as well as music and the spoken word.

## COMMUNITY

One discovery the Jacksons have made is that Atlanta’s art community is “real pocketed.” So rather than attempting to create one large group for worship and ministry, a better approach is to help create smaller groups in different parts of the city.

They helped start a church in Atlantic Station, a new community built on an old-town model just north of the Georgia Tech campus. The congregation meets in a movie theater.

Another discovery is that a lot of the stereotypes of artists don’t always apply, he said. Artists vary in the ways they think and choose to live.

And the best way to gain access is to jump in: volunteering to paint sets, usher, clean up and help market the arts to keep them alive.

Jeremy Walters, a recent graduate of Clemson University, served as a summer missionary who assisted Kerry in his work with the church, the theater and in meeting other needs in that part of downtown.

While scouting out possible mission trips for the Baptist Campus Ministry at Clemson University, Jeremy felt drawn to Atlanta personally. He learned that a summer mission position there had come open and he volunteered.

“So I got plugged into the church here,” said Jeremy, whose daily schedule has been as varied as the arts.

## VARIETY

Some days Jeremy will visit with church members who live and work downtown or with those who are homeless. He joins Kerry in assisting at art venues where their volunteering is needed and welcomed.

Balzer Theater was the nation’s first “green” theater — so Kerry, Jeremy and others from the church assist with the major recycling efforts. They build good will and fulfill a commitment made when Kerry was searching for a gathering place and someone from the theater said: “I think we can help each other.”

Typical approaches to forming a Christian congregation may not fit here. But Kerry said the arts and church are no more mutually exclusive than being called to the arts and ministry.

“Arts people tend to be spiritual by nature,” he said. So in personal conversations and the programs of the church, the connection between the arts and spirituality are explored.

“It’s the love of the arts that draws people together,” he said. “We can use the arts to start conversations.”

And those conversations can lead artistic persons to join others in worship and ministry through Bezael Church — a church that is in some ways unlike others, yet with the same purposes of worship, ministry and community.

“We’re a community of believers who want to make the community better,” said Kerry. “We do that through the arts, because that is who we are.” **BT**

—Information on Bezael Church is available at [bezalelchurch.org](http://bezalelchurch.org).



Kerry Jackson’s artwork is often incorporated into worship. For more information, visit [drawingtotherock.com](http://drawingtotherock.com).

# quotation remarks



“This is a tragic crime against all humankind, and we need to support them.”

—Pastor Walter Lanier of Progressive Baptist Church in Milwaukee, an American Baptist congregation located about 15 minutes from the Sikh temple where deadly shootings occurred Aug. 5 (APB)

“The music that comes from these bands is incredibly violent, and it talks about murdering Jews, black people, gay people and a whole host of other enemies.”

—Mark Potok of the Southern Poverty Law Center to The New York Times about neo-Nazi bands tied to Sikh temple shooter Wade Page (RNS)

“During tough economic times, the credibility of mainstream, conventional institutions and leaders declines dramatically and what happens is that more and more Americans have given up resolving their problems in the middle and have gone to the extremes.”

—Jack Levin, a professor of sociology and criminology at Northeastern University in Boston, on the growth of white supremacist groups (CNN)

“Our deacon ministry has formed teams for prayer, home repair, Communion for the congregation and homebound, new member welcome, community mission events, projects, and hospital visitation.”

—Pastor Bill Ross of First Baptist Church of Marietta, Ga., on the shift from deacons as “a board of decision makers to a fellowship of ministers” (Visions)

“I want to bury Snoop Dogg and become Snoop Lion.”

—The rapper born as Calvin Broadus, during a July 30 press conference in which he announced his conversion to Rastafarianism (RNS)

“For outsiders looking in, the moral of the story is that ‘there is no pleasing Christians. They always seem to be looking for something to be mad about.’ We complain about the calumnies and caricatures of Christians on the big screen; and then, when an Academy-Award winning film shows us at our very best, we complain that scenes depicting harsh, inner-city reality are too true to life! We are, in effect, making our participation contingent on all our possible objections being met beforehand. Since there are many people who would be happy if we stayed within our cultural and religious ghettos, it’s difficult to imagine how we Christians can hope to be taken seriously in cultural discussions and debates with this kind of an approach.”

—Eric Metaxas, who has written biographies of William Wilberforce and Dietrich Bonhoeffer as well as VeggieTales scripts, on the Southern Baptist bookstore chain, LifeWay, pulling the movie The Blindside due to protest by a Florida pastor who criticized some language in the PG13 film (Prison Fellowship’s BreakPoint blog)

“[David] Barton is a culture warrior driven by desire rather than by evidence.”

—Boston University professor Stephen Prothero, in a column titled “Thomas Jefferson: Our Least Christian President,” on the WallBuilders founder who portrays himself as a historian and America’s founders as holding the same theological beliefs as modern evangelicals (RNS)

“We respect our employees by offering a workplace that is free of judgment and bias, and one that gives everyone an opportunity to succeed and grow.”

—Hobby Lobby President Debra Love clarifying the Christian-based company’s nondiscriminatory policies “after numerous calls asking for comment” (PR Newswire)

“We’re all sinners. We’re born in sin. But you’re not born to hate . . . You have to be taught to hate.”

—Charles Wilson, whose scheduled wedding at First Baptist Church of Crystal Springs, Miss., had to be moved because he and his fiancé were black (Clarion-Ledger)

“Texas is a highway for trafficking. The stories of our Texas teens lured into trafficking are horrendous.”

—Director Suzii Paynter of the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, who noted a growing number of Baptist congregations and individuals working to stop human trafficking (ethicsdaily.com)

“[It is] inerrantists here who are disagreeing with other inerrantists.”

—Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee President Frank Page, who as a pastor wrote a stinging criticism of Calvinism, calling the ongoing debate “within the family” (Baptist Press)

“There are clergy bullies out there who are driven by personal preferences, comfort zones, and often seek to force the church into molds or styles they are professionally more comfortable with rather than contextualizing ministry and facing their own learning curves and challenges.”

—Eddie Hammett of the Columbia Partnership



# Widening the gap or closing the gap?

There is a growing gap, and we've got to decide what to do about it. Anyone with even the slightest awareness knows that American society doesn't look like it did decades ago. And as hard as some try to stop the sociological shifting, we are not going back there.

So how should evangelical or mainline (or whatever descriptor we choose) "Christians" react to such changes — after decades of political and religious dominance? We certainly need better responses than the ones we've seen and heard lately.

Whenever a brouhaha (over everything from public prayers to relocating mosques to chicken sandwiches) breaks out that pits politically-charged evangelicals against others, I cringe. Strident voices always drown out more reasonable ones.

Self-appointed spokesmen for God stand closest to the microphones. Their message is loud and clear: "Christianity is under attack — and we better stop it."

Then we hear the familiar and defiant calls to "stand up for our rights/beliefs" — without regard for the rights and beliefs of others. Predictably, large masses of less-than-reflective church people will then rally for the latest cause and assume the mantle of persecution much too easily.

As a result, the public image of at least our slice of Christianity gets sullied once again. And the gap between "us" and "them" grows wider and wider.

These cultural clashes are not helpful to the cause of Christ or the betterment of society. I've considered posting this ad: "Wanted: Wiser American Christians in the forefront."

Do we really want to be defined as cocksure, yet insecure believers who fear change, especially the growing religious diversity among us? This is what happens with each press conference or talk show appearance by a caustic defender of a narrow religious-political agenda.

American Christians are further portrayed as those who care only about themselves

— rather than seeking to create an environment of freedom and respect where authentic faith grows apart from coercion. In reading about Roger Williams, founder of Rhode Island and the First Baptist Church in America, there is a striking contrast to current cultural warriors.

Williams, who was truly persecuted for his religious convictions, did not focus on protecting self-interests. Rather he created a haven for those who believed as he did as well as for all others regardless of their beliefs. He went out of his way to show respect for those who were unlike him — giving their rights equal weight.

Such advocacy by evangelical Christians is rare if not absent today. There is no outrage over the trampling of the rights for anyone other than those within their own enclave. And the so-called persecution they often claim usually is nothing more than efforts at treating all religious expressions fairly and equally.

Sure, there are those who are hostile toward religious faith. But much of that hostility can be traced to the heavy-handed tactics of evangelicals. And the constitutional guarantees of religious freedom remain clear and strong for the benefit of all Americans.

American Christians never act more foolishly or undermine their own faith more obviously than when seeing every opposing viewpoint as persecution or when seeking government endorsement of their particular beliefs and practices as a preference to all others.

Time and energy would be better spent in prayer and Christ-like service to others than on such efforts that do nothing more than advance the notion that evangelical Christians consider religious bullying to be a preferred spiritual gift. It is simply impossible to imagine Jesus acting this way.

During my most impressionable years we were often reminded of the Apostle Paul's affirmation: "Do not be conformed to the world..." (Rom. 12:2). The Independent Baptists, with whom I had much contact in my youth, had a

clear understanding of living by different rules than society at large. Lots of extra rules.

Yet the infusion of secular politics into Christian fundamentalism (or perhaps the other way around) — beginning with the old Christian Roundtable and Moral Majority on through the current political coziness of the Southern Baptist Convention — has brought a new and different perspective on how Christians should relate to society.

Today, many evangelical Christians live with the expectation that the larger American society should conform to and confirm their particular beliefs and practices — even if the force of law is required. An emphasis is placed on defending "our rights" and digging in against any loss of power resulting from declining majority status.

And the gap gets wider — and public discourse gets uglier.

But what if we accept the realities of cultural change that might cause us to live as many Christians of the world — past and present — without government power to bless and boost our religious agenda over all others?

Is it possible to be faithful to our convictions and heritage by contending for the rights of those with whom we disagree as well as our own? In fact, that may well be the most faithful way to hold firmly to our faith while seeking to close the gap that breeds distrust and hostility.

If so, other Christians need to move closer to the microphones. **BT**



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# Why?

*Answers to  
Baptist questions  
from a historical  
perspective*



## QUESTION: Why do Baptists oppose alcohol?

If you grew up in a Baptist church in America, chances are you were taught from the pulpit, and likely by your parents, that drinking alcohol is a sin. Yet there was a time when many Baptist churches in America not only used real wine in Communion, but also — in rural areas especially — appointed a member to grow grapes and produce home-made wine for observances of the Lord's Supper.

In addition, pastors of rural Baptist churches were sometimes paid in whiskey. One minister took things a step further. Popular 18<sup>th</sup>-century Baptist pastor Elijah Craig of present-day Georgetown, Ky., and a commercial distiller of whiskey, is credited with creating bourbon in 1789.

Craig's whiskey, shipped from Bourbon County, took on a distinctive color and texture during transit, and soon became known as "bourbon." Chances are you've never heard those old Baptist stories in Sunday school.

So, why did Baptists abandon their swilling ways and, seemingly, embrace tee-totaling? Like many stories in Baptist life, the issue turns on evolving biblical interpretations.

From their beginnings in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century through most of Baptist history, alcohol in and of itself was simply not an issue. Baptists in America (along with most other Christians), being more biblically literate than now, took the Bible literally in terms of alcohol.

Consumption of alcohol is not scripturally sinful (even Jesus drank it), and for a biblicist people, that was the last word. Baptists merely opposed drunkenness, a condition that, biblically speaking, is clearly sinful. Church records of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are replete with instances of discipline over the matter of drunkenness, but are rarely concerned with drinking *per se*.

And so the matter remained until the late

19<sup>th</sup> century, during which time Baptists grew increasingly creative with their biblical interpretation on a number of matters. During the antebellum era, many issues caused consternation for a biblical people.

On the issue of slavery, Baptists of the North moved from a literal reading of scripture (which does not condemn slavery) to an understanding in which Jesus' teaching of love for all humanity and Paul's teaching on human equality trumped the biblical blessing of slavery.

White Baptists in the South, however, after having often opposed slavery in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, switched directions and landed squarely on a literal interpretation of slavery. When the war ended rather badly for the South, many white Baptists of the region clung to their conservative biblical convictions of white supremacy, yet gradually embraced more liberal biblical interpretations regarding alcohol.

By the 1870s, many Christians in the North began transitioning from temperance to prohibition. Forsaking a literal reading of scripture, they argued from the perspective of the good of society. Alcohol, often abused by men, destroyed families, led to crime and created social havoc.

For the sake of family, community and society, and out of Christian conviction, alcohol must be outlawed, they reasoned.

By the end of the century, many Baptists of the South took up this ironically liberal scriptural approach. Their abandonment of a literal biblical interpretation on this point was soothed by the knowledge that personal piety was biblical.

Increasingly, they justified their more liberal interpretation by claiming that biblical passages sanctioning the drinking of alcohol did not really say what they said. More and more Baptist preachers declared, in short, that alcohol in biblical days was actually non-alcoholic.

The legacy of Elijah Craig was quietly laid aside North and South. Some Baptist preachers may have secretly wished they could yet be paid in whiskey, but by now cash was more in vogue.

Not coincidentally, Charles E. Welch, son of Methodist minister Thomas B. Welch — the inventor of a method of pasteurizing grape juice that prevented fermentation and thus alcoholic content — prospered following the founding of his Welch's Grape Juice Company in 1893, thanks in no small part to growing sales of grape juice to churches for Communion usage.

By the 1920s, the Prohibition movement in America was in full force, and few Baptist churches anywhere maintained the traditional use of wine in Communion services. Simultaneously, church covenants became increasingly popular, and almost always included a pledge by church members not to drink or engage in the sale of alcohol. And within a generation or two, Baptists forgot their long heritage of a literal biblical position on alcohol.

Today, however, the issue of alcohol in Baptist life is taking a turn to the past. Although the 1920s-era church covenant yet adorns numerous church walls throughout the Baptist world, many moderate Baptists openly drink in moderation as did their spiritual forebears. Meanwhile, young Calvinists are irritating an older generation of fundamentalist Southern Baptists by reminding inerrantists that a literal Bible welcomes liquid spirits.

Perhaps the spirit of Elijah Craig is feeling a bit livelier. **BT**

*—This series is provided by Baptists Today in partnership with the Baptist History & Heritage Society. Bruce Gourley serves as online editor of the news journal and as executive director of the Society.*

# NEW

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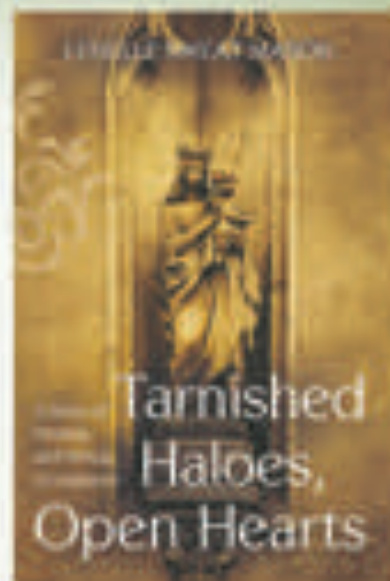
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## Majority of Americans would vote for an atheist for president, finds poll

By Kimberly Winston  
*Religion News Service*

For the second time in less than a year, the Gallup poll reports that a majority of Americans would vote for an atheist for president.

The latest survey, from June, found that 54 percent of those asked said they would vote a “well-qualified” atheist into the Oval Office — the highest percentage since Gallup began asking the question in 1958, when only 18 percent said they would back a nonbeliever.

On the other hand, the survey showed that those who do not believe in God still come in behind every other group polled for, including gays and lesbians (68 percent) and Muslims (58 percent).

Still, an imaginary atheist candidate passed the 50 percent threshold for the first time when Gallup asked the question in August 2011, so the trend is upward.

“We have seen an enormous change over time in the willingness to vote for an atheist,” said Karlyn Bowman, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, which reports the numbers in its current newsletter. “But I think the numbers also remind us that this is a deeply religious country. That doesn’t mean we are all going to church on Sunday, but that having religion in your life is valuable to most Americans and I think that explains the resistance.”

Indeed, in the current poll, 43 percent said they would not vote for a well-qualified atheist, a percentage that was higher among Republicans than Democrats (58 percent) or independents (56 percent).

In his analysis of the recent data, Gallup’s managing editor Jeffrey M. Jones writes that for groups whose approval ratings hover within a narrow range of percentage points for more than 10 years — which might be happening for atheists — it can take more than fronting an appealing atheist candidate to reach more universal numbers, like those enjoyed by women (95 percent), blacks (96 percent) and Catholics (94 percent). **BT**

## Bible museum to open in \$50M spot near National Mall in Washington

By Adelle M. Banks  
*Religion News Service*

WASHINGTON — Planners of a Bible museum in Washington closed a \$50 million deal this summer on a building two blocks from the National Mall.

The Museum of the Bible, a nonprofit group planning the, as yet, unnamed museum, announced it will be housed at 300 D Street, SW, in what is now the Washington Design Center, a series of showrooms of luxury home furnishings.

“Our intent is for this museum to showcase both the Old and New Testaments, arguably the world’s most significant pieces of literature, through a non-sectarian, scholarly approach that makes the history, scholarship and impact of the Bible on virtually every facet of society accessible to everyone,” said Mark DeMoss, a member of the Bible museum’s board.



The museum, which will likely open in 2016, will highlight the collection of the billionaire Green family of Oklahoma. That collection features more than 55,000 items including biblical artifacts ranging from Dead Sea Scrolls to Torah scrolls that survived the Holocaust. Museum officials expect to also showcase other prominent collections from across the globe. **BT**

## Southern Baptist leader Land announces retirement

By Adelle M. Banks  
*Religion News Service*

Richard Land, the man who became the public face of the Southern Baptist Convention on ethical and political issues for nearly 25 years, has announced plans to retire in 2013 after a rough-and-tumble spring.

The decision comes months after Land, president of the SBC’s Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, made controversial comments about the Trayvon Martin case that resulted in a reprimand and the loss of his radio talk show for the racial tension they caused.

Land, 65, said in a July 31 letter announcing his retirement that he has no intention of ending his role as a culture warrior.

“I believe the ‘culture war’ is a titanic spiritual struggle for our nation’s soul and as a minister of Christ’s Gospel, I have no right to retire from that struggle,” Land wrote in a two-page letter to the acting chairman of his commission.



Richard Land

Bill Leonard, chair of Baptist studies at Wake Forest University Divinity School, said from a historical perspective, “the Trayvon Martin situation should not be seen as the defining moment for Land on race.”

Nonetheless, Leonard said Land’s retirement signals a changing of the guard in the nation’s largest Protestant body, which is struggling to reach nonwhites and non-Southerners as it faces a declining membership.

“You have to wonder if there is — inside the new, the younger leadership of the convention — a concern that his style of very aggressive, very public responses is something the convention wants to perpetuate,” Leonard said, adding that Land “replaced Jerry Falwell” as the media’s go-to voice for conservative evangelicals.

ERLC acting chairman Richard Piles called Land’s departure “bittersweet,” and thanked Land for his “exemplary” service.

“He is to be applauded for his tireless work for racial reconciliation, the pro-life movement, and traditional marriage, just to name a few of the more well-known issues he has championed,” Piles said.

Land will have been president of the commission for 25 years on his planned retirement date of Oct. 23, 2012. **BT**

# Rites & Rights

## *Black churches split over gay marriage, politics*

At Charity Missionary Baptist Church in North Charleston, S.C., pastor Nelson B. Rivers III supports and follows his African-American congregation's policy: They will only conduct marriages between one man and one woman.

**B**ut the vice president of the NAACP also backed his civil rights organization's recent statement supporting "marriage equality."

"We see no conflict in that," Rivers said, "because I am the leader of the r-i-t-e at my church, the rites, but I'm also a strong advocate of the r-i-g-h-t-s of my members."

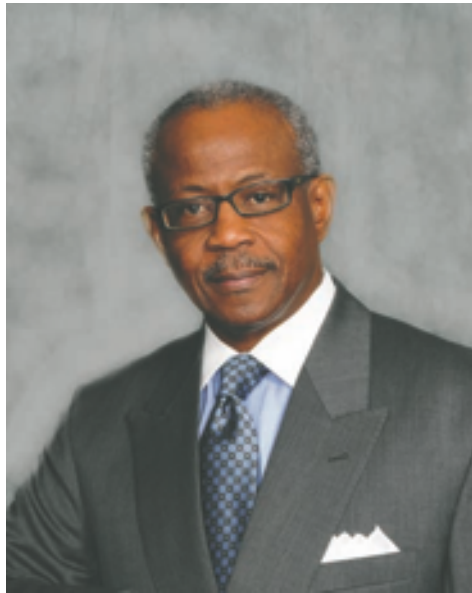
President Obama's support for gay marriage, followed quickly by the NAACP's, has put some black clergy in a bind, torn between their political loyalties and their religious beliefs. For some, like Rivers, it's been a both/and proposition, while others say they can support the president without endorsing his position on gay marriage.

But the issue has highlighted that the black church has never been monolithic. The black church's response is further complicated by the fact that people in the pew may not always go along with what pastors in the pulpit preach.

"You've got to balance religious convictions with all of your other interests, your racial interests, your economic interests," said Andra Gillespie, an associate professor of politics at Emory University who studies African-American politics.

Most blacks still prioritize their rights as African Americans and economic issues over social issues, she said.

Drawing the same distinction as Rivers, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church issued a statement at its recent quadrennial



Pastor Nelson Rivers III of Charity Missionary Baptist Church in North Charleston, S.C., supports both his church's policy on wedding rites and the civil rights of all persons. RNS photo courtesy of Charity Missionary Baptist Church

meeting declaring that its churches cannot perform same-sex rituals. But it also noted that while it differed with Obama on gay marriage, his positions on health care and student loans are "consistent with the interests of our congregant members."

"We do not believe in same-sex marriage but we do not believe that's the only issue," explained AME Zion Bishop Darryl Starnes. "There is more in the scriptures about treating the poor right and championing the cause of the oppressed than some of these other issues."

Likewise, the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World has said it is "in conflict" with the president's stance but applauds Obama for "his many achievements in improving the quality of life for all Americans."

Overall, African-Americans remain one of the groups most opposed to gay marriage: 51 percent are opposed, while 40 percent support

it, according to a recent poll by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. That support, however, has edged up from 26 percent just four years ago. Among black Protestants, opposition is slightly higher, at 54 percent.

Pew researchers said Obama's support hasn't noticeably shifted opinion in either direction, but some smaller groups are seeking to galvanize lingering black skepticism over gay marriage to make it a wedge issue for African-American voters this November.

"I would hope that the president would become wise, come to his senses and know that he has made a mistake," said William Owens, president of the fledgling Coalition of African-American Pastors, at a recent National Press Club news conference.

His group is circulating an online petition to ask Obama to "repudiate his assertion that gay marriage is a civil right."

Still others, including the Washington-based group Many Voices, are working to reshape the notion that all black churches are against gay rights. Rather, many clergy are thinking carefully about their stance, said Cedric Harmon, co-director of the three-year-old nonprofit.

"They're weighing this out; they're considering who they know, what they believe," he said. "They don't want to be mean. They don't want to be hateful."

Rivers said while his church doesn't sanction same-sex ceremonies, another across town might conduct them. If gay members were to request such a service from him, he said he would recommend they find such a congregation for a ceremony because it is their right to have one.

"On the issues of justice, fairness and equality and the prophetic role of clergy and standing up for what is right, there is much consensus," he said. "On the other issues, how you interpret doctrine, that's up to your church." **BT**

*"You've got to balance religious convictions with all of your other interests, your racial interests, your economic interests."*

—Andra Gillespie, an associate professor of politics at Emory University who studies African-American politics

## Guest Commentary

By Jerry Chiles

# Am I welcome at your church?

After retiring from a ministerial position but planning to stay in the same city, I felt the need to find a new congregation in order to give the church and myself some breathing room. I thought it would be easy to adjust to another church setting, yet it is amazing how congregations do church the same but differently.

The first church I visited met in a school auditorium with ample parking. I arrived about 10 minutes before worship began and made my way to the auditorium where I was greeted with a packet of material. As I found my seat, I noticed mostly young families dressed casually. The praise team began with beautifully projected slides the congregation could follow.

It was an enthusiastic time of music followed by words from the casually dressed pastor. I was surprised that as I left no one bothered to speak to me.

Over the following weeks we visited several other churches — with traditional worship or blended services. In one church a screen showed the words to contemporary songs while posting the numbers for hymns. Not knowing that we were to use the hymnal, we played catch-up retrieving it.

At one church I walked in 10 minutes before the worship time and found no one to greet me. So I picked up a worship bulletin and found a seat. However, a woman stopped to greet my wife and me, and spent five minutes getting to know us.

I filled out the information pad that was passed down the pew, but have not heard

anything from this church.

When the minister passed the peace and encouraged everyone to do the same, I greeted folks with, “May the peace of God be with you.” It seemed to catch people by surprise.

At another church we arrived 10 minutes before worship and tried to find a parking space. One sign read “Exit Only” but was bent, so I nearly entered the exit.

Finally, I found a parking place about a city block away — making us late.

While several people were in the foyer, no one spoke to me. I entered the sanctuary and was handed a bulletin. During worship I filled out information on the pad that was passed down the pew. At the end of worship, one person who I had known in a previous situation spoke to me. The following week I received a cordial letter from the pastor.

One church visit began with me finding visitor parking close to the entrance. As I approached the building, two men greeted me and thanked me for coming. They directed me to the guest registry in the middle of the hallway, making it easy to connect.

I was warmly greeted, given a worship bulletin and shown to the sanctuary. After I was seated a man came over and said, “Later there will be a greeting time, but I am slow and I wanted to meet you.”

Two or three other persons also greeted me.



That afternoon our doorbell rang and a woman introduced herself and said: “I am from the church and wanted to bring you this information and this loaf of bread. I hope you will come back.”

I was impressed! Later that week I received the church newsletter and a letter from the pastor.

Before visiting churches I perused their websites. Some were informative while others had outdated information. Only one church I visited had an available internet connection to use the Bible app on my smart phone.

My latest visitor experience was in a United Methodist church out of town. I found guest parking close to the building and was greeted at the door. Everyone seemed friendly and relaxed.

As I entered the sanctuary, the lights were low and there were no pews — only chairs and some tables in the back. A variety of people were present, mostly in casual attire.

The praise team leader called us to worship. The music, led by a well-rehearsed, talented team, was accompanied by beautiful projections on the screen.

Then the pastor stepped forward and began talking about how both rich and poor are welcome at the Communion table. While the scripture was projected on the screen, I took out my phone and accessed my Bible app.

Following the sermon, the congregation was invited to participate in Communion by intinction. More praise music followed. I left church that morning feeling accepted and included and that I had truly worshiped.

When I come to your house, how will you welcome me? How will I know that you want me to worship with you? What barriers can be removed so that I can encounter God?

Some lessons I’ve learned: Be aware and thankful that guests are coming. Clear the path — with good signage, guest parking and genuine greeters — so their visit will be unencumbered. Search out and welcome guests rather than spending time only with friends. **BT**

—Jerry Chiles retired from Forest Hills Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C., where he was minister to adults.

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By Bob Ballance

# Courage, common sense should follow Colorado shooting

The theater in Aurora, Colo., where James Holmes shot 71 people, killing 12, this past July 20 is just 20 miles from where I live. Columbine High School in Littleton, scene of the April 1999 massacre, where 34 were shot and 13 died before the two senior high gunmen committed suicide, is just 30 miles away.

**P**roximity to both of these tragedies will not allow me to shrug my shoulders and say, “what a tragedy” and then go on with my daily chores. Too many people close around me are being forced to deal directly with this most recent gun-related tragedy.

A few days after the shooting in Aurora, I asked a friend: “Why should anyone be allowed to own an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle like Holmes used?”

His response: “Because we live in a free country. It’s one of our rights.”

“But what about parents’ rights?” I asked. “Don’t they have the right in this great free land to say ‘yes’ to their 9-year-old daughter when she wants to see a movie and then expect

that she’ll be safe while she’s there?”

He still defended the gun owner’s right. Sorry, but in this case I’m far more concerned about the victim’s rights and the rights of those who know and care about the victim.

Besides, without such victim’s rights, what good are the rights of the gun owner anyway? And without the right to expect safety in public places, what good are any of our rights?

In that regard, I raise this question: Why should anyone — outside of police or military personnel — be able to own one of these guns or one like it?



These guns have the capacity to shoot 50-60 rounds in a 60-second period. In what setting — again outside of a police or military situation — would such a weapon be needed?

It’s time for these types of massacres to stop. In fact, federal laws were put in place in 1994 that prevented private ownership of these guns and others like them. But in 2004, those laws expired without a lot of resistance because no one had the courage to face powerful gun lobbyists who wanted those laws gone.

After the Columbine and Virginia Tech

massacres, attempts to revisit federal laws governing gun ownership were revisited, but attempts to make changes were unsuccessful. After this most recent event, there will be another attempt at revision. Yet again, however, powerful lobbyists will work hard to prevent that from happening, and they’ll likely succeed.

On this issue, where are the courageous politicians and commonsense citizens? Money and power make decisions while well-being and wisdom take a back seat to the harsh realities of the day.

I value our Constitution’s protection of freedom of speech, thought, expression and even the right to own guns of various sorts, but not these guns.

This is one of the most challenging and divisive issues of our time. Even so, the Aurora tragedy demands that we critically re-examine the public’s right to own automatic and semi-automatic assault weapons. After all, when James Holmes went to make his AR-15 purchase, his record was clean, and there was no reason to suspect future misuse.

The blood of his victims is on all our hands. **BT**

—Bob Ballance is pastor of First Baptist Church of Boulder, Colo., and former editor of *Baptists Today*.

# Nurturing Faith: *Texts and Themes for 2013*

## **Jan. 6-Feb. 10: God's Desire and Israel's Glory**

### **Jan. 6 – Isaiah 60:1-6 (Epiphany)**

*“Rise and Shine!”*

A day of glory is coming for Israel.

### **Jan. 13 – Isaiah 43:1-7**

*“You Are Mine!”*

A day of deliverance is coming for Israel.

### **Jan. 20 – Isaiah 62:1-5**

*“A Cherished Bride”*

As God's bride, Israel gets a new name.

### **Jan. 27 – Nehemiah 8:1-10**

*“Law School”*

Ezra teaches the first mass Bible study class.

### **Feb. 3 – Jeremiah 1:4-10**

*“Inside and Out”*

God calls Jeremiah, explaining that he has no choice.

### **Feb. 10 – Exodus 34:29-35**

*“A Face Full of Glory”*

God speaks – and shines – through Moses.

## **Feb. 17-Mar. 31: Lent on the Loose**

### **Feb. 17 – Luke 4:1-13**

*“Don't Tempt Me!”*

Jesus's ministry begins with a test – three of them, over 40 days.

### **Feb. 24 – Luke 13:31-35**

*“A Fox in the Henhouse”*

Jesus, like a mother hen, weeps over Jerusalem.

### **Mar. 3 – Luke 13:1-9**

*“The Year of No Fig Preserves”*

Jesus refuses to explain tragedy, but calls for repentance.

### **Mar. 10 – Luke 15:1-3, 11-32**

*“Prodigals, All of You”*

Who's the biggest prodigal?

### **Mar. 17 – John 12:1-8**

*“Better Than a Pedicure”*

Mary shows appreciation for Jesus.

### **Mar. 24 – Luke 19:28-40**

*“A Day for Shouting”*

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem is a day ordained for praise

### **Mar. 31 – John 20:1-18**

*“The Power of Persistence”*

Mary stays at the tomb when all others leave – and meets Jesus.

## **April 7-May 26: The Apocalypse?**

### **Apr. 7 – Revelation 1:4-8**

*“Look Who's Coming!”*

John insists that Jesus will come again.

### **Apr. 14 – Revelation 5:11-14**

*“Songs of Angels”*

John visualizes heaven's throne room.

### **Apr. 21 – Revelation 7:9-17**

*“Visions of Terror”*

Trumpets you never want to hear.

### **Apr. 28 – Revelation 21:1-6**

*“No More Tears”*

A new heaven and new earth emerge, where death and grief are no more.

### **May 5 – Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5**

*“Better Than You Can Imagine”*

John describes heaven as a place beyond earthly beauty and majesty.

### **May 12 – Revelation 22:12-21**

*“I Am Coming Soon!”*

John promises that Jesus is coming soon.

### **May 19 (Pentecost) –**

#### **Psalm 104:24-35**

*“Life in the Spirit”*

The psalmist attributes all life to the Spirit of God

### **May 26 (Trinity Sunday) –**

#### **Romans 5:1-5**

*“Love Three Ways”*

Paul writes of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit

## **June 2-30: Elijah: Prophets Gone Wild**

### **June 2 – 1 Kings 18:20-21**

**(22-29), 30-39**

*“Baal, Bulls and Blazes”*

Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal to a duel of the Gods.

### **June 9 – 1 Kings 17:8-16 (17-24)**

*“Giving and Getting”*

Elijah challenges a poor widow's faith – and then calls God on the carpet.

### **June 16 – 1 Kings 21:1-10**

**(11-14), 15-21a**

*“How Low Can You Go?”*

Elijah confronts Ahab and Jezebel, who have stolen Naboth's vineyard.

### **June 23 – 1 Kings 19:1-4 (5-7), 8-15a**

*“The Sound of Silence”*

God speaks to Elijah – very quietly.

### **June 30 – 1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21**

*“If the Mantle Fits ...”*

Elijah commissions Elisha to follow him ... sort of.

### **July 7 – Psalm 30**

*“Mourning into Dancing”*

The psalmist offers a hymn of ups and downs – or downs and ups.

## **July 14-Aug. 4: Reviewing the Basics**

### **July 14 – Colossians 1:1-14**

*“Triple Strength”*

Paul prays that the Colossians may be “strong with the strength of ... power”

### **July 21 – Colossians 1:15-28**

*“The Hope of Glory”*

Christ, the reconciler, is the head of the church and the hope of glory.

### **July 28 – Colossians 2:6-19**

*“Stuck on Jesus”*

Paul urges the Colossians to remain firmly fixed on Jesus.

### **Aug. 4 – Colossians 3:1-11**

*“The Be All and End All”*

Paul calls believers to put the past behind and focus on Jesus.

## **Aug. 11-Sept. 1: What God Really Wants**

### **Aug. 11 – Isaiah 1:1, 10-20**

*“How to Make God Happy”*

What God really wants is justice – and those who do justice are blessed.

### **Aug. 18 – Isaiah 5:1-7**

*“How to Make God Mad”*

Stinking fruit does not a happy vineyard owner make.

### **Aug. 25 – Isaiah 58:9b-14**

*“Justice's Reward”*

Isaiah insists that showing justice is good for all, including the just.

### **Sept. 1 – Jeremiah 2:4-13**

*“Dumb and Dumber”*

Exchanging living water for a cracked and empty cistern is not a smart move.

## **Sept. 8-Oct. 27: Gospel Stories**

### **Sept. 8 – Luke 14:25-33**

*“Counting the Cost”*

Do we really want to be disciples?

### **Sept. 15 – Luke 15:1-10**

*“Counting Sheep”*

People who love look out for the lost.

### **Sept. 22 – Luke 16:1-13**

*“Counting Coins”*

Jesus applauds a crook. What?

### **Sept. 29 – Luke 16:19-31**

*“Counting Options”*

The story of the rich man and Lazarus suggests we should think ahead.

### **Oct. 6 – Luke 17:5-10**

*“Feeling Small”*

Mustard-seed faith and worthless servants can accomplish great things.

### **Oct. 13 – Luke 17:11-19**

*“One Came Back”*

The healing of the 10 lepers leads to a lesson on gratitude and service.

### **Oct. 20 – Luke 18:1-8**

*“Persistent Prayer”*

Does God really give in to our wheedling?

### **Oct. 27 – Luke 18:9-14**

*“Humble Prayer”*

Does a pushy prayer get us anywhere with God?

## **Nov. 3-24: Latter Prophets, Future Dreams**

### **Nov. 3 – Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4**

*“When Things Look Bad ...”*

Habakkuk sees trouble on every hand, but holds on to hope.

### **Nov. 10 – Haggai 1:15b-29**

*“I Will Fill This House with Splendor”*

Haggai looks at a ruined temple and sees visions of grandeur.

### **Nov. 17 – Malachi 4:1-6**

*“With Healing on His Wings”*

Malachi sees a sick nation – and a new day of healing and life.

### **Nov. 24 – Jeremiah 23:1-6**

*“A Righteous Branch”*

Jeremiah lives in a troubling time but hopes for a new and just leader.

## **Dec. 1-29: Advent Hopes, Old and New**

### **Dec. 1 – Isaiah 2:1-5**

*“You Don't Need That Spear”*

Isaiah envisions a day when weapons will become tools of peace.

### **Dec. 8 – Isaiah 11:1-10**

*“Odd Bedfellows”*

Isaiah views a time of peace between natural enemies, even lions and lambs.

### **Dec. 15 – Isaiah 35:1-10**

*“From Highway to Holy Way”*

Isaiah looks ahead to a happy return to God's holy city.

### **Dec. 22 – Isaiah 7:10-16**

*“With Us – God!”*

Isaiah has a vision that even he does not understand.

### **Dec. 29 – Matthew 2:13-23**

*“A Strange Beginning to a Happy Ending”*

The joyful news of Jesus' birth gives way to a bloody slaughter of innocent children.



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### Teaching the Lessons

After reading Tony Cartledge's weekly Bible study lessons starting on page 18, Sunday school teachers and other Bible leaders can access helpful teaching resources (at no charge) at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net). These include:

- \* Tony's video overviews
- \* Adult teaching plans by Rick Jordan
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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.

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# Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Job 1:1, 2:1-10

Oct. 7, 2012

## When God Takes a Bet

**H**ave you ever felt that life – or God – has treated you unfairly? If we live long enough, all of us will find bad, sad or difficult things invading our lives, and we may wonder what we did to deserve such heartache.

Job's trials were much worse than what we typically face, but the questions he asked were not so different. During the month of October we'll join Job in struggling to understand why troubles come, and how we can respond in a healthy way.

### A righteous man (1:1)

The Book of Job, along with Ecclesiastes, adds a speculative stream to the Wisdom literature found in the Bible.

🔑 The book consists mainly of poetic dialogues (3:1-42:6), bracketed by a narrative prologue (1:1-2:13) and epilogue (42:7-17). The first two chapters contain similar stories, in which God allows righteous Job to be afflicted as a test of his willingness to remain faithful even when tragedy strikes. 🔑

The narrator introduces us to Job in typical storytelling fashion, similar to the "once upon a time" of familiar folk tales: "There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job." 🔑

From the beginning, the writer wants us to understand that Job is innocent of wrongdoing and undeserving of punishment: he was "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil."

The word translated as "blameless" carries the connotation of being



complete or whole: it speaks of Job's integrity. We learn in Proverbs that "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom" (1:7, 9:10; see also Prov. 15:33, Job 28:28, Ps. 111:10). Job qualifies as a wise man who makes right decisions.

Job's faithfulness had not gone unrewarded. His 10 children (v. 2) and massive livestock holdings (v. 3) suggest that God has blessed him with such prosperity that he has become "the greatest of all the people of the east." Observing Job's piety, even God declared there was "no one like him on the earth" (1:8).

Yet, tragedy struck. The remainder of chapter 1 describes a setting in which a subordinate heavenly being challenged Yahweh to let him test the tenacity of Job's trust, and God allowed it. 🔑

The name of this character is commonly misunderstood and mistranslated. In Hebrew, it is "*hassatan*," meaning "the accuser," but English translations commonly render it as "Satan," despite the presence of the direct article (the

prefixed "*ha-*" means "the").

The accuser is neither evil nor one who tempts others to do wrong, but is clearly identified as one of the "sons of God," a member of the divine council who went to and fro to do Yahweh's bidding. 🔑 He plays the role of a heavenly district attorney, roaming the earth in search of sinners who should be brought to justice before Yahweh.

Following the accuser's challenge and God's permission to test his righteous servant, a quick series of tragedies robs Job of both his substantial flocks (his source of wealth) and his 10 children, who died in a collapsing house (1:13-19).

Yet, the text says, Job remained faithful, continued to bless Yahweh's name, and did not charge God with any wrongdoing (1:21-22).

### An unspeakable trial (2:1-8)

Our text for the day concerns Job's second test, which begins precisely as the first, with heavenly beings attending

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upon Yahweh. As the accuser reports on what he has observed (vv. 1-2), Yahweh again points with pride to Job, noting that he “persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason” (v. 3).

Are you surprised by this? The Lord admits to having been “incited” against Job “for no reason.” The Hebrew word *hinnam*, translated here as “for no reason,” is the same word used in 1:9, where the accuser had asked “Does Job fear God for nothing?”

But, we learn that the accuser is not yet convinced that Job’s integrity will hold, and he dares Yahweh to let him wreck Job’s health (“skin for skin!”). Though Yahweh recognizes that Job’s suffering has been caused for no reason other than the divine gambit with the accuser, God acquiesces to the wager that Job’s integrity would crumble and he would curse God if his health were lost (vv. 4-6). 

Yahweh’s willingness to let Job suffer for the sake of divine pride leads some writers to wonder if it is God, rather than Job, who is being tested. What do you think?

With Yahweh’s nod of permission, the accuser strikes Job with “loathsome sores” that cover his body (v. 7) and fill him with misery. They also make him ritually unclean. To avoid contaminating others, Job camps out by the family trash heap, where ashes from the cooking fire were piled with broken pottery and other garbage (v. 8). 

### An amazing equanimity (2:9-11)

Now, for the only time, Job’s wife enters the picture. The narrator treats her poorly: he doesn’t bother to tell us her name, or even acknowledge that she has suffered the same losses of family and property that Job suffered, except for the skin disease. With his retreat to the garbage heap, there is a sense in which she has lost her husband, too.

While watching Job suffer and scratch, and perhaps feeling a keen sense of her own loss and some personal anger toward God, Job’s spouse

urges him to get it over with, to curse God and die (v. 9) – or does she? In the text, the verb translated as “curse” is actually the word for “bless,” but Hebrew writers were so uncomfortable with the notion of cursing God that they often used “bless” as a euphemism for “curse” (see “The Hardest Question” online for a more detailed discussion).


If that seems strange, consider our modern idiom of saying “he/she blessed me out” when it’s really cursing that we have in mind.

Job’s poor wife gets no more sympathy from Job than from the narrator. He seems to interpret his wife’s words as a challenge to his integrity, but is determined to sit his ground among the ashes and hold to his belief that one’s attitude toward God should not be dependent on material or physical blessing.

“But he said to her, ‘You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (v. 10, NRSV).


We should recognize that Job did not suggest that all women are foolish, only that his wife spoke as one who is foolish. He is not ready to give up on God. He assumes that God is free to bring both good and evil into the world. Later he will question why God dealt him such a terrible hand, but for now he clings to his equanimity.

Even so, while Job seems resigned to accepting whatever comes from God, and he “did not sin with his lips,” in this response he does not bless God, as he did in 1:21.

How would we respond to such a torrent of trouble? We cannot read the Book of Job without confronting questions about providence. Job’s sufferings are portrayed as happening for a reason, though Job has no idea that his earthly loss results from a heavenly wager. 

Many people, citing folk theology they wrongly believe to be biblical, find comfort in saying “Everything happens

for a reason,” implying that every personal trial or national calamity is part of a divine plan.

Is this the way God works? Could a lesser being truly incite God to smite innocent people in order to prove a point? Even Job’s friends, who assumed that God was behind his troubles, did not imagine that Job’s sufferings could have resulted from a divine dare. They believed that God was punishing Job for some sin, in keeping with Israel’s traditional theology of retribution. 

Job never wavered from his declaration of innocence, however, and the narrator fully supported his claim to integrity. Nevertheless, he suffered the fate one would expect of the wicked. Why?

These questions and themes are not resolved in the prologue, but continue to play out through the remainder of the book. One lesson that becomes clear is that God is not limited to the theological boxes humans construct, but acts independently and freely.

Job “feared God and turned away from evil” (1:8), yet evil came upon him, perhaps the ultimate example of the reality that bad things happen to good people. The author portrays Job as perfectly upright, yet in short order he lost his children, his wealth and his health.

Does God bring evil upon us for divine purposes that we may or may not ever come to understand? Those who hold a Calvinistic understanding of divine sovereignty or predestination might affirm that thought, believing that God sends trials as discipline for sin or as lessons designed to strengthen the believer and prepare him or her for some future trial of greater severity.

A better approach may be to recognize that Job’s experience is not a model for all. Evil can be the natural consequence of human choice or even the result of random events, of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Our trials may not be a divinely instigated test as in the story of Job, but his response challenges us to be both faithful and honest in the midst of trouble, even when we don’t understand. **BT**

# Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Job 23:1-17

Oct. 14, 2012

## When Life Isn't Fair

Can you recall the worst thing that ever happened to you? The worst news anyone ever told you? Of course you can. Depending on your personality, you may avoid thinking about it, or you might dwell on it often.

Your “worst thing” might involve a personal injury or trauma you experienced in an accident or in military service. It might be a medical diagnosis you never wanted to hear, or words like “I’m moving out,” or news that someone you cherish has died.

As we approach today’s lesson, remember what it was like, even if it is hard for you to do so. Try to recall some of the many thoughts that raced through your head, and the many questions – especially those that linger.

Did you ever get an answer that satisfied?

### Looking for comfort

Our study of Job has jumped from the tragedies that afflicted him in the first two chapters to a painful soliloquy in the midpoint of the book. It will be helpful for us to review what has taken place between Job’s awful affliction and his current complaint.

Three of Job’s friends arrived to comfort him, according to 2:1-13, and from that point until God speaks from the whirlwind in chapter 38, the search for understanding comes entirely through speeches made by Job and his friends. ↓

This means in part that the interpretive voice of the narrator disappears: it is up to the reader to hear Job’s



complaints, and the charges of his friends, and draw his or her own conclusions about the issues at hand.

The narrative says nothing about how Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar learned of Job’s trials, though it does provide enough information to suggest they also lived in the East. Eliphaz appears to be the leader of the group: he always speaks first.

In the prose frame of the story, the men initially related to Job as true friends. When they arrived and found Job sitting in the ashes, they hardly recognized him. They had known him as the “greatest man in the east,” but saw that his suffering had become “very great.” Job had gone from the top of the world to the bottom.

Seeing the depth of Job’s sorrow, the men did what true friends do when consoling one who has faced tragedy: they sat down in the ashes with him. Recognizing that the time for words was not yet, they sat in silence for seven days, presumably fasting and comforting Job through the gift of their

presence and their willingness to share his suffering.

While Job was saying nothing, his friends did the same. But, when Job finally lost his patience and began to rail against what God had done to him, his friends also spoke – but their criticism was directed toward Job.

When Job’s grief finally erupted, he called down curses on the day he was born and the night he was conceived. He wished that darkness would cover them or that Leviathan would swallow them so they would cease to exist (3:1-10). ↓

In 3:11-26, Job switched from curses to questions. He wanted to know why God would give a man life and health and then snatch it away and force him to live in utter misery. He wondered why God would not let him die and get it over with. He asked why he was ever born, why he couldn’t have gone straight to Sheol.

Job’s friends responded by repeatedly charging that neither God nor their understanding of theology could possibly be at fault: if Job was suffering, it must

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be because of some secret sin. 📌

That is not the way to help a friend. Job's companions were so intent on defending God that they could not bring themselves to enter Job's world. They dared not entertain the questions that troubled Job because it would threaten their careful theological system if they did so. Would we respond differently?

In the end, it is Job's complaints and questions that God honors, not the pious pronouncements of his friends.

### Longing for God (vv. 1-9)

Today's text is an excerpt from Job's response to Eliphaz, in the third round of dialogues between Job and his friends.

Job's speech is the plaintive soliloquy of a lonesome man who is surrounded by friends but feels isolated from everyone, including God.

He begins by asserting that "my complaint is bitter" (v. 2), or possibly, "rebellious." Job knows he is going out on a limb. He's not sure how safe it is to complain to God, but he can't help himself. He will complain!

The only problem is, Job can't locate God's complaint department. He seems to be saying "I'd really like to give God a piece of my mind . . . if I could just find him!" (v. 3). Job insists that all he wants is an audience with God, a chance to lay out his case, to present his arguments for why he doesn't deserve the trouble he's seen (v. 4).

Job seems confident that if only he could get a hearing, he would get an answer (v. 5). He believes that God would listen to his complaint (v. 6), and surely acquit him of any improper charges (v. 7).

But Job can't find God. "If I go forward, he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him; on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right, but I cannot see him" (vv 8-9, NRSV). In the ancient world, to speak of the "front, back, left, and right" was a way of saying "east, west, north, and south," because one always oriented himself to the rising sun.

### Fearing the truth (vv. 10-17)

Job has looked everywhere for God without success, but refuses to give up. He believes that "God knows the way that I take" (v. 10). Job seems to believe that God is aware of his troubles, and doesn't doubt that God can see him, but he longs for it to be the other way around. He wants to sense the presence of God. 📌

In vv. 11-14, Job reasserts his innocence and expresses the frustration he feels that his righteous behavior and his firm commitment to God's way have not paid off in a life that is free of sorrow and trouble. His long-cherished belief that righteousness always leads to blessing has been challenged.

Job knows (1) that he has been as righteous and pure in his faith as any person could be before God, and (2) that his anticipated life of blessing has turned into a nightmare.

What Job doesn't know is how to explain it, and this threatens his whole understanding of God, because that's the only theology Job knows. With his entire belief system on shaky ground, Job's earlier confidence shifts to fear. He wants more than anything to see God, but at the same time he is terrified at the prospect (vv 15-16).

If Job's righteousness has not kept him from the suffering he is experiencing, what is to keep it from getting worse? If he actually confronts God, maybe his life will become even more miserable! Suddenly, Job's desire is not to find God, but to hide in the darkness (v. 17). Maybe he doesn't really want to come face to face with God after all.

Have you ever found yourself on Job's garbage heap? Have you ever asked, "Why me?" Have you ever wondered why no angel intervened to interrupt an accident or disrupt a disease?

It may be helpful to remember that even Jesus knew the feeling. And, when

Jesus cried "My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46), he was quoting from Psalm 22:1.

Job, the psalmist, and even Jesus felt forsaken by God. If we sometimes feel that way, we are in good company. Some days we may feel much in touch with our blessings, and we pray, and God feels so close. Other days we are overcome with loss, and we cry out to God, and we get silence. We sense darkness.

Does that mean God has nothing to say? Does that mean God is no longer there?

Job held to a belief that God was never unaware of his problems: "But he knows the way that I take." Job concluded that God was testing him, and he was determined to pass the test (v. 10).

About a year ago, Kelly Clarkson had a hit with song called "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." The song title is clearly an oversimplification, but the sentiment resonated with many fans. Facing trials and overcoming them does have the potential to make us stronger people.

Even so, we go beyond the evidence if we claim that every trial is a test from God. Even in the unusual story of Job, the narrator carefully attributes Job's testing to the accuser, albeit with God's permission. God doesn't cause it, but allows it.

Job finds himself in a place of despair, but is never without hope, even in the darkness. Whether God causes that darkness is beside the point: there is darkness aplenty to go around. The important question is how we will respond to the darkness. Will we find the hope that leads us through, or will we simply sink in the waters of despair?

We can learn from Job that it's OK to yell at God. It's OK to complain. God is big enough to take anything we can dish out, without feeling the need to zap us for our impudence. God is far more pleased with an honest prayer than a pious one. God knows that as long as we're praying – even when we complain – we pray because we still have hope, and thus the door is still open to faith and life. **BT**

# Youth

October 7 — October 28, 2012

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

## The Best

**W**e all know persons who are strong in one area, whether it is sports, academics, their personality or their sense of humor. Do you know someone who is strong in multiple areas? Who is the best all-around person you know?

The passage for this session tells the story of a man named Job, who may be one of the best persons ever to have lived.

Job is a man of integrity whom the writer describes as blameless. He is wealthy, having 10 children and a huge amount of livestock. One of the sons of God, the Accuser (mistranslated as Satan), challenges God to see if he can break Job. God agrees and tragedies begin to rain down on Job.

The passage begins with Job's second test. Before we learn what the second test is, we get some commentary from the Accuser

and God. The Accuser does not believe that Job's integrity will last, but God believes it will and allows the Accuser to have Job as long as he doesn't kill Job. So, the Accuser puts sores on Job from head to toe.

While Job is dealing with his sores, sitting in ashes and scraping his scabs, his wife comes up and tells him just to curse God and die. Job stays his ground, though, and calls his wife foolish. He is willing to take both the good and the bad from God. Job has passed the second test, and kept his faith and integrity in the eyes of God.

The purpose of the story of Job is not to explain the source of evil, but rather to focus on how we respond when bad things happen in our lives. Job continued to be faithful and honest, even when the worst hit him.

OCTOBER 7

### Think About It:

*Job had everything one could want. Then he had everything taken away. What is your most prized possession? What would you do if it was taken from you?*

### Make a Choice:

*Bad things happen to all of us, and we read of even worse things happening to other people. How do you respond when these things happen? It doesn't always help to ask "Why?" but it does help to remember that God will be with us through the hard times.*

### Pray:

*Creator God, we are thankful for what we have. May we use it as if we won't have it tomorrow.*

## The Worst

**W**hat is the worst pain you have ever felt? Was it an emotion of someone leaving you? Was it a physical pain from an injury or illness? Was it psychological pain from being bullied? Was it spiritual pain when the church hurt you? Whatever that pain is, recall it as you read the passage for this session.

Job is only halfway through his struggles. He doesn't know this, of course, but we do because we know the rest of the story. Job doesn't know what will happen next, but still stands firm in his faith and trust in God.

Three of Job's friends have come to visit him and bring comfort, but through their questioning Job seems to be even more isolated than ever. The three friends sit with Job for seven days in the ashes, in silence. Then Job erupts! He goes on a rampage complaining to God and then begins to ask hard, difficult questions about God. His friends

insist that Job has sinned and thus deserved to be punished.

Job answers with a bitter response toward God. Job knows that if he could hold court with God, God would confirm Job's innocence. Job's theology of righteousness has been challenged, and he needs to see God. Knowing God is there would be something to hold on to. Yet, Job struggles to find God.

Does God ever seem distant to you, even when you know God is still there?

The rest of the story we know: It is OK for Job to complain to God, to question God. God can handle our deepest and most honest questions and complaints. God is honored when we express our true questions and feelings. May that assurance bring you comfort next time you need to yell at God or ask hard questions of God.

OCTOBER 14

### Think About It:

*We learn later in Job that the complaints and questions Job had actually honored God. Does that feel right? Does that free you to be truly honest with God, knowing that you can complain and question God?*

### Make a Choice:

*It was Job's friends who threw out the easy answers that were found to be in the wrong. Job was right to express his emotions. How often are you honest with God?*

### Pray:

*God, hear our prayers. God, hear our screams of rage against you. God, hear our questions we raise to you. God, hear our prayers.*

## David Cassady and Jeremy Colliver



### Bring It!

**H**ave you ever been so in trouble at home that your parents have broken out the “If you only knew ...”? “If you only knew how much we’ve sacrificed for you ...” “If you only knew how much we’ve done for you ...”

In the last session we read one of Job’s responses to God. In this session we read of God’s response to Job. Does God say “If you only knew ...”?

God’s response doesn’t come out of the blue, since Job has asked, “Let the Almighty answer me!” With all Job has been through, he probably isn’t expecting a response. But Job gets a response, and what a response it is!

God’s response comes in the midst of a storm, and the storm is an appropriate setting for what Job hears. God questions the source of Job’s questions. God believes they

come from Job’s ignorance; Job’s theology is not adequate to understand God completely. So what does God do but to turn the tables on Job? God questions Job!

The questions come fast and furious. They flow over Job and rush through him so fast that he has no time to answer. Just reading them, it is easy to feel overwhelmed even though we weren’t present to hear them.

What must Job be feeling as he hears God question him? The questions are rhetorical, in the sense that both God and Job know the answers, but they are for emphasis.

What were they emphasizing? They are emphasizing that God sustains us. God even sustains one man’s faith when he feels isolated and there is nothing left to stand on. God sustains by making God’s presence known. God is there, and that is enough.

OCTOBER 21

#### Think About It:

*Job had a way of understanding God that did not hold up when life got hard. Is your theology adequate enough to handle all of God? If not, what will you do when your theology is shaken?*

#### Make a Choice:

*Questions asked about our faith and our theology are sometimes hard to hear. When you are asked these questions, you can choose to stubbornly ignore them or you can listen to them and grow. Which will you choose?*

#### Pray:

*God, you have made yourself known through many ways. May we be open to your presence as it enters into our lives.*

### Trophy Time

**L**ove when teams are awarded their trophies or medals at the end of an event. The looks on the players’ faces are priceless as they receive tangible prizes for which they have trained. Hearing the words of thanks and seeing the hugs that are passed freely just make me smile.

Our passage for this session is like these trophy presentations — except God is passing out the awards.

The passage begins with Job’s acceptance speech. It seems a little harsh at first until you remember that Job is only quoting what God has previously said. Job does not admit to being disobedient but rather not fully knowing and understanding God. Then, Job prays for his friends who questioned Job during his ordeal.

God makes one final statement before handing out the hardware: Job, you have

done right in complaining and questioning but your friends have done wrong.

Then the trophy parade begins. It starts with the friends having to bring Job seven bulls and seven rams as a burnt offering and then for Job to offer them on their behalf. Job does just this, even though his friends had questioned him.

Next up on the trophy parade we learn that God will double all that Job had before his sufferings: His 10 children are restored, his herds are increased, and everyone brings him a piece of money and a gold ring. Job’s daughters must have been something special because they get an equal share of the inheritance, their names are the only ones listed, and they are said to be the most beautiful women of the land.

The final trophy Job receives is time to enjoy these things: He lives another 140 years!

OCTOBER 28

#### Think About It:

*Job’s fortunes were restored two-fold of his original fortunes. Was God rewarding Job for simply passing a test, or was there something else going on here? For what other reasons would Job have had his fortunes restored two-fold?*

#### Make a Choice:

*Job had a choice to offer a prayer on behalf of his friends who had falsely accused him so that they may be forgiven. If you were given the choice, would you pray for your friends?*

#### Pray:

*God, there are many things about you and the way you work that we do not understand. Let our hearts be open to experiencing new sides of you.*

# Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Job 38:1-7, 34-41

Oct. 21, 2102

## When God Takes the Stand

**H**ave you ever been in a conversation where the topic was “The first thing I want to do when I get to heaven”? If you spend enough time with people who are dying, the subject will come up.

Most commonly, people speak of beloved family members they hope to find waiting for them like a welcoming committee. Occasionally, someone will wish “to bow before the throne in the presence of Jesus.”

I resonate more with a friend who once said, “When I get to heaven, God will have a lot of explaining to do.”

That’s what Job hoped for, though he lived long before the Christian concept of heaven originated. He wanted God to do some explaining – now.

As Job carried on a running dialogue with his three friends, he spoke often of his desire to encounter God directly, with last week’s lesson from Job 23 being Exhibit A.

Job longed for God to offer some sort of explanation for why his foundational theology – that obedience leads to blessings – had been shattered along with the loss of his wealth and the deaths of his children.

As Job and his friends closed their third round of verbal jousting, just before the text is interrupted by the interloper Elihu’s lengthy peroration (chs. 32-37), Job’s fervent defense turned into an impassioned prayer: “Let the Almighty answer me!” (31:15).

When God spoke, Job got an Almighty response, almost certainly more than he had bargained for. 🗝



### An overwhelming God (vv. 1-3)

The answer to Job’s plea for a direct confrontation with God arrives in the form of a whirlwind, from which Yahweh speaks. This is not entirely unexpected, for the ancients often interpreted troublesome tempests as direct messages from God.

In Old Testament writings, it was common for fierce storms to accompany theophanies, or appearances of God (Ezek. 1:4, Nah. 1:3, Zech. 9:14). When God appeared to the prophet Elijah during a memorable encounter in 1 Kgs. 19:11-13, the most surprising thing is that Yahweh was not in the storm, earthquake or fire that preceded the soft, calm voice by which God spoke to the prophet. The reader does not doubt, however, that the storm, earthquake and fire had come from God.

For Job, the appearance of a stormy whirlwind would have been especially frightful, for we recall that his sheep had been killed by lightning (1:16), and his children had died together when a “great wind ... struck the four corners of the house” where they were gathered

(1:18-19), bringing it crashing down upon them. Though the wind “came across the desert,” the statement that it struck all four corners of the house at once implies that it had a circular motion of a twister.

Can you imagine how frightened Job must have been? Imagine how you would feel if you shook your fist at God and a tornado blew up, speaking with the voice of a freight train?

We are not surprised that Yahweh’s address to Job is as imperious and blusterous as the whirlwind, echoing Job’s own complaints but on a grander scale. The words are staggering, convincing and convicting. The text does not claim that Job had a vision of God beyond the whirlwind, but the experience made such an impression that he would later declare “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you” (42:5).

God’s initial speech runs from 38:2 to 40:2, followed by a brief response from Job (40:3-5) and then an even lengthier speech (40:6-41:34) and a second response from Job (42:1-6).

Note that Yahweh’s challenge from the storm picks up on Job’s frequent

Additional background information online where you see the “Digging Deeper” icon





allusions to darkness in his previous laments and complaints. Imagine a crackling voice, loud enough to be heard above the storm winds: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” (38:2). 📖

Job had raised serious charges against God and asked many questions, but the voice declared that Job’s ignorance had obscured the issues. Job’s questions had been based on the same inadequate theology his friends defended, with the only difference being that Job no longer trusted it.

We have previously noted that the Old Testament’s wisdom literature is grounded in a theology of creation, and that is reflected in Yahweh’s torrent of questions: as God overwhelmed Job with visions of divine grandeur, the message was couched in terms of creation. Apparently, Yahweh wanted Job to gain a larger picture of the universe and the respective place of God and humankind within it. Turning the theological tables on Job, Yahweh declared “I will question you, and you shall declare to me!” (38:3).

### A creator God (vv. 4-7, 31-38)

The remainder of God’s speech – far more than we can discuss in the course of one lesson – comes as a flood of questions that pour over Job like a mighty waterfall, beating him down with no time to speak the answers he did not have. The initial cascade of questions begins at the beginning (38:4-7).

Try reading those verses aloud, with an authoritative, domineering tone. Then try to imagine what was going through Job’s mind as he heard God speak.

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding!” (38:4).

Clearly, Job had not been present when God created the earth. If Job had not participated in creation, had not helped to determine earth’s measurements and lay it out against the grid of the universe (38:5) – if Job had not been there for the laying of the cornerstone (38:6) or heard the angelic courses

singing for joy (38:7) — how could he begin to understand God’s wisdom?

Job had no time to catch his breath before Yahweh expanded the same line of questioning in ever-widening circles. Could Job master the mighty sea and set its limits (38:8-11)? Could Job command the morning and bring light to the earth (38:12-15)? Could the complainer comprehend the mysteries of the deep and the place of the dead (38:16-17)? The ancients believed all these elements of creation were compassed within “the expanse of the earth” (38:18), but they were clearly beyond Job’s comprehension.

Yahweh’s questions rose beyond earth and sea to consider the heavens. Could Job locate the sources of light and darkness or lead them to their respective places (38:19-21)?

Job would have believed that Yahweh was in charge of the weather, as exemplified by the on-demand appearance of the whirlwind. 📖 But he would have to admit that he knew nothing about the storehouses of snow and hail, or the home of light and the east wind (38:22-24). Rain and dew and frost and ice were equally beyond Job’s control (38:25-30, 34-38), and he could certainly not imagine leading the starry constellations on their paths through the heavens (38:31-33) – so did he have standing to challenge God?

### A sustaining God (vv. 39-41)

One might think these queries would be enough, but God continues, shifting from creation itself to the managing and sustaining of the earth. At the same time, God moves from the greater to the smaller, something more familiar to Job.

If Job could not command the heavens, could he oversee animal life on the earth? In a verbal parade, Yahweh marches representative creatures of earth and sky before Job: lions (38:39-40) and

ravens (38:41), mountain goats and wild deer (39:1-4), untamed donkeys (39:5-8) and unbroken oxen (39:9-12). Could Job tame these beasts? Could he understand the foolishness of ostriches (39:13-18), the power of horses (39:19-25), or the bloody ways of hawks and eagles (39:26-30)?

No, of course not. Job could neither understand nor command creation. The text implies that Yahweh mercifully paused with a closing challenge for Job to give answer (40:1-2): “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Anyone who argues with God must respond!”

A thoroughly defeated Job knows, however, there is nothing he can say. Job can only declare himself to be of small account and unworthy of standing before God: “I lay my hand on my mouth” (40:4). Job’s few words suggest a belief that he has already said too much, and will say no more (40:5).

What do you think of God’s response to Job? On the one hand, it seems high-handed and far from compassionate. On the other hand, it portrays a God who cares enough about humans to enter into dialogue with them. Some things, though, may simply be beyond human understanding. “When the question has to do with innocent suffering,” Sam Balentine has written, “‘no answer’ may be the answer we need to hear from God, even if it is difficult to accept.” (*Job*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary [Smyth & Helwys, 2006], 628). 📖

If we fast-forward to 42:1-6, we discover that Job finally found peace with God and with himself, not because he got his questions answered, and not because he gained new wealth and more children, but because he caught a new vision that enabled him to see God in a new way.

Job discovered that God was bigger than he had ever imagined, a God who could not be limited by human preconceptions about what God must do. Job learned, in short, that God could not be subject to human demands and still be God. 📖

# Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Job 38:1-7, 34-41

Oct. 28, 2012

## When God Settles Debts

Reaching the end of Job's story brings a sigh of relief and a flood of questions. Did Job really capitulate, as some writers term his response in 42:1-6? What did Job's friends do wrong? Did the double restoration of Job's property imply that the traditional theology was right all along? If we face trouble, can we also expect such a happy ending?

The lectionary text for today skips vv. 7-9, but it will be helpful for us to take a look at the entire chapter. How does the epilogue fit with all that has come before?

### Job's answer to God (vv. 1-6)

With 42:1-6, we come to the final verses of the long poetic section between the narrative prologue (1:1-2:13) and epilogue (42:7-17) that bracket the Book of Job like two bookends on a shelf lined with volumes of poetry.

The previous four chapters have consisted almost entirely of two loud and lengthy speeches in which Yahweh overwhelmed Job with a demonstration of such inimitable wonder that Job had no fight left in him, but readily submitted to the indisputable might and right of God to do as God wished.

On first reading, Job's response can be a bit hard to follow, because one must assume that, in the opening words of vv. 3 and 4, Job is not brashly challenging God as it appears but rather quoting from God's earlier challenge to him in 38:2-3.

Thus, it is helpful to insert "you asked" or "you said" before "Who is this that hides counsel without



knowledge?" (v. 3), and "Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me" (v. 4) as in HCSB and NET, though the words are not in the Hebrew and must be supplied. 📖

We note that Job still does not admit to any disobedience, only to a lack of appreciation for the immensity of God: "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (42:5). It was commonly thought that one could not see God and live. So, did Job really see God? The text doesn't clearly indicate that Job saw anything other than the whirlwind from which Yahweh spoke. Note that the word for "eye" is singular: "now my eye sees you." Perhaps Job has in mind a mental way of seeing, the same sort of thing we express when we gain a new insight and say "Oh, now I see ..."

Having gained a new perspective, Job is ready to apologize for failing to appreciate God fully: "therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and

ashes" (42:6) – or so say most translations. Thus, commentators often refer to this as "Job's capitulation." But is that really what happened?

In the Hebrew text, the word often translated as "despise" has no object: Job could be saying "I despise myself" (NRSV) or "I despise what I said" (option suggested by NET). The basic meaning of the verb *ma'as*, however, is not "despise," but "reject." Job's clear intention is to reject his earlier, inadequate understanding of God. Since there is no object, the sense of the word could be "retract," as understood by NAS95 ("I retract") and HCSB ("I take back [my words])."

This translation offers a better parallel to Job's following declaration. The word often rendered as "repent" is not the usual word for repentance (*shub*, which literally means "to turn around"), but *nakhama*, a term that means "to be sorry" or "to console oneself."

A close reading, then, shows that

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



## Resources to teach adult and youth classes

are available at  
[nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)

Job still holds to his innocence. He does not repent of wrongdoing, but expresses sorrow or regret for his former failure to see the bigger picture Yahweh has shown him, and wishes he could take back some of what he has said.

“Dust and ashes” are typical symbols of grief or repentance – but they are also the literal setting for Job’s sitting. From 2:8-13 on, the reader presumes that Job has maintained his seat in the dusty ash heap where his family’s garbage collected. While readers may naturally assume that Job intends to impose new dust and ashes as a sign of repentance, it’s helpful to remember that’s where he has been all along.

### Job’s intercession for his friends (vv. 7-9)

The poetic section of Job ceases with v. 6, and the remainder of the chapter is written in straightforward prose. Here, the narrator has God turn from Job to Eliphaz to express divine wrath toward the three friends, “because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has” (42:7). ⚡

This is significant: despite Job’s bold challenge to divine justice, God appears far more pleased by Job’s willingness to question his beliefs than by his friends’ smug attempts to defend them.

God instructed Job’s friends to bring seven bulls and seven rams – an immense offering – as a whole burnt offering to God. What is more, they are to ask Job – whom they have been treating as an unconfessed sinner – to intercede and ask forgiveness for their stubborn speech. ⚡

The image of Job acting as a priest who intercedes for others and offers sacrifices brings to mind 1:4-5, where Job is portrayed as doing the same in behalf of his children, seeking forgiveness in case they had inadvertently sinned (1:4-5).

### Job’s surprising restoration (vv. 10-17)

How do we explain what happens next? Job’s tragic experience and manifold

complaints, along with God’s imperious non-answer, have questioned the traditional belief that blessings and behavior are necessarily connected. In the end, however, God not only restores Job’s property, but also doubles it.

The narrator offers no explanation for this, either in his own words or in a message from God. He simply notes that it took place after Job had interceded for his friends (42:10, 12).

While Job’s lost property is doubled, he also becomes the father of 10 new children, although there is no mention of his wife. ⚡

Other family members and friends also appear, leaving us to wonder why they have remained absent prior to this, leaving Job to three other friends who traveled from afar. According to the story, his brothers, sisters, “and all who had known him before” came to comfort him “for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him” (v. 11).

We also note that the author of the epilogue gives special attention to Job’s daughters: they alone of all Job’s family members are named. ⚡ In addition, the narrator declares Job’s daughters to be the most beautiful women in the land. In 1:3, Job had been described as the greatest man in the East: now his daughters are the most beautiful.

As if the distinctives of name and beauty were not enough to set the daughters apart, the narrator says that Job gave them an inheritance along with their brothers (vv. 13-15), which was counter to custom.

As Job’s story began with a folk-tale-style “Once there was a man . . .,” it concludes with a “happily ever after.” The narrator says Job lived another 140 years, seeing children to the fourth generation after him, and died “old and full of days” (42:16-17).

But again we must ponder how to understand Job’s magnanimous

restoration. Did God reward him for passing the test? Did the traditional theology prove true after all? Or is something else going on?

Two aspects of the story strongly hint at a different understanding.

First, God did not just restore Job’s fortunes, but doubled them. This could reflect a nod to the regulations found in Exodus 22 that require thieves who steal another’s property to repay two to four times as much as they took. If someone entrusted his goods to a neighbor for safekeeping but they were stolen, the thief was required to make double restitution (Exod. 22:7).

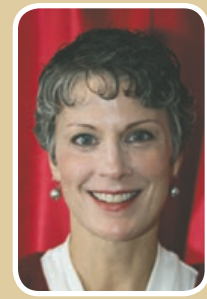
Job, as such a pious man, would have assumed that his life and goods were in God’s care. Yet, God had allowed the accuser to take all that Job owned for “no reason” (2:3). Perhaps we are to see the two-fold restoration as a divine admission of guilt for allowing Job’s goods to be stolen. Thus, the doubling of Job’s property would represent a repayment of God’s debt rather than a divine reward for Job’s obedience, which would affirm the traditional theology. ⚡

A second indication that things have changed is found in the emphasis given to Job’s daughters. They are the only members of Job’s family to be named, and Job made a point of giving them an inheritance — just as their brothers.

This was not typical: patriarchal convention allowed daughters to inherit property only if there were no sons (Num 27:1-11). Job’s experience, though, seems to have changed his understanding of justice. Perhaps the social custom of dividing one’s estate between sons but not daughters no longer seemed fair to him, and he no longer felt rule-bound by tradition.

Thus, while a quick reading might lead to the assumption that the closing chapter of Job reaffirms the quid-pro-quo theology challenged throughout the book, a closer inspection suggests that the “greatest man of the East” was also a pioneer in exploring the mysteries of God. ⚡

# Adventures with **LULER** the Hound



Kelly Belcher



## The Bow-wow

Luler says that every time we eat or drink, we thank God for food and for the people who love us, feed us and take care of us.



Have you ever been to a family reunion or a big church-wide potluck supper or a giant neighborhood picnic? Having a meal with other people is a good way to share friendship and love with each other. Even Luler the hound wants to have her supper dish at the same time her people are eating their supper.

The first Sunday of October is very special because people in many churches all over the world do the same thing at the same time: We all have the Lord's Supper together! On that day during worship, Christians in different churches – Baptists, Presbyterians, Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans and others – share the bread and cup of Jesus Christ. It's a great and wonderful thing to know we are all doing the same thing. Sharing Christ all at once brings the whole world together.

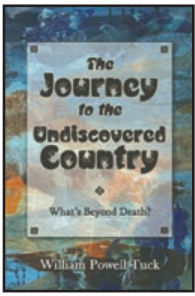
Especially in times of war, poverty and suffering, this World Communion Sunday is a day of togetherness, hope and relief for all of us. Make sure you are in worship on Oct. 7, and be a witness to this great world feast, or take part in it yourself.

## The Idea Box

You can collect an offering from the kids in your church on Oct. 7. Give the money to your local soup kitchen in honor of World Communion Sunday.



**More Online:** Jump online at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net) to discover weekly ideas for children's leaders.



## The Journey to the Undiscovered Country

By William Powell Tuck  
Energion Publications

A review by Fisher Humphreys

# 'Beyond Death'

## Book addresses subject too often neglected

If Bill Tuck had lived in the 19th century, he would have been called a “gentleman theologian,” a learned pastor who writes knowledgeably about Christian theology. He is the author of more than 20 books, and this newest one is about a subject that too often has been neglected by moderate Baptists: eschatology.

Not that everyone else is neglecting it. Some evangelists still tell deathbed stories, and some pastors still present salvation principally as avoiding hell and entering heaven. But for many moderate Baptists, the emphasis has shifted from the future to the present.

It's biblical to talk about the present. If you want to be biblical, you must speak about salvation in this world as well as the next. And you must speak about salvation in this world in both corporate and individual terms. And you must speak about individuals in this world being saved as whole persons and not just as sinners who need forgiveness.

It is wise and healthy as well as biblical to embrace all these emphases.

The risk, of course, is that we present these biblical emphases at the expense of the biblical emphasis on death and what follows. Tuck's book is a perfect antidote to that.

It consists of one brief chapter on each of five of the traditional themes of Christian eschatology: death, the Second Coming, judgment, hell and heaven.

For each theme, Tuck draws on the work of the best recent biblical scholars. But his objective isn't to inform his readers about the scholars' work, but about the theological themes themselves.

His book is more like an encyclopedia than a dictionary. It's about the last things, not about theologians' “words about the last things.”

Tuck believes that many things about the future are mysteries beyond our understanding, and he doesn't speculate unwisely. But neither does he evade difficult questions or understate the hope-full message of the New Testament.

Unlike many people today, Tuck does not engage in denial about death. He knows that death is not a friend in disguise but an enemy who would destroy us. He is confident that Jesus has defeated death and promises to share the spoils of his victory with us. Jesus' promise gives us hope as we make *The Journey to the Undiscovered Country*.

Tuck doesn't deny the reality of divine judgment, either. “I believe without question that the judgment of God is real,” he writes.

Judgment is frightening, but it's also reassuring. The God who cares enough to condemn evil cares enough to save us from it.

Judgment has already begun, and that is important, but there will be a final judgment after we die, and that is important too. God's judgment will be fair, not arbitrary.

We will be judged “in our response to the highest revelation of God that we have had.” Our judge is a God not only of law but also of grace. In following Jesus (Matthew 25), Tuck says, we should expect to be surprised at the judgment. He invites us to appropriate these biblical teachings by soberly judging our own lives now.

Tuck writes about the Second Coming authoritatively. Two years ago he wrote a book about some immensely popular books on the Second Coming, the “Left Behind” series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. Unlike those authors, Tuck insists that the New Testament does not provide a systematic scheme for understanding the end of the world.

He also insists that it is a mistake to attempt to identify the time when the end will come, though it is wise to live watchfully. He offers an understanding of the Second Coming that is consistent with the character of Jesus who wins our allegiance by love rather than by violence.

Despite all the difficult questions concerning hell, Tuck affirms that it is real. He is convinced that it is remedial rather than merely retributive. It is not vindictive or arbitrary, but is a product of God's justice and love.

Tuck's last chapter is about the undiscovered country: heaven. Reading it reinforced my hope and helped me to celebrate what “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,” but what “God hath prepared for them who love him.”

This is a beautifully written book and never boring. It is practical and interesting and filled with Christian hope. I recommend it to anyone who wants to think about the future realistically and as a Christian, and especially to those who have arrived at an age where they think regularly about their own mortality. And I recommend it to preachers who are searching for ways to talk about the future that do not fall into unbiblical, discredited patterns. **BT**

—Fisher Humphreys is professor of divinity, emeritus, of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.

*Tuck doesn't deny the reality of divine judgment: “I believe without question that the judgment of God is real.”*

## Classifieds

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**Senior Pastor:** First Baptist Church of Graham, N.C., ([fbcgraham.org](http://fbcgraham.org)) is prayerfully seeking a senior pastor who has at least five years of pastoral experience and has earned a minimum of a Master of Divinity degree from an accredited seminary or divinity school. First Baptist Church is a contributing member of CBF and CBFNC, is affiliated with the North Carolina Baptist State Convention and the Mt. Zion Baptist Association, and partners with local ministries for mission opportunities. Our church affirms and ordains men and women to serve in leadership roles, including those of deacon and minister. We are seeking a compassionate and caring servant-leader who is sensitive to the needs of others, an effective preacher/teacher, and experienced in pastoral care and counseling. If you feel God is leading you to our church, please send your résumé to: Senior Pastor Search Team, P.O. Box 779, Graham, NC 27253.

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**Senior Pastor:** McLean Baptist Church seeks a senior pastor to lead us in Christian growth, discipleship, missions and evangelism. We are a moderate-minded, inclusive, 600-member church in McLean, Va., affiliated with the Baptist World Alliance, NorthStar and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. We expect excellent preaching, a commitment to pastoral care, administrative leadership, an ecumenical outlook and Christ-centered theology. We require a

degree from an accredited seminary and at least 10 years relevant experience in successful church ministry. A doctorate in ministry or theology is a plus. The full-time position offers salary and benefits appropriate to the D.C. metro area. Please review the position description at [mclean-baptist.org](http://mclean-baptist.org) and, if qualified, submit a résumé to [seniorpastorresume@yahoo.com](mailto:seniorpastorresume@yahoo.com) by Sept. 30.

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**Associate Minister of Faith Formation:** Greystone Baptist Church, located in the growing and diverse area of North Raleigh, N.C., is prayerfully seeking a full-time associate minister of faith formation. Candidates should exemplify energetic spiritual leadership for faith formation through education, outreach, and adult discipleship in small group and mission contexts. A graduate degree from an accredited seminary or divinity school is required. Ordination is preferred, as are the vision and skills to develop our web-based ministry. GBC is a contributing member of CBF and CBFNC, is affiliated with the Raleigh Baptist Association and partners with local ministries for mission opportunities for our 750+ members. Our church affirms and ordains men and women to serve in leadership roles, including those of deacon and minister. Our watchword is "Every member a minister." We are seeking a minister to join our collaborative ministerial staff to inspire our members to exemplify this guiding principle in daily living. Please submit a résumé by Oct. 15 to: Faith Formation Search Team, 5605 Maram Ct., Raleigh, NC 27609. Please also visit our church website, [greystonechurch.org](http://greystonechurch.org).

**Associate Minister to Students:** First Baptist Church of Augusta, Ga., is seeking an associate minister to students, who will work with the minister to students in the following capacities: organization of weekly activities, Bible studies and discipleship; student ministry communication; and the planning of retreats, trips and mission projects. The ideal candidate will be self-motivated, organized, demonstrate a calling to student ministry, and will be passionate about working with students 6th grade-college. At a minimum, qualified candidates must possess a bachelor's degree and 2 years of student ministry experience, and will ideally have a master's degree from an accredited seminary. For a complete job description or to submit a résumé, please contact [echao@fbcaugusta.org](mailto:echao@fbcaugusta.org).

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**CBFSC Coordinator:** Applications and nominations are being accepted until Sept. 15 for the position of coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of South Carolina. The coordinator will give leadership to organizing, facilitating and coordinating CBFSC to fulfill its vision of growing as a community of grace on a shared spiritual journey that connects people to Christ and one another. The coordinator will also serve as a catalyst to nurture spiritual development, encourage congregations to thrive, and value collaborative and innovative ministry and missions. Inquiries, applications or nominations for the position may be sent to [cbfscsearch@gmail.com](mailto:cbfscsearch@gmail.com) or to CBFSC Search Committee, Attn: Casey Callahan, 397 College Ave., Clemson, SC 29631. **BT**

## In the Know

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**Rick Bennett**, director of missional congregations for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship since 2004, will become pastor of First Baptist Church in Elkin, N.C., effective Oct. 1.

**Greg Bowers** is pastor of The Memorial Baptist Church in Greenville, N.C. after serving as pastor of First Baptist Church in Blytheville, Ark.

**Ron Cava** is pastor of First Baptist Church in Henderson, N.C. He had served as pastor of First Baptist Church of Clinton, N.C.

**Matt Cook** is pastor of First Baptist Church of Wilmington, N.C., coming from Second Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., where he had served since 2006.

**LeRoy Ford** died July 9 at age 90. He was a member of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth and former professor of religious education at Southwestern Baptist Seminary.

**Bob Lee Franklin** died July 8 in Montgomery, Ala., at age 78. He sustained injuries in an automobile accident in November 2011 in Macon, Ga., where he served as director of missions of the Mid-State Baptist Association. Earlier he served with the SBC Home Mission Board, the Noonday Baptist Association in Marietta, Ga., and the Montgomery Baptist Association.

**Steve Graham** is the new coordinator for Cooperating Baptist Fellowship of Oklahoma/Kansas effective Oct. 1. An Oklahoma native, he will leave the national staff of CBF, where he coordinated leadership development and peer learning for ministers.

**Josh Hunt** is associate pastor of First Baptist Church in Anderson, S.C., coming from the pastorate of Ross Grove Baptist Church in Shelby, N.C., where he served for eight years.

**Carol McEntyre** has been called as pastor of First Baptist Church in Columbia, Mo. She has served as the Buckner community minister at First Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tenn.

**Harold L. McManus Sr.** died July 24 in Macon, Ga. He had served as a Navy chaplain and a pastor, and held the Roberts Chair of Church History in the Christianity Department of Mercer University, where he taught from 1949-1985.

**Scott Stevens** is publisher of BaptistWay Press of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, succeeding Ross West who retired earlier this year. He previously served as student director at LifeWay Christian Resources.

**Lance Wallace** has resigned from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship where he worked in communications for nearly 10 years. On Sept. 4 he will become senior director of communications for the Georgia Tech Research Institute in Atlanta.

**Troy Weyenberg** is director of Camp Grow Ministries at Green Lake Conference Center, an American Baptist-related facility in central Wisconsin. Camp Grow provides camp experiences for children, youth and families. **BT**

# BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

In and around the yard of a pacifist Baptist church, the bloodiest one-day battle in American history unfolds this month: the Battle of Antietam.

**B**uilt in 1852 by German Baptist farmers, the Dunker Church on a hill near Sharpsburg, Md., houses a peace-loving congregation of six to eight farm families. The peace, however, had been shattered during morning worship service on the 14<sup>th</sup>, as the sounds of distant cannon fire, signaling the Battle of South Mountain, infiltrated the Baptist sanctuary. Yet, South Mountain proves only a prelude to the events of Sept. 17.

The cannon fire signals the clash of Robert E. Lee's Confederate Army of Northern Virginia with U.S. General George B. McClellan's army. Having driven north onto enemy soil, Lee is living up to his growing reputation as a daring commander. In an effort to seize momentum in the war, capture much-needed supplies, foment political unrest in the North, and perhaps bring Maryland into the Confederacy, Lee has forced the Union onto the defensive. McClellan proves his mettle with a victory at South Mountain, but Lee is ever resourceful as he maneuvers away and seeks high ground.

The 17<sup>th</sup> dawns shrouded in fog. Anticipation and fear hang thick in the air. Lee has taken his stand upon the high ground surrounding the German Baptist meeting house. McClellan is nearby. In the murkiness, a chorus of rifle fire begins. Over the next seven hours, Union forces thrice attack the entrenched Confederate forces. Stretched but not broken, the Confederate lines hold their ground. Near the end of the day, the armies disengage, rifle and cannon fire fall silent, and a truce is called on church grounds. The casualties are epic: Of the 100,000 soldiers engaged in war this day, 23,000 — nearly one in four — are either dead, wounded or missing. Of those, 2,100 Union soldiers are dead and 1,550 Confederate soldiers rise no more.

The Confederate Army turns the German Baptist church into a hospital. On the 18<sup>th</sup> both armies gather their wounded and bury their dead. That evening, Lee withdraws his army across the Potomac River and begins the



"Battle of Antietam." Color lithograph circa 1888.

150 YEARS AGO

September 1862

march back to Virginia. Upon the departure of the armies, the German Baptist church stands riddled with bullet holes and damaged by cannon fire, war having left its mark upon the pacifist place of worship. Nearly two years will pass before the building is restored.

Yet the Union victory on the grounds of the pacifist Baptist meeting house has monumental repercussions. The hopes of the Northern public are suddenly lifted. Just as importantly, the successful repulsion of the Rebel invaders provides U.S. President Abraham Lincoln the public goodwill necessary to announce his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation—long contemplated—on Sept. 22. The proclamation is to become law on Jan. 1.

Thus, Lee's Northern invasion, rather than boosting the prospects of the South, shifts momentum to the North and sets the stage for the biggest blow yet to African slavery.

Having been raised as an abolitionist Primitive Baptist, Lincoln is now openly

prodding America to apply the nation's founding principles of freedom to persons of color. Eight days after Antietam, the president jots down his evolving thoughts on Providence and war, words that are forever immortalized:

*The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong. God cannot be for and against the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party; and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are of the best adaptation to effect his purpose. I am almost ready to say that this is probably true; that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet. By his mere great power on the minds of the now contestants, he could have either saved or destroyed the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And, having begun, he could give the final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds. BT*

By Brett Younger

## Parting thoughts

Elaine worries about her 15-year-old, because William is a normal teenager. He loves rock and roll and gets nervous around girls. In the movie *Almost Famous*, this overly involved mother is constantly offering what she calls “Cliff Notes on how to live.”

She warns about the world of compromised values, the Valhalla of decadence, and the danger of throwing brain cells away like confetti. She laments the depravity of Simon and Garfunkel. She tells William: “Be a lawyer like Atticus Finch. Keep the small bills on the outside. Become a person of substance. Do your best. Be bold, and mighty forces will come to your aid.”

She offers these nuggets of wisdom as she drives William to school each morning. In a memorable scene, she finishes with practical items: “Don’t forget to ask your band teacher for a concert schedule. Don’t eat junk food for lunch. Don’t forget I’m picking you up at 3:30.”

As William walks away, she remembers one more. She rolls down the car window and shouts, much to his humiliation, for all his friends to hear, “And don’t do drugs.”

When I first saw this scene, I was a father who drove his son to school. What a great idea!

I have lots of wisdom Caleb needs: “Don’t compromise your values. Protect your brain cells. Simon is great; Garfunkel not so much. Not all lawyers are Atticus Finch. Do your best. Be bold, but don’t count on mighty forces doing exactly what you hope.” I thought shouting “Don’t do

drugs” for all his friends to hear would be hilarious.

You may be as shocked as I was to learn that Caleb, who is usually quite amusing, was not amused. After the first day we negotiated all the fun out of it. If I insisted on shouting “Don’t do drugs,” the window had to be all the way up. No one but Caleb could hear it, and it would be better if Caleb didn’t hear it.

Carol and I will soon be dropping Caleb off at Georgetown University 649 miles away. Caleb will walk us to the car and encourage us to “Get on the road” before more of his future friends see his father crying. I’ll be tempted to drive away quickly, but I hope I’ll be smart enough to say things such as:



- Stretch your wings, because a journey of a thousand miles begins with stretching your wings, even though that doesn’t sound right.
- Look before you leap, especially when you’re on the internet.
- When life hands you lemons, sell them on eBay.
- If you come at the king, you best not miss.
- Try thinking inside the box because no one is doing that.
- Don’t do drugs.
- Don’t let your roommate bring a television.
- Talk to everyone the first week.

- Remember people’s names.
- Don’t try out an untested nickname. I don’t want your mother to hear people calling you “Sparky.”
- Sit in the front of the classroom.
- Read the books.
- Study hard. Find a quiet place and make it yours.
- When you feel you can’t study anymore, play basketball. Do not do this before you start studying.
- Expand your comfort zone. Be open to new ideas.
- Let your professors overhear you saying complimentary things. (This works more than you’d think.)
- Talk to girls. They are smarter than we are. Look for girls from the South.
  - Go to football games.
  - Sleep eight hours every now and then.
  - Eat breakfast.
  - Sort your dirty clothes before you get to the Laundromat.
  - Dance, but be home by midnight on school nights.
  - Call your mother.
  - Call your brother.
  - Pay attention to the half with which you think I would agree.
  - Text your mother.
  - Put some vegetables on your pizza.
- Email your mother.
- Say your prayers.
- Write a letter to your mother.
- Go to church.
- Say hello to elderly people.
- Remember your mother’s birthday.
- Figure out when you don’t need to listen to me, but give me the benefit of the doubt.
- Listen for God.
- Have an amazing, sacred, joyful life. **BT**

—Brett Younger is associate professor of preaching at the McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta and author of *The Lighter Side: Serving Up Life’s Lessons with a Smile*.



# In the land of giants

## Navigating the course with strength, courage

By Bill Wilson

The story of the Israelites' thwarted entry into the Promised Land has always made me curious. The 12 spies cross the Jordan and reconnoiter the land before them, returning with a mixed message.

Ten of the spies are convinced the giants in the land will devour those who challenge them, while the dissenters, Caleb and Joshua, are confident that God's provisions will suffice. "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it."

Their minority report falls on deaf ears, and the children of Israel turn back in fear and wander in the wilderness for decades.

Later, we hear the rest of the story. In reality, the inhabitants of the land trembled in fear of the Israelites (Joshua 1-2): "Our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."

Due to their faithfulness, Caleb and Joshua are rewarded (Joshua 14), and a lesson is taught that God's people have been forgetting for centuries.

When the giants look most menacing, God's people can take heart in his strength and power. "Be strong and courageous" is not just an inspiring phrase from Joshua 1; it is an invitation to a lifestyle.

Do you need to be convinced that there are giants in the land? Does your congregation need to be awakened to the fact that business as usual will probably lead you to extinction in a few generations?

Perhaps your fear is ignited by David Olson's research that reveals only 17 percent of Americans attend a worship service of any sort on an average weekend. Or perhaps it is David Kinnamon's findings that two-thirds of our youth will abandon local church life in their 20s.

Perhaps it is the fact that 4,000 Protestant churches will close their doors permanently this year. Perhaps it is the sense that we live in a land that no longer values our traditions and methods. Perhaps it is your own children telling you how irrelevant church seems to be to their life.

Whatever it takes to awaken you to the giants in the land, you may be tempted to come to the same conclusion that the 10 spies articulated: "We're in trouble, and the best way to proceed is backward!"

Instead, what would it look like to live in the spirit of Caleb and Joshua as we seek to navigate our way forward through the land of the giants?

For this journey, first, we need a map and compass to guide us. God's people, when they have been at their best, have always been clear about their purpose and reason for being.

Jesus struggled to convince the disciples that the life of faith was as simple as bringing heaven to earth in all that we say and do. Over the years we have picked up additional interests and tasks that now divert our attention from our primary goal.

A fuzzy mission will prove deadly in this new landscape. We will need to say no to many good things in order to say yes to the very best things God has in mind for us.

Second, we will need adequate provisions. We launch out on this journey knowing that we are opting out of a life of excess, but knowing that we will need critical supplies to be successful.

Like the settlers departing St. Louis and heading west in the 1800s, we face hard choices about what to take with us into the wilderness ahead. What is essential? What can we live without? What is mission critical and what is a carryover from the past?

Chances are, if we are to make it in this

new world, we will need to jettison some of the baggage we have accumulated. Some of us will be very sad and find it hard to let go, but if we are to survive, sacrifices will have to be made.

Third, we need a strong and courageous spirit. Who will be our Caleb and Joshua? Granted, the future will be challenging and marked by struggle. It will also be inspiring and filled with great meaning.

Whiners need not apply. Those accustomed to getting their own way will be disappointed. Fair-weather believers will want to scurry back to Egypt. Naysayers are not needed.

As we face our own giants, I am convinced that a leaner, more focused and dedicated church is emerging. Despite the challenges, I believe there has never been a better day to be God's people living out our divine mission.

The way through this land is the way of Joshua and Caleb: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9). **BT**

—Bill Wilson is president of the Center for Congregational Health.



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# ‘Never seen a church like this’



Pastor Amy Butler

Calvary celebrates 150 years of unique history in D.C.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — When Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary 100 years ago, Charles Evans Hughes, a church member destined to become Chief Justice of the United States, said “I have had much to do with churches, and I have never seen a church like this.”

Hughes’ words were echoed in multiple ways this year as Calvary celebrated 150 years of what pastor Amy Butler described as being “called and

compelled to live the gospel message” in “radical and unexpected” ways.

Calvary was born, as Baptist churches often are, out of conflict. In the early 1860s, as Abraham Lincoln’s presidency was in its early stages, many new residents were moving to the city to fill government positions. The country was at war, and Washington, D.C., was caught between Unionist Maryland to the north and Confederate Virginia to the South.

“Sounds like a perfect time to start a church, doesn’t it?” asked Butler, as the congregation gathered for worship in early June.

Within the E Street Baptist Church, which had experienced an influx of new members and new ideas, an ongoing debate between abolitionists and those who continued to support slavery became intractable. In 1862, 12 men and 13 women withdrew to form a “new interest” in which the rights and dignity of all persons was not a matter of debate: Calvary has been socially conscious from birth.

In 1955, Calvary was the first white Baptist church in Washington, D.C., to accept an African-American member. In 1983, it started and hosted the first homeless shelter for women in the metro area. The church has long welcomed gay and lesbian members. Social activism continues through a variety of efforts, including support for immigrant rights.

The church hosts and incorporates both a Hispanic and a Burmese congregation, and it partners with other organizations committed to community improvement.

Calvary’s location, ecumenical involvement and activist temperament have often put

Calvary’s main building, designed by Adolf Cluss, was constructed in 1865, burned in 1867, and was rebuilt in 1869.



**MILESTONE:** Members and guests celebrate the 150th anniversary of Calvary Baptist Church where President Warren G. Harding worshipped and the Northern Baptist Convention (now American Baptist Churches) was formed. Photo by Scott Henrichson.

it at the fulcrum of change. The Columbia Association of Baptist Churches (now the District of Columbia Baptist Convention) was organized at Calvary in 1877.

In 1907, when the Northern Baptist Convention (now the American Baptist Churches in the USA) was founded, it took place at Calvary.

When the Baptist World Alliance moved its offices from London to Washington during World War II, its first offices were at Calvary.

During the early 1900s, Calvary was at the forefront of the new Sunday school movement, and attendance swelled.

The church has never limited itself to a single affiliation. Historically, Calvary has been associated with the Southern Baptist Convention, the American Baptist Churches of the USA, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Alliance of Baptists, the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, and the Baptist World Alliance.

The church enjoyed a unique distinction in 1957, when pastor Clarence Cranford was tapped as president of the American Baptist Convention, and church member Brooks Hays (a congressman from Arkansas) was elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention. The two served simultaneously and promoted closer ties between the two Baptist bodies.

Currently, Calvary member Carol Blythe

serves as president of the Alliance of Baptists. In July, associate pastor Edgar Palacios was recognized by the Baptist World Alliance with its Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award.

In February 2012, however, the church sent a letter to SBC president Bryant Wright expressing these concerns: “We believe the Southern Baptist Convention has departed from the historic principles of separation of church and state and autonomy of the local church to such a degree that seriously calls into question our continued affiliation with the convention.”

On July 25 the congregation voted to officially withdraw from the SBC. Deacon chair Rachel Johnson said that the church has always “affirmed the vibrant role faith can play in the public sphere and the call of the church to be a prophetic voice in our policy decisions, but always in a manner that is keeping with the Baptist distinctives of soul freedom and separation of church and state.”

Calvary enrolled thousands of members during its heyday in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with presidents, congressmen and other high officials in regular attendance. As the Penn Quarter district experienced urban blight and residents fled to the suburbs in the latter part of the century, however, the church suffered a serious decline in membership.

By the early 2000s, regular attendance had dropped below 50 and prospects were dim.

But with hard work, focused leadership and a continued openness to all people, Calvary is healthy and growing again: more than 300 attended worship on Easter Sunday, the church facility is a hub of community activity, and a positive spirit pervades the congregation.

When asked to describe Calvary in a few words, member Allyson Robinson offered “crazy, radical hospitality.”

“Diverse, welcoming and unique,” said church moderator Amy Dale.

Church administrator Paul Rosstead concluded, “A different kind of Baptist.”

In her sermon for the anniversary, Butler imagined what might be said of Calvary 50 years from now.

“I hope they will say we had the courage to be reborn into whatever it is God is calling us to do and be,” she said, and that we “took radical stands on behalf of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Pastor since 2003, Butler expressed optimism that the congregation would remain committed to excellent and relevant worship, to welcoming all people, to loving one other, and to working “tirelessly for peace and justice, ushering in the kingdom of God all around us.”

“In the meantime,” she said, “it’s up to us to get started living that history right now.” If so, she said, no doubt others will echo Justice Hughes’ assessment from 100 years ago: “I have never seen a church like this.” **BT**

# Survey suggests low use of social media among faithful

A new survey finds that Americans, while mostly religious, generally do not use social media to supplement worship and mostly keep their faith private online.

The Public Religion Research Institute survey found about one in 20 Americans followed a religious leader on Twitter or Facebook. A similar number belonged to a religious or spiritual Facebook group.

The results seem to defy the familiar story of prominent religious leaders using social media to build a following — and a brand.

“We were surprised when this turned up really low levels of people engaging religion and faith online,” said PRRI research director Daniel Cox.

Cox said churches face many challenges in connecting with people via social media. Megachurches may reach a large audience through social media, but the majority of Americans attend smaller houses of worship

that lack the resources to run social media campaigns, Cox said.

In addition, the millennial generation, which most strongly embraces social media, doesn't attend services as often as older generations.

According to a recent Pew survey, one-third of adults who use the Internet do not use social networking sites. And a significant minority of Americans do not access the Internet.

The survey also found half of Facebook users didn't list their religious affiliation on their profile.

Alan Rudnick, pastor of First Baptist Church of Ballston Spa in upstate New York, considers Facebook and Twitter essential for reaching out to his congregation and local community, but said Americans may be reluctant to label themselves for personal spiritual reasons or out of fear of being ostracized.

“Because social media on Facebook and other places is so easily accessed, people are distancing themselves, because organized religion in a lot of circles has a negative



connotation,” he said.

White evangelicals were much more likely to use social media for religious purposes, though only a minority did so. One in four white evangelicals say they have listened to a sermon online or downloaded a podcast, compared to 6 percent each for Catholics and other Protestants.

The survey also found that 10 percent have taken video or photos with their cell phone during worship, and nearly as many admitted to sending or reading email during services.

The survey of 1,026 American adults has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points. **BT**

## Baptist minister: Perhaps survey questions were baffling

By Jeff Brumley

*Associated Baptist Press*

A survey's finding that few Americans use social media to connect with churches and other religious groups has those who conducted the research astonished.

“We were a little bit surprised,” Robert P. Jones, CEO of the Public Religion Institute, told CNN in a story published Aug. 6. “We thought there would be a higher usage, given all the press that has surrounded pastors on Twitter and people posting prayers online.”

But one minister and social media advocate said the survey language may have been too narrow in defining what it means to connect with a faith community via social media.

“I'm wondering if they (respondents) just didn't understand the questions,” said Mike Gregg, minister of educational life at Northside Drive Baptist Church in Atlanta, and a big user

of social media for religious purposes. “I'm a first adopter in social media and technology and how it relates to the church world and being Baptist.”

The survey revealed that 11 percent of participants post status updates “about being in church,” and that 7 percent “say they have sent or read e-mail during services.” It also found that 6 percent have joined “a religious or spiritual group on Facebook.”

But Gregg said such measurements aren't the last word in how many people — and most that he knows — are actually expressing or experiencing their faith in an online context. People may not join a specific group online, he said, but they are more likely to connect with fellow

church members through social media.

“The question is, what does it mean to be a ‘religious community’ online?” Gregg asked.

It's true that joining an online church is a cutting-edge phenomenon, but individuals connecting with other members is not, he said. “I have some friends I have never met before, but we're pretty close on Facebook.”

Jones told CNN that one demographic in particular does not conform to the numbers found in the survey.

“The exception to (the lack of religion on social media), and really this is across the board, are white evangelical Protestants,” Jones told CNN. “They stand out.”

That group is more likely than other faith groups to post while at church and more likely to have downloaded a sermon, the survey found.

“Part of the reason why is that social media fits very well with the Great Commission to go out and make disciples,” Jones told CNN. **BT**



Mike Gregg

# For Sikhs, turban is a proud symbol — and a target

Law enforcement authorities wondered why suspected gunman Wade Michael Page burst into a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wis., on a Sunday in August and opened fire, killing six before he was shot dead by the police.

**B**ut many American Sikhs say they do know this: Their community has been targeted by a growing number of hate crimes since the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The New York-based Sikh Coalition reports more than 700 such incidents since 2001. The question is: Why?

“The turban is the main issue here,” said Pashaura Singh, a professor of Sikh and Punjabi studies at the University of California-Riverside. “People confuse Sikhs with Osama bin Laden.”

Following 9/11, bin Laden and his al-Qaida associates were often shown in media

*Out of respect for God’s creation, Sikhs do not cut their hair, instead knotting it each morning and wrapping it in five meters of cloth, which protects the hair as well as the mind,*

reports wearing white turbans. Combine that with a lack of basic knowledge about the estimated 500,000 Sikhs living in the U.S. and you get tragic — and sometimes violent — cases of mistaken identity.

“Numerous reports have documented how those practicing the Sikh religion are often targeted for hate violence because of their religiously mandated turbans,” wrote 92 House members to Attorney General Eric Holder in April. The House members called on Holder to begin collecting data on hate crimes committed against Sikh Americans.

Rupinder Singh, a California health care administrator who writes the blog *American Turban*, has heard taunts of “terrorist” and “Osama” as he shops at the mall. “When I walk into a restaurant or an airplane, all eyes are on me,” he said.

But Singh said he would never consider taking off his turban. “It is such a core part of our identity,” Singh said. “I could never imagine separating from it.”

Founded in India in 1469, Sikhism is often confused with Hinduism or Islam, but is part of neither. The religion teaches that there is one God, but many paths to the divine, and abjures proselytism.

Each of the faith’s 10 founding gurus wore turbans, called dastars, but it was the last guru, Guru Gobind Singh, who instructed all male members of the faith to wear them. (The requirement is optional for women.) The reasons ranged from political to theological.

Sikh gurus rebelled against India’s strict caste system, teaching instead that people are essentially equal in God’s eyes. Turbans, typically worn by the upper class, should be worn by the lower classes as well, the gurus taught, to symbolize that equality.

But it is more than a political symbol. Like Orthodox Jews who wear yarmulkes or Catholic nuns who don habits, Sikhs believe the turban is a visible declaration of humility before God and commitment to their faith.

Out of respect for God’s creation, Sikhs do not cut their hair, instead knotting it each morning and wrapping it in five meters of cloth, which protects the hair as well as the mind, said Pashaura Singh.

The turbans are worn in a variety of styles and colors, with some carrying symbolic significance. White turbans represent purity, while



Jagmeet Sethi started a Connecticut-based apparel company called *TurbanInc* to produce t-shirts to express his pride in being a Sikh. “We wanted to combine one of our most routine methods of expression with confidence, self-love and pride in being Sikh.” RNS photo courtesy Jagmeet Sethi

navy blue represent the sky and ocean and are often worn by temple officials. Saffron is the color of sacrifice, and black the shade of political protest, Pashaura Singh explained.

In an increasingly pluralistic America, the turban has also become an emblem of the country’s commitment to religious freedom, a value strongly shared by Sikhs, said interfaith activist Ralph Singh.

“The irony is that in the process of proudly displaying that emblem, we have become a clear target for those who feel that people who are different are threats,” he said.

Ralph Singh has been among those targets. Gobind Sadan, his spiritual community near Syracuse, N.Y., was firebombed on Nov. 18, 2001, in perhaps the first post-9/11 case of mistaken Sikh identity.

Singh said he later received a letter from one of the young men convicted of arson. “He said that if he had known who we are, he never would have done it,” Singh said. **BT**

# Still learning from Clarence

## Koinonia Farms to host Jordan symposium end of the month

Sunday, July 29, would have been the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Clarence Jordan, a Southern Baptist minister — well known for his Cotton Patch Bible translation — who died in 1969. A celebration of his legacy kicks off Sept. 28-29 with the first-ever Clarence Jordan Symposium at Koinonia Farms, an interracial farming community he founded near Americus, Ga., 70 years ago this year.

Former President Jimmy Carter will deliver opening remarks for the event, which features speakers including leaders in the New Monasticism, a movement of intentionally Christian communities cropping up in American cities in recent years.

Amanda Moore, a resident at Koinonia Farms who is handling publicity for the event, said the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary is important not so

much for the number of years it represents, but rather as an effort both to reconnect with people who knew about the ministry in the past but lost touch and to introduce it to a new generation of socially conscious Christians who may not know it is still around.

After earning his Ph.D. in Greek New Testament from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1938, Jordan and his wife, Florence, who died of cancer in 1987 and also would have turned 100 this year, moved with another couple, former American Baptist missionaries Martin and Mabel England, to a 440-acre plot of land in southwest Georgia.

They started an interracial, Christian farming community dedicated to non-violence, environmental stewardship and common possession of goods. They named it Koinonia after the Greek word meaning communion or fellowship used to describe the early church in the second chapter of Acts.

At first the Koinonia community lived at peace with its neighbors in Sumter County, but as the Civil Rights Movement began to emerge in the late 1950s, their notion of racial equality came to be viewed as a threat to the Southern way of life. The next several years witnessed harassment including shootings, burnings, bombings, beatings and a crippling economic boycott.

After things died down some in the 1960s, Jordan turned to writing, churning out a series of New Testament translations called Cotton Patch, which translated not only words but also used American analogies such as substituting Washington, D.C., for

Rome and Atlanta for Jerusalem.

The idea, to divorce the Bible from an ancient past

to current times, also meant changing terms such as “Jew and Gentile” into “white man and Negro” and “crucifixion” into “lynching,” believing no other term was adequate to convey the sense of the word in common language of the day.

Jordan died Oct. 29, 1969, from a heart attack at the age of 57. At his request he was buried at Koinonia Farms in a plain wooden box in an unmarked grave. Shortly before his death he established the Fund for Humanity to build affordable housing for people in the community.

Later, Millard and Linda Fuller, who first visited Koinonia planning only to stay for a couple of hours but wound up making their permanent home there in 1968, expanded the idea into Habitat for Humanity. The Fuller Center for Housing, started by the Fullers in 2005, is a major sponsor of the Clarence Jordan Symposium.

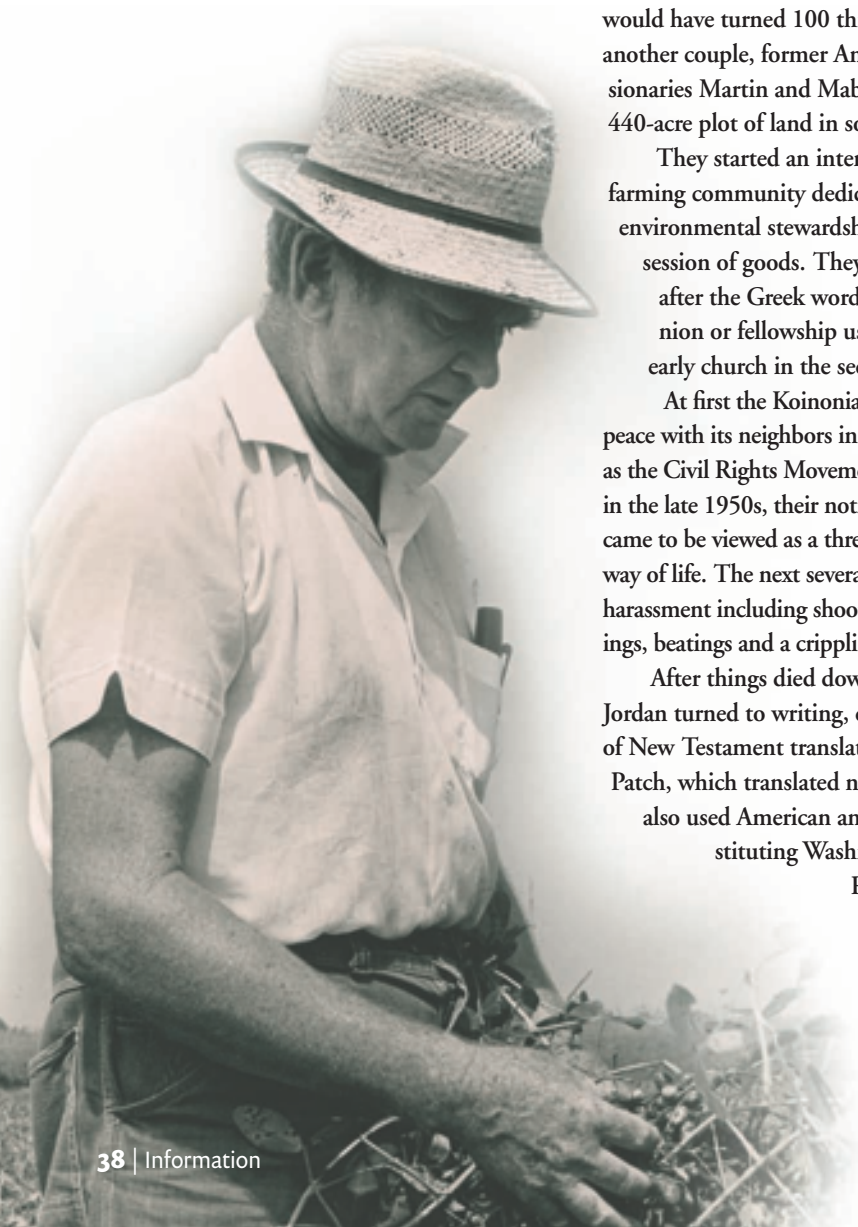
Keynote speakers include Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, a Baptist minister and author who lives at The Rutba House, a New Monastic community in Durham, N.C. Another is Shane Claiborne, a leading figure in New Monasticism and a founding member of The Simple Way in Philadelphia, featured on the cover of *Christianity Today* in 2005.

Others include Charles Marsh, a professor at the University of Virginia and director of The Project on Lived Theology, a research community that seeks to understand the social consequences of religious beliefs, and Philip Gulley, a Quaker pastor from Danville, Ind., who has published 17 books.

The cost for attending the Clarence Jordan Symposium is \$195. Student discounts are available. Information and registration are available at [koinonia2012celebration.org/symposium](http://koinonia2012celebration.org/symposium).

The Sept. 28-29 symposium will be followed by Renovation Blitz Build Oct. 1-26 to repair buildings at Koinonia that have gone largely neglected for years. The celebration wraps up with a Koinonia Family Reunion Oct. 26-28, both for those who have visited in the past and those who always wanted to.

In addition to its founding principles, Koinonia Farms today also works in areas such as sustainable agriculture, local ministries, an internship program and educational offerings. **BT**



# Ministry to poorest of Romania's poor turns 20

Project Ruth's Mihai Ciopasiu is all too glad to talk about the success the organization has enjoyed the past two decades serving the poorest and most-shunned children in Romania.

The nonprofit began as a day center with barely 20 Gypsy children in a church basement in one of Bucharest's worst slums. By May 2012, when it celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Project Ruth had become an accredited school and counseling center for 200 students.

Its services have expanded to include medical and hygiene programs, humanitarian aid, computer training and athletics in a two-building campus.

Nurturing that growth, Ciopasiu added, has been a network of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) churches and individuals channeling life-giving supplies, money, volunteers and prayer to Project Ruth since the very beginning.

"What we have been witnessing is a miracle," said Ciopasiu, the executive director since 2009.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The focus must be on the next 20 years, Ciopasiu said, if the ministry is to start addressing the systemic issues that make Project Ruth necessary. Many of his American supporters agree.

"We would love to see a more comprehensive outreach in the community," said Pat Anderson, CBF interim executive coordinator and a Project Ruth supporter since before its founding in 1992.

"I remember when the first group of Gypsy kids was brought in," Anderson said, explaining he had befriended its founder, Baptist pastor Oti Bunaciu, during previous mission trips to Romania.

The Gypsies, who are also known as the Roma, are among the poorest and most despised in Romania. Their plight is heart-breaking and evokes an impulse to help among almost all who see what Project Ruth is doing, he added.

## 'TRULY UNIQUE'

That is why CBF will continue its support for the organization, Anderson said.

"Anyone that's been touched by it comes away feeling that this is something truly unique and significant," he said.

That certainly describes Ellen Sechrest, the minister of spiritual formation and missions at Boulevard Baptist Church in Anderson, S.C. She first visited Project Ruth in 1997 with a group of churchwomen. During the visit they were told of the need for a sponsorship program to defray the costs of educating and feeding the Gypsy children.

"So we created one," Sechrest said.

Now, she oversees a program that connects the school with American donors who can have their \$30-a-month contributions automatically withdrawn from their bank accounts.

## 'LAND OF NOTHINGNESS'

Joining sponsors in her church are individuals and group contributors in Missouri, Tennessee, North Carolina, Virginia, Florida and Georgia, she said.

Plus there are the regular mission trips from Boulevard Baptist that have sent more

than 100 church members, including 50 teens, to work at Project Ruth over the years.

The draw, she said, is seeing "these children in the land of nothingness and knowing that education is the way out."

Project Ruth's real commodity is hope, said Wesley Craig, minister of missions and community ministries at Baptist Temple Church in San Antonio. He and his wife, Susan, worked with Project Ruth as CBF field personnel from 2006 to 2009.

Project Ruth's mere existence sends a powerful message to the rest of Romania, and even Europe, that Gypsies are not the untouchables they are depicted to be, Craig said.

## HOPES AND DREAMS

The consistent effort by Romanian Baptists and Project Ruth and CBF volunteers is often the only message that runs counter to those beliefs, Craig said. "You don't realize how much a miracle that is. There is hope for these people."

To continue sending that message, Ciopasiu said, Project Ruth will expand its ongoing counseling program to offer marriage counseling and group therapy for moms. It will also work to oppose human trafficking and, next year, offer a summer camp program to get kids out of the city — some of them for the first time in their lives, he said.

Altogether, the goal is to erode the social factors — divorce, alcoholism, poverty and low literacy rates — that contribute to the Roma's misery.

"This is what we dream," said Ciopasiu. **BT**

—Jeff Brumley is assistant editor of *Associated Baptist Press*.

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\*Program includes worship on Sunday evening and deacon training by Daniel Vestal and a pastors gathering on Monday morning

# Like water for chocolate

Reblog

By Tony W. Cartledge

You know it's hot outside when a "cold front" drops temperatures into the 90s.

After a week at the Baptist World Alliance meeting in Chile, where it's winter and I needed a coat to venture outside the hotel, I returned to Raleigh's record-setting 105-degree heat, the sixth day in a row of triple digits.

The heat reminded me of the best meal I had in Santiago, joining two delightful friends on a long walk to the Barrio Bella Vista section of town and a restaurant called *Como Agua Para Chocolate* — "Like Water for Chocolate."

The restaurant decor was equal parts rustic, funky and sultry — one table for six was made up to look like a bed. Both the food and its presentation were amazing: my *corvina al fuego* (sea bass flambéed with rum) was delectable, and other dishes looked even more impressive.

I had heard the expression "like water for chocolate" before, but its meaning wasn't self-evident: I had tried to imagine what it would mean to substitute water for chocolate, which didn't sound particularly positive, or like something you'd hang on a restaurant.

With a little research, I learned that "like

water for chocolate" is a Hispanic expression that basically means "hot," often in a sensual way — hence the restaurant's claim to have a *cocina magica afrodisiaca* (magical aphrodisiac cuisine).

In Central and South America, hot chocolate is not made with milk and powdered cocoa, but with hot water and blocks of sweetened chocolate. "Like water for chocolate" describes the point at which the water is hot enough to melt the chunks of chocolate.

I enjoyed *chocolate caliente* several times on cold days in Chile, including a nice thick mug of it while in the ski village of Farellones, where it was the perfect complement to a cold day.

Back at home, I was happier getting reacquainted with a frigid can of Diet Mountain Dew, because the atmosphere alone could melt a chocolate bar in a heartbeat.

One of the things I like best about travel is that it reminds me how big the world is: how different it can be in some ways, and how similar in others. And one of the special things about the annual BWA gathering is that when we come together from around the globe, so many of our differences melt away in a warm celebration of a common faith.

Like water for chocolate. **BT**

Selections from recent blogs  
at [baptiststoday.org](http://baptiststoday.org)



## Meaningful work

By John Pierce

We've all been to those retirement celebrations where the honoree proclaims: "I enjoyed getting up and going to work every day of my life." And every mind in the room is thinking: "Liar."

But it is a good thing when our work is not dreadful, but an opportunity to use our unique gifts in constructive ways. When counting my blessings, I always include a prayer of thanks for "meaningful work."

That doesn't mean that every deadline, complaint, funding dip or technical breakdown is as welcomed as a scoop of Edy's French Silk ice cream. Rather it is an expression of gratitude for the larger privilege to provide resources for my family while engaging in work that fits my gifts and seems to make a positive difference in the life of others.

In challenging economic times, it is especially important to regard our work

highly even if not in the most desirable position at the time. Lessons learned from less-desired jobs can serve us well too.

If nothing else, those brief youthful jobs of insulating summertime attics, shoveling foundry sand, working the production line in a carpet mill and running buckets of mortar up a rope to bricklayers introduced me to skills and people I would have not known otherwise. And those long, hot days amplified the voice in my head saying: "Stay in school; stay in school."

It is a blessing when our jobs allow for creativity. Even if not, we can find creative expression beyond our employment. There is something satisfying about looking at a finished project and being pleased with what emerged through innovation, cooperation and/or sweat of the brow.

Two books on this subject emerged from the growing pile of review copies in my office: *Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor* by Ben Witherington III and *Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture* by Paul Stevens — both published by Eerdmans.

Stevens challenges the common division between "sacred" and "secular" work. Rather he speaks of "good work" and "bad work" — delineating between those things that are constructive or destructive. Likewise, Witherington writes: "Separating the sacred from the secular is a recipe for disaster when it comes to thinking about the relationship between faith and work."

Good work treats others properly and makes a positive contribution to our shared lives. As Stevens notes, it is "characterized by justice."

With new graduates facing a slow job market and new technologies calling for different skills, it can be a baffling time to find a career that matches one's gifts and training. But work is a large part of most of our lives and deserves some reflection about what it means and what we should bring to the task.

Like everything else in life, balance is needed. It is possible to give our work too little or too much of our attention. Both good work and needed Sabbath are by God's design. **BT**



# Amish report staggering growth in Midwest

**M**IDDLEFIELD, Ohio — The Amish are one of the fastest-growing religious groups in North America, according to a new census by researchers at Ohio State University.

The study, released in late July at the annual meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, suggests a new community sprouting every three and a half weeks.

Nearly 250,000 Amish live in the U.S. and Canada, and the population is expected to exceed 1 million around 2050.

The growth may not be visible outside Amish country, but the rural settlements definitely see the boom.

“This place has grown,” said Daniel Miller, 52, who has spent his life on an Amish settlement here. “It’s because all of the kids.”

Many Amish families have multiple children, Miller said, adding that those children often stay in the community and eventually sprout families of their own.

There are currently 99 church districts, or communities, in Middlefield, which is east of Cleveland in central Northeast Ohio. Miller said



he remembers when there were fewer than 20.

The Amish double their population about every 22 years, said Joseph Donnermeyer, the Ohio State professor who led the census project as part of the recent 2010 U.S. Religion Census.

The skyward growth has made Ohio home to more than 60,000 Amish residents — the most in any state. Pennsylvania ranks second with about 59,000 Amish people. Indiana ranks third with about 45,000.

Simple economics also has been a factor in the rising population, Donnermeyer said.

“They are often purchasing land at good market prices,” he said. “They are buying land that no one else wanted to buy. Generally speaking, the Amish are a good economic value for the rural communities. They have business startups, and they are more likely to buy local.”

Additionally, Amish residents are not likely to draw on government money, Donnermeyer said, adding that Amish people have very low unemployment and rarely go on welfare.

He said Amish residents also pay the same taxes as other citizens. “The idea that the Amish don’t pay taxes is the biggest mythology about the Amish,” Donnermeyer said.

As the population grows, the Amish community and its neighbors begin to merge. In Middlefield, horse-drawn buggies are parked outside the local Wal-Mart.

“I’m not a fan of Wal-Mart, but my wife is,” said Amish farmer Dan Yoder, 59, as he walked through the Wal-Mart parking lot. “We get the stuff you can’t make at home.

“Things have changed a lot,” he added. “This lot used to be my uncle’s farm.” **BT**

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# Five things to know

## *about religious violence in Nigeria*

Ongoing violence in Nigeria has exacerbated tensions between the country's Muslims and Christians. Nigeria has equal numbers of Christians and Muslims, and 92 percent of the country's population says they pray every day, according to a 2010 poll by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

**H**undreds of Christians and Muslims have died this year alone, including a deadly attack Aug. 6 on worshippers at Deeper Life Bible Church located 155 miles southwest of Nigeria's capital Abuja.

Here are five things to know about the violence in Nigeria.

### **1. This is not simply a Muslim-Christian conflict.**

While Muslims and Christians are attacking each other, the combatants also divide along ethnic and cultural lines, and grievances often have little to do with religion.

"Religion is part of the mix, but it's very much linked in with political, ethnic, justice and poverty issues as well," said Claire Amos, a World Council of Churches official who recently visited the country to assess the crisis.

One of the main fault lines divides Muslim nomadic herders and Christian farmers. The groups clash as the herders migrate through farmland, Amos said. "It's of course an archetypal tension. It's the basic story of the conflict between Cain and Abel."

### **2. A growing desert makes matters worse.**

Climate change and poor natural resource management create an ever-larger

desert. "As the Sahara expands, people have to travel further south, which brings them into conflict with farmers," said John Campbell, a Nigeria expert at the Council on Foreign Relations.

The migrating northerners are the predominantly Muslim Hausa-Fulani people, the Southerners — the predominantly Christian Berom.

### **3. The militant Islamist group Boko Haram is a menace, but its role is often mischaracterized.**

Boko Haram, which envisions a purely Islamic society, has exploited the frustrations of pious Muslims who struggle to live faithfully in a society that is rife with corruption and that happens to be led by a Christian president.

According to the congressionally chartered United States Institute of Peace, "since August 2011 Boko Haram has planted bombs almost weekly in public or in churches in Nigeria's northeast."

But many who study the conflict say portrayals of Boko Haram as the Nigerian version of al-Qaida oversimplify the crisis.

"Boko Haram is very local, and linking them to a global jihadi movement is irresponsible," said Qamar-ul Huda, of USIP's Religion and Peacemaking Center. "They may have similar tactics and techniques, but they're not global and they don't even have a global ideology."

### **4. Oil is flowing in Nigeria**

Some look at the wretched poverty and say oil in the Niger Delta is a bane to the country. That's an overstatement, said Huda, but among many Nigerians there persists the view that oil isn't doing the nation much good.

"The frustration is that after more than 10 years of civilian rule, the political and economic institutions are still weak, and authorities are not able to maneuver a great prosperity for people," Huda said.

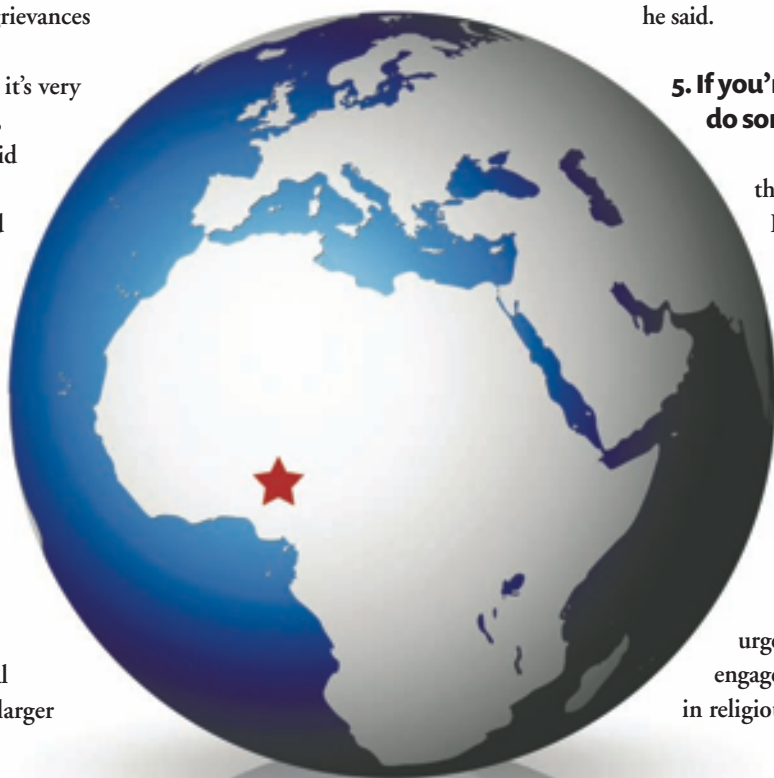
That sense of helplessness and deprivation breeds violence not only in the aggrieved Delta area, but also in other parts of the nation where Muslim-Christian tensions are already high, he said.

### **5. If you're not in Nigeria, you can still do something about the crisis.**

Katrina Lantos Swett, chair of the U.S. Commission on Religious Freedom, calls on U.S. citizens to contact their representatives in Congress and tell them of their concerns about sectarian violence in Nigeria.

"They can also call on legislators to fund and implement programs to stop religious violence and promote religious freedom in that country," said Lantos Swett.

Muslims and Christians "can urge their co-religionists in Nigeria to engage in interfaith dialogue, not engage in religious violence." **BT**





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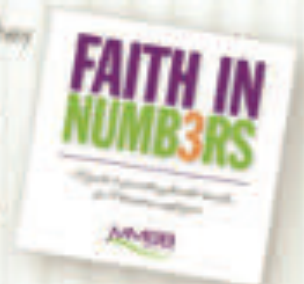
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