

## Inside

Gaining Wisdom ..... 3

The Bible Code:  
What Enthusiasts  
Overlook ..... 4

The Hebrew  
Calendar—Part 2 ..... 7

Military Service,  
The Draft and  
Christianity ..... 12

Are You *Dokimos*? ..... 15

Just for Youth: Is  
God Calling You? ..... 16

Are You Hospitable? ..... 18

So You Are  
Being Called  
For Jury Duty ..... 22

Local Church News ..... 23

LYC Announcement ..... 24

## Are You Really a Christian?

Most of us in the Living Church of God act like Christians most of the time. But there are “those times” when all of us slip up, act in a selfish or worldly manner or simply get rebellious. Our enemy, Satan the devil, is always waiting to “stir us up” in a moment of weakness.

So we must be on guard always—*always!*

However, there are some among us who regularly seem to betray Christian ideals in an *outlandish* way! I recently heard about a few such individuals who were debating the fractious “presidential election process” right after church services a few weeks ago. A couple of these people said that they “hated” Vice President Al Gore because of His stubbornness in conceding the election.

But one man even expressed an even more awful and *bitter* attitude toward one of the candidates. That attitude, of course, is the exact OPPOSITE of everything Jesus Christ taught!

Let us always remember that Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, LOVE *your enemies*, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:43–44). How can you *possibly* be acting “Christian” and say that you HATE the Vice President of the United States? You might not personally “like” him. You might “hate”—in a sense—some of the things that he or *any politician* might say or do. But you cannot “hate” ANY human being and be in a Christian attitude!

The above example of “hate” being engendered over this recent election also illustrates that *many of us* have NOT come out of this world. We have not fully internalized the absolute fact that *true* Christians are not of this world. Again, Jesus Christ said, “My kingdom is NOT of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36). And the Apostle Paul was inspired to tell us, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20).

Genuine Christians must always remember that we are “ambassadors” for Christ—representing His Kingdom here on earth. As any faithful ambassador should do, we must be obedient to the laws of the nation where we live—unless they *directly contradict* the higher laws of Almighty God. And we are to be “subject” to the ruling authorities of our land. We are to pay

our taxes, salute the flag and HONOR those whom GOD has placed in authority.

God's Word instructs us: "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God" (Romans 13:1). And later, "For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor" (vv. 6-7).

Dear brethren, as time goes on and the biblical prophecies reach their fulfillment, will some of *our* brethren start "hating" other brethren because they are, humanly, citizens of a country which is beginning to oppress our country? Will some of us "hate" members of the great "Mother Church" because that church is oppressing or persecuting our people? Will some of us "hate" those of another race because they have hurt us in the past, or are *now* hurting us through threats, riots or violence or any other such thing?

Again, although living *in* the world, we are NOT to be "of" the world. Our whole attitude should be that of ambassadors from another country. Also, we should cultivate the attitude of the *faithful saints* as described in the book of Hebrews: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and *confessed that they were* STRANGERS and PILGRIMS *on the earth*. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11:13-16).

Brethren, none of us are perfect in this life. But as time goes on, we need to GROW in genuine *faith* and *trust* in the absolute promises of God. His soon-coming government—directed by the Living Jesus Christ from a throne in Jerusalem—should become more and more of a REALITY to us. We need to mentally "picture" that reality—visualizing at least in a general way the leaders of the nations coming up to present themselves before Christ the King. We should picture the magnificent processions coming in and out of Jerusalem on special occasions—the wealth, the fabulous beauty, the awesome inspiration of huge choirs singing and perhaps bands or orchestras playing at royal occasions and ceremonies. We should picture the splendid and joyous musical occasions and pageantry, which will be carried out as acts of WORSHIP to the Great God during His annual Festivals!

We are instructed in God's Word, "If then you were raised with Christ, *seek those things which are ABOVE*, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things ABOVE, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:1-3). As true Christians, we will be *studying* about, *meditating* about and *praying* about what the Father and Christ are now planning for us at the throne of God in heaven. We should be deeply con-

**Are You Really a Christian?**  
*continues on page 21*

**Editor in Chief** . . . . . Roderick C. Meredith  
**Editorial Director** . . . . . Richard F. Ames  
**Executive Editor** . . . . . William Bowmer  
**Managing Editor** . . . . . Gary F. Ehman  
**Regional Editors** . . . . Charles Bryce (Canada)  
    Rod McNair (Philippines)  
    Bruce Tyler (Australia)  
**Layout Editor** . . . . . Donna Prejean  
**Proofreaders** . . . . . Sandy Davis  
    Linda Ehman  
**News Bureau** . . . . . June Olsen  
**Circulation** . . . . . Aaron Eagle  
**Business Manager** . . . . . Fred Dattolo

**Regional Offices**

**UNITED STATES:**  
**P.O. Box 501304**  
**San Diego, CA 92150-1304**  
 Office (858) 673-7470 • Fax: (858) 673-0310  
<http://www.livingcog.org>

**AUSTRALIA:**  
**GPO Box 772**  
**Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia**  
 Phone: (07) 3841-8360 or freecall: 1800-816-543  
 Fax: (07) 3841-8325

**CANADA:**  
**P.O. Box 27202**  
**Toronto, Ontario, M9W 6L0**  
 Phone: (905) 671-3730 • Fax: (905) 671-9599

**NEW ZEALAND:**  
**P.O. Box 2767**  
**Auckland, New Zealand**  
 Freephone: 0800-380-584

**PHILIPPINES:**  
**MCPO Box 1774**  
**Makati City 1257, Philippines**  
 Phone: 63-2-813-6538 • Fax: 63-2-867-1569

**SOUTH AFRICA:**  
**P.O. Box 1154, Kenmare 1745**  
 Republic of South Africa  
 Phone: (27) 11-664-6036

**UNITED KINGDOM:**  
**P.O. Box 9092**  
**Motherwell, ML1 2YD Scotland**  
 Phone: 44-1698-263-977 • Fax: 44-1698-263-977

The *Living Church News* is published bi-monthly by the Living Church of God. Subscriptions are sent without charge to all members of the Living Church of God and others who may request them. 16935 W. Bernardo Dr., Ste. 260, San Diego, CA, 92127.

©2001, Living Church of God™. Printed in the USA. All rights reserved. Periodical postage paid at San Diego, CA.

**Postmaster: Send address changes to**  
**Living Church News**  
**P.O. Box 501304**  
**San Diego, CA 92150-1304**

The *Living Church News* is not responsible for the return of unsolicited articles and photographs. Scriptures are quoted from the *New King James Version* (©1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers) unless otherwise noted.

\* Applications pending. The symbol ™, appearing herein, does not indicate trademark registration.

# Gaining Wisdom

## Editorial

By Roderick C. Meredith

**A**re you a truly “wise” person? Are you now learning to “think through” carefully *all* important decisions that you must make? Are you preparing, in this way, to fulfill your calling when Jesus Christ returns and tells you, “Well done good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities” (Luke 19:17)?

How would you know how to manage cities, and manage all the physical and human problems that this involves? One vital “key” to preparing for this type of responsibility is to really *study*, think through, review and *then study* again the statutes of God which are listed primarily in Exodus 21–23, Leviticus 10–27 and Deuteronomy 12–27. For these statutes and judgments contain the basic civil law of Israel which King David *studied* again and again.

There are *many* reasons why God has chosen David as the future king over all the nations of Israel (Jeremiah 30:9; Hosea 3:5; Ezekiel 34:23–24; 37:24–25). But certainly one of the key reasons God chose David as king in ancient Israel and *will again* appoint him as king over Israel in Tomorrow’s World is because David “loved” God’s law. In the Psalms David stated this over and over.

David said, “I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word” (Psalm 119:15–16). Again, David exclaimed, “Princes also sit and speak against me, but Your servant

meditates on Your statutes. Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors” (vv. 23–24). And again, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes. The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver” (vv. 71–72). Of course, David had the opportunity to reign over ancient Israel for *40 full years*—putting these statutes and judgments into practice day after day. That is a *major* reason why David will again be Israel’s king—under Jesus Christ.

Will you dedicate yourself to really *studying* God’s statutes and judgments, and will you pray about how—in *principle*—they may be used as a basis for the civil laws in *your* city a few years from now?

Another vital “key” in preparing for your future responsibility as a king under Jesus Christ is to develop a definite plan and program to *grow* in WISDOM. Brethren, *all of us* are beloved by God. We know that. He is our Father. But *God Himself* makes it very clear that He is NOT now calling very many individuals possessed of great natural ability or wisdom.

For God inspired the Apostle Paul to write: “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:26–27). Of course, this does not mean that *no one* of great ability or wisdom is called. But, as we all know, the vast majority of God’s people today and down through time are from what people today call the

“working class” and/or the “lower middle class.” These people are more likely to have the *HUMILITY* so that—if *God calls them*—they will let God direct their lives.

The Apostle James tells us: “Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (James 2:5). People who have more money or material things tend to “trust” in these things—so they are usually unwilling or unable to throw themselves totally upon God’s mercy, and to put their complete faith and trust in Him.

But God’s Word makes it plain that we do need both faith and WISDOM to serve our Creator in a big responsibility. He tells us, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind” (James 1:5–6). So we should all ASK for wisdom. We *regularly* need to *pray fervently* about this. And we need to *practice wisdom* in our daily lives—in this way preparing for the BIG decisions we may need to make in Tomorrow’s World if Christ gives us five or even ten cities as *our responsibility* under Christ’s overall direction!

Frankly, knowing we are deficient in wisdom, all of us should CRY OUT for wisdom. God tells us, “My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding;

**Gaining Wisdom**  
*continues on page 19*

# The Bible Code:

## What Enthusiasts Overlook

By Douglas S. Winnail

Many have wondered about the “Bible code.” Does it prove that God inspired the Bible? Does it really predict the future? Does it give us remarkable new insights into Scripture and the world around us? Michael Drosnin’s 1997 book, *The Bible Code*, was an instant best-seller that enlivened talk shows and spawned a series of “copycat” novels, films and videos that were immediately snatched up by a fascinated public. Interest in predictions runs high—especially at the beginning of a new millennium! But is the Bible code real? Is it credible? Is it of God? Or, is it a passing fad and a hoax? John Weldon, who holds a doctorate in comparative religion observes, “we are dealing with either one of the greatest revelations in human history, or one of the greatest mistakes” (*Decoding the Bible*, Weldon, 1998, p. 11).

In this article we will examine what has been discovered and written about the Bible code by its promoters and its critics. We will see what history reveals about Bible code methodologies, and—more importantly—how the statements of Bible code enthusiasts compare to actual statements in Scripture. We will learn why the Living Church of God has not embraced, endorsed or promoted this “remarkable discovery.” We will also learn some important lessons about how to evaluate sensational new information—even when that information *appears* to promote God and the Bible!

### Codes, Computers and Critics

In *The Bible Code*, Michael Drosnin makes the claim that “there is a Bible beneath the Bible... criss-crossing the entire known text of the Bible, *hidden* under the original Hebrew of the Old Testament, is a complex network of words and phrases, *a new revelation*” (*The Bible Code*, p. 25). To find the Bible code, he mentions that researchers “eliminated all the spaces between the words, and turned the entire original Bible into one continuous letter sequence, 304,805 letters long” (Ibid.). Computers were then programmed to search for words by looking at letters at various intervals—every second, fifth, 100th or 1,000th letter, etc. These are called “equidistant letter sequences” or “skip codes” because the intervening letters are skipped over when constructing words. Using this method Drosnin

claims to have discovered remarkable predictions by finding key words associated with critical world events—John Kennedy’s assassination in Dallas, Scud missiles and the Gulf war, the date of the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Rabin (Ibid., pp. 14, 26). While this sounds amazing, we need to ask—just *how credible* are these claims, and *how trustworthy* is the methodology behind the Bible code?

The Bible code *assumes* that modern Hebrew texts are exactly the same as what God gave to Moses. In fact, Drosnin claims “all Bibles in the original Hebrew language that now exist are the same letter for letter” (*The Bible Code*, p. 194). Yet this is simply not the case! Various critics point out that spellings of Hebrew words have changed over the centuries, that numerous scribal variations have accumulated during recopying, and that the original Hebrew text may actually have been shorter than modern texts (see *Christianity Today*, July 12, 1999, p. 60; also *Who Wrote the Bible Code*, Ingermanson, 1999, p. 27). Dr. Ronald Hendel writes, “every known ancient Hebrew manuscript of the Bible, including every manuscript of the traditional Masoretic text, has a different number of letters. This is a fatal problem for a computer program that relies on the manipulation of exact numerical sequences of letters” (*Bible Review*, August 1997, p. 23). Professor Shlomo Sternberg comments that an eleventh-century version of the Torah (Leningrad Codex) “differs from the Koren edition... in 41 letters in Deuteronomy alone” (Ingermanson, p. 27).

Another critical factor Drosnin does not mention is that the Hebrew text fed into a computer contained *no vowels*. The words he found when searching for predictions were only consonants—to which *he added* the vowels. In this situation the person doing the searching can determine the prediction by choosing which vowels to insert. In addition, when you eliminate spaces and run letters together and then create new words, you *mutilate* the original text and eliminate the original meaning! This process of textual manipulation becomes very subjective, and enables the researcher to find whatever he is looking for.

Peter Coy, an associate economics editor, writes that *The Bible Code* is a classic example of what errors can be committed when “data-mining” occurs—when you simply look for patterns in large amounts of data. Recognizable patterns can be found, but that does not

mean there is a definite relationship between the items—the occurrences may be purely coincidental! Coy mentions it is worth studying Drosnin's book "because his methodology is *so bad* that it's a valuable example of how *not* to read data" (*Business Week*, June 16, 1997).

The original code researchers claim they were unable to find hidden codes in other books such as a Hebrew translation of *War and Peace*. Drosnin asserted "when my critics find a message about the assassination of a prime minister encrypted in *Moby Dick* I'll believe them" (*Time*, June 9, 1997, p. 67). Yet Brendan McKay, an Australian mathematician, took up the challenge "and found predicted assassinations of Gandhi and Nicaraguan president Somoza, among others" in *Moby Dick* (*Christianity Today*, July 12, 1999, p. 60). Physicist David Thomas "has found thousands of hidden occurrences and many complex messages in the English King James translation of Genesis, and in a well known court case" (Weldon, p. 50). Thomas writes "I was able to easily produce complex hidden messages in all the texts I worked with... once I learned how to navigate in puzzle space, finding 'incredible' predictions became a routine affair" (*Ibid.*, pp. 50–51).

Michael Drosnin appears to arrive at some of his startling predictions by a process of creative *mistranslation*. Numerous critics point this out. In Genesis 25:11, "after the death of Abraham" is translated by Drosnin "after the death of the prime minister." In Leviticus 26:12–13, "[you] will be my people. I am [the LORD your God]" is rendered by Drosnin as "July to Amman." In Numbers 26:64, "[the men] numbered by Moses" becomes in Drosnin's book "the code will save." For a more detailed discussion of mistranslations that become startling predictions, see Weldon, pp. 71–74; *Christianity Today*, July 12, 1999, p. 60; Hendel, "The Secret Code Hoax," *Bible Review*, August 1997.

Drosnin also claims to be able to predict the future using Bible codes, yet leading code experts flatly state "it is impossible to use the Torah codes to predict the future... most of Drosnin's claims are unreliable" (Weldon, pp. 42–43). For these and other reasons one of the discoverers of the Bible code comments, "I do not support Mr. Drosnin's work on the codes nor the conclusion he derives... the book is on extremely shaky ground" (*Ibid.*). Theoretical physicist Dr. Randall Ingermanson concluded, after running computer tests for associated letter frequencies on every book in the Old Testament, "the Torah has no Bible code... there is no Bible code" (Ingermanson, pp. 134, 137).

## Mystical Origins

But where did the idea of a Bible code come from? What prompted researchers to look for a code with a computer? Historical sources offer very interesting

answers! Drosnin mentions that when the code researchers arranged the Hebrew text into a continuous letter strand of 304,805 letters, they felt they were "actually restoring the Torah to what *great sages* say was the original form. According to *legend*, it was the way Moses received the Bible from God—contiguous, without break of letters" (Drosnin, p. 25). But *who* were these sages who gave birth to the legend? Where did they get their ideas that you can read the biblical text forwards, backwards, vertically and diagonally and create a hidden text by dropping out letters? One of the code researchers explains, "according to *mystical sources* in Jewish tradition, the Torah can be read and understood on many levels, including the level of a *hidden text*" (Weldon, p. 20).

Numerous reviewers have noted the connection between the methodology of the Bible code and Jewish mysticism—Kabbalism. Kabbalists have been trying to find hidden messages in the Torah for centuries. Kabbalism incorporates elements of Gnosticism, neoplatonic philosophy, magic and oriental religion. Dr. Weldon writes, Kabbalism "represents a *rebellion* of sorts against traditional Judaism... **both philosophical and practical Kabbalism are opposed to the doctrine and commandments of the Torah and the rest of the Jewish scriptures**" (p. 146). Kabbalists teach that God is an androgynous being who is indescribable and unknowable. The god of Kabbalism is definitely not the God of the Bible—but resembles instead the esoteric ramblings of Gnosticism! *The Encyclopedia of Judaism* states, "ever since the second century CE, there has been a trend in Jewish culture which is not satisfied with traditional ways to approach God" (*Ibid.*). This has generated attempts to gain a mystical experience with God by trying to find hidden messages in Scripture and by inducing trance-like states by repeating sacred names for God in order to "receive" divine messages from God.

For Kabbalists, the surface meaning of any biblical text is *secondary* or *inferior* to the hidden meaning, and "readers who focus on the surface meaning of the biblical text and its historical narrative are said to be *harming themselves* spiritually" (*Ibid.*, pp. 154–155). This Kabbalist approach to interpreting Scripture (looking for hidden meanings behind the surface text) strongly influenced many fathers of the Church up through the Middle Ages.

Kabbalists "saw themselves as transmitters of divine secrets" that they alone could glean from Scripture (*Ibid.*). According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Kabbalists believed "esoteric [hidden] doctrines are contained in the Hebrew Scriptures. The uninitiated cannot perceive them; but they are plainly revealed to the spiritually minded, who discern the profound import of this

theosophy *beneath the surface of the letters and words of Holy Writ*" (11th Ed, article: "Kabbalism"). These are almost Drosnin's exact words! Similarly, one leading code researcher has stated that "he alone could properly conduct code searches" because of the complexity of the codes (*Cracking the Bible Code*, Satinover, 1997, p. 17). Historical sources clearly reveal that the origin of Bible code ideas and methodologies originated from Jewish mysticism, pagan philosophy and heretical Gnostic speculations—not the God of the Bible!

### The Bible vs. the Bible Code!

One of the most helpful and instructive ways to evaluate the Bible code is to compare the claims of code promoters to the clear statements of Scripture. When you do this, *striking contrasts* emerge! We are told in the Bible that "surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). The prophets of God *believed* in God, *feared* God and *obeyed* God. Their prophecies were often warnings of what would happen if people would not repent and obey God. Michael Drosnin, by his own admonition states, "I'm not religious. I don't believe in God. I'm a total skeptic" (Drosnin, p. 181). The focus of *The Bible Code* is on predicting the future—not on repentance! 2 Peter 1:19–20 tells us that God has given a more sure word of prophecy to His Church, and that no prophecy is to be interpreted privately. Drosnin's entire book is about his own personal interpretation of prophecy. He is not affiliated in any way with God's Church. He does not even believe in God. Would God totally contradict His own inspired word and do things in a manner just the opposite of what He has told us He would do? Think about it!

The Bible indicates repeatedly that the prophecies of God are *sure* and *certain* (Daniel 2:45; Isaiah 14:24, 27; 48:3–7). However, Drosnin and code researchers suggest that "all probabilities are in the Bible Code" (Drosnin, p. 44). Drosnin goes on to assert, "The Bible is a warning of sudden and *inevitable* doom. But the real message of the Bible code is *just the opposite*. A warning is encoded in the Bible so that *we can prevent* the threatened Apocalypse... The message of the Bible code is that *we can save ourselves*" (Ibid., pp. 103, 179). This idea denies the need for the return of Jesus Christ, and abolishes Christ's role as the Savior of mankind (see Matthew 1:21; 24:3, 22). For Drosnin, "the code will save," not Jesus Christ! While Drosnin may mean well, this is truly a *different* Gospel—which the Bible condemns (see Galatians 1:6–9).

The suggestion by Bible code researchers that in order to recognize and decipher the hidden codes you must understand Hebrew, have a high powered computer and

be able to run sophisticated statistical analyses to verify your findings, simply runs contrary to what God has revealed in His word. We do not find any implications of hidden codes in Scripture. God says "I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place... I declare things that are right" (Isaiah 45:19). Again we read, "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2). God says He will listen to those who humbly seek Him and believe what is plainly recorded in the surface text of the Bible. People who speculate and argue over Scripture and seek hidden meanings that contradict the obvious message will not understand the Bible. The Bible plainly states, "If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). That is a pretty strong statement!

The biblical texts on which Drosnin and other code researchers focus their attention clearly forbid divination (Leviticus 19:26; Deuteronomy 18:9–14). The Bible also warns that we should not listen to or be deceived by diviners (Jeremiah 27:9; 29:8). Divination is an attempt to foretell the future by some physical means. The ancients tried to do this by slaughtering an animal and examining the inner organs. Today people use Ouija boards, tarot cards, astrology, crystal balls—and, most recently, computer programs that eliminate all the spaces between letters in the Bible and search for "hidden" messages in reassembled words! If the Torah contains every detail of a person's life (as Kabbalists believe) then "the Bible could become the *greatest divination tool* of all time" (Weldon, p. 83)!

Michael Drosnin and the Bible code researchers are using the Hebrew text as a "Delphic oracle" to divine information. They are more interested in finding hidden messages than following the clear instructions of Scripture. When we compare what promoters claim about the Bible code, we see a remarkable contrast with the Bible. We see two different approaches to God and to divine revelation. The prophet Elijah addressed this very issue when he contrasted two different belief systems and warned the ancient Israelites "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). We face the same decision today!

### Important Lessons

Predicting the future is a fascinating subject. It creates an immediate audience, yet it is a subject that needs to be approached with caution. The Bible gives us important guidelines for evaluating information. Solomon wrote

### The Bible Code: What Enthusiasts Overlook

*continues on page 20*

# The Hebrew Calendar—Part 2

## Who Is Responsible for the Calendar?

By John H. Ogwyn

**D**oes God expect individual Christians to determine His calendar for themselves? Many self-appointed calendar experts each claim that *their* calendar is the right one. Did God intend the calendar to be proclaimed by an authoritative body—or is it “every man for himself?” Increasingly, we see people simply doing what is right in their own eyes. Is God the author of such spiritual anarchy? To whom did God give responsibility for the calendar?

God told Moses: “The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts” (Leviticus 23:2). But who was to do the proclaiming, and what does this mean?

The Hebrew term for convocation is *miqra*, which refers to an officially called or designated assembly. In Numbers 10:2, Moses was told that two silver trumpets were to be made and one of their major purposes was “for the calling [Hebrew *miqra*] of the congregation.” Who was to use those trumpets? Verse 8 explains: “The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets; and these shall be to you as an ordinance forever throughout your generations.”

Verse 10 explains that “in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months...” the priests were to sound the silver trumpets.

The noun *miqra* is derived from the verb *qara*, the verb rendered “proclaim” in Leviticus 23:2 and 23:4. What exactly does it mean? It is the same word used in Genesis 1 where God “called” the light Day and “called” the darkness Night (Genesis 1:5), where He “called” the firmament Heaven (1:8), “called” the dry land Earth and “called” the gathered waters the Seas (1:10).

Later, we learn that God brought before Adam the animals He had created to see what he would call them. “And whatever Adam called [*qara*] each living creature, that was its name” (Genesis 2:19). So we see that *qara* means “to call”—to name or to designate. In Genesis 1 it was God, and in Genesis 2 it was Adam, who did the naming or designating.

How does this relate to the holy days? In Leviticus 23, we learned that a certain group, (“you,” plural) was responsible for naming or designating the days on which the congregation was to assemble before God. Numbers 10 explains that this refers to the priesthood, and shows the means

God gave them to announce the designation of new moons and festival days. It was not an individual matter for each Israelite to arrive at by himself; rather it was a collective matter to be proclaimed by an authoritative body.

But there is more! Most read right over the implications of *who* was to name, or designate, the days that would be considered God’s appointed festivals. The priesthood was given the right to name, or designate, those days—in the same way that God gave Adam the authority to name, or designate, the animals He had created. God gave the priesthood guidelines and principles by which they were to designate those days, but He did not spell out every single detail. He gave them the principles with which they had to make judgments!

It is important to notice the difference between the weekly Sabbath that God gave to mankind, and the annual festivals that He gave to the Church. God did not tell the priesthood that they were responsible to name or designate the weekly Sabbath. God Himself had proclaimed the weekly Sabbath at the end of creation week. Mankind was simply told to “remember” and keep holy the time that God Himself had previously

designated. The annual festivals were different, as Leviticus 23:2 and 23:4 show. While each individual could simply remember to observe as holy the seventh day of every week, this was not possible with the annual festivals. Their exact timing would vary somewhat from year to year, regulated by the principles that God gave Moses in Leviticus 23 and elsewhere. So we see that while the weekly Sabbath is to be remembered by each of us as individuals, the annual festivals are to be named or designated on the calendar each year by an authoritative body. They were never intended to be an individual matter!

If each of us seeks to determine our own calendar, we will end up celebrating the festivals on a variety of days. Yet God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33) nor is He the source of the spiritual anarchy that many so effectively promote today. Paul told the brethren in Colosse that they were not to let any man judge them in matters pertaining to holy days, new moons, or Sabbaths, but rather “the body of Christ”—the Church (Colossians 2:16–17, KJV). The Church has again and again concluded that the current Hebrew calendar, preserved in the Jewish community, is authoritative for Christians today.

### Which Calendar Did Christ Use?

We know from the New Testament that Jesus Christ observed the holy days and festivals commanded in Leviticus 23. Did He do so based upon a calculated calendar such as we use today—one that included the so-called “postponement” rules—or did He use a calendar based solely upon physical sighting of the new crescent? One thing is for sure: Jesus Christ did it correctly! If we know what He did, then all we have to do is to follow His example. But is it possible to know what He did? Absolutely!

The place to go to find the kind of calendar which was authoritatively proclaimed during Jesus’ human lifetime is *not* the Talmud and later rabbinical writings. These documents were written well after the fact, and record history with a Pharisaic bias. Since the Pharisees dominated the Jewish community after the fall of the temple, their traditions came to be considered normative Judaism. The rabbis who compiled the Talmud were their successors, and often sought to read later traditions back into earlier history.

Interestingly, many who claim to reject the Hebrew calendar because they consider it a tradition of the Pharisees have used the Talmud as their source of calendar information and definitions—rather than simply using the Bible itself! While later rabbis tried to harmonize the traditions of an observed calendar (favored by the Pharisees) with the principles of a calculated calendar (preserved by the Sadducee priesthood), the two are not really compatible. Much of the Talmud’s tortured logic relating to the calendar comes from its attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable. However, we are not dependent on the record of the Talmud, or Josephus for that matter, to know what calendar Christ used. We have the authoritative record of the New Testament itself!

From the biblical record, we are able to match three festivals during Christ’s ministry with the days of the week on which they fell. As we will see, these three festival dates are compatible **only** with *one* calendar model—the **calendar used by Jesus Christ thus stands revealed by the New Testament!**

The year of Christ’s crucifixion, and therefore of His final Passover, can be established clearly by correlating the prophecy in Daniel 9 with the historical occurrence described in Ezra 7. Daniel explained that

there would be a time period of 70 prophetic “weeks”—i.e., 490 prophetic “days.” We are told that 69 of these “weeks” (i.e., 483 years) would run from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem until the appearance of the Messiah. Ezra 7 records the decree of King Artaxerxes that begins the count of the prophetic “weeks.”

Secular history makes plain that the Artaxerxes’ seventh year occurred in 458–457BC. The only question is whether or not the author of Ezra-Nehemiah (one book in the Hebrew scriptures) was figuring the years of Artaxerxes’ reign by counting from fall to fall or spring to spring. A careful comparison of Nehemiah 1:1 and 2:1 shows that a fall-to-fall reckoning was used. Nehemiah refers to an event in the month Kislev (December) of the 20th year of Artaxerxes, followed later by an event in the month Nisan (April) in the 20th year of Artaxerxes. The only way that both of these events could have occurred in the king’s 20th year would be if the author was figuring the years of the king’s reign from fall to fall.

This means that when Ezra 7 says that Ezra arrived in Jerusalem with the decree in the late summer (fifth month) during the seventh year of Artaxerxes, this must refer to 457BC. If we come forward 483 years, this brings us to just before the fall festival season of 27AD. This would be when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist and began His three-and-a-half-year ministry—He began in the fall of 27AD and was crucified in the spring of 31AD.

This reference in Ezra gives us a benchmark. We also know from the biblical record, apart from these calendar questions, that Jesus Christ was crucified on a Wednesday and resurrected three days and three

nights later, at the end of the weekly Sabbath. This means that the Passover of 31AD, the scripturally established time of His crucifixion, had to occur on a Wednesday. Additionally, we will see that the day of the week is made plain for two other festival dates. One is the Last Great Day of 30AD, which occurred on a weekly Sabbath. And Scripture shows that the second holy day of Unleavened Bread in 29AD fell on a weekly Sabbath. Now examine how we date these two festivals.

John 7–13 recounts the events of the fall festival period preceding Jesus' final Passover. A careful reading also shows that most of the events of John 8–10 happened on the Last Great Day. Jesus' words in the temple during the evening of this day are recorded in John 7:37–39. At verse 53, Jesus and His disciples went to the Mount of Olives for the night, returning to the temple early the next morning—the daylight portion of the Last Great Day (John 8:1–2).

If we simply read on through the next chapters, we find that the woman taken in adultery and the healing of the blind man both occurred on that same day. From John 9 we already knew that the blind man was healed on an annual Sabbath; John 9:14, using the definite article with its Sabbath reference, states plainly that it was also a weekly Sabbath, which is why such an issue was made of the healing.

John gives us the basis for reconstructing the chronology of Christ's ministry, noting Jesus' words and actions on several specific festival occasions. We have already seen that John the Baptist baptized Christ in the fall of 27AD, just when Daniel's prophecy showed the Messiah should appear. Six months later, at the Passover season of 28AD, He suddenly came to the temple and began His public ministry (John 2). When

we carefully read John 6–13, we see that this is a continuous sequence of the last year in Jesus' life, from the Passover of 30AD to the Passover of 31AD. Therefore, the only Passover not commented on in John's gospel is that of 29AD—and the events of that year's festival season are adequately covered in the other three Gospel accounts.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all record the disciples plucking ears of grain to eat as they walked with

with a later incident described as “another Sabbath” (Luke 6:6) when Jesus healed the man with the withered hand. This phrase, taken together with the points made in Mark 2:27–28—that the Sabbath was made for man and that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath—emphasizes that this was a weekly Sabbath day. Luke is the only writer who adds the detail that this took place on the second holy day of Unleavened Bread.

**If each of us seeks to determine our own calendar, we will end up celebrating the festivals on a variety of days. Yet God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33) nor is He the source of the spiritual anarchy that many so effectively promote today.**

Jesus through the grain fields. The placement of this incident—in Matthew 12:1–8, Mark 2:23–28 and Luke 6:1–4—shows that this occurred early in His ministry, not during the Passover the year before His crucifixion. This only leaves the Passover season of 29AD.

How do we know that this incident occurred at the Passover season? Luke 6:1 makes this clear by describing that it happened “on the second Sabbath after the first.” What does that mean? The Greek phrase used is *en sabbato deuteropropo*, which literally means “the second Sabbath of first rank.” This expression can only refer to the seventh day of Unleavened Bread, the second Sabbath of first rank occurring in the year.

The rest of the story—contained in the accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke—shows that this was also a weekly Sabbath. All three writers link the event in the grain fields

Do these facts provide evidence for the kind of calendar that Jesus recognized in His lifetime? Using today's calculated Hebrew calendar, notice what the dates of these events in Christ's ministry would be. Remember that today, leap years are years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17 and 19 of a 19 year cycle instead of the earlier 2, 5, 7, 10, 13, 16 and 18. How do the dates from the calculated calendar compare to what would have been obtained by sightings of the new crescent moon?

In 29AD, the last day of Unleavened Bread would have occurred on Sabbath, April 23, according to our traditionally calculated Hebrew calendar. This date results from applying one of the postponement rules, since the *molad* (or new moon) of Tishri that year occurred after noon and the reckoning of Tishri 1 would therefore have been postponed to the next day. This is the only way that the last holy day

of Unleavened Bread could have come on a weekly Sabbath in 29AD. By contrast, using computer-generated models to determine the timing based upon the observable new moon in Judea, physical sighting would have caused the last holy day of Unleavened Bread to fall on Sunday, April 24 in 29AD.

As for the Last Great Day in 30AD, calculations based on the traditional Hebrew calendar show that it would have occurred on Sabbath, October 7. No postponement rules would have been involved. But, significantly, the Last Great Day would have occurred on the weekly Sabbath *if and only if* the calendar were based upon the calculated *molad* (the mean conjunction), **not** the visible sighting of the new crescent. This is made clear by examining the computer model for the observable new moon in 30AD. The first visible crescent could have been seen from Jerusalem **no earlier** than Sunday night, September 17, thus making Trumpets Monday, September 18 and the Last Great Day Monday, October 9 by that reckoning.

In 31AD, the calculated date for Nisan 1, according to the traditional Hebrew calendar, was Thursday, April 12. This would have occurred **only** if the postponement rule that did not allow the Feast of Trumpets to come on a Friday had been in effect. The calculated *molad* of Tishri came on a Friday in 31AD, and only by having postponed Tishri 1 to a Sabbath would Passover in 31AD have come on a Wednesday. It is true that the observable new moon of Nisan would have also been seen on Thursday, April 12, thus coinciding with the calculated date for Nisan 1. However, we have just seen that the dates of the other holy days mentioned during Christ's ministry only coincide with the proper day of the

week when they are figured based upon a calculated *molad* rather than an observable crescent. As we saw earlier, the biblical calendar guidelines require calculation rather than physical sighting.

There is one additional point regarding the timing of Passover in 31AD. Passover would have come on April 25 **only** if 31AD were counted as an intercalary year. Otherwise, the Passover would have fallen a month earlier—on Monday, March 26! Unless the priests were following a fixed cycle of intercalary years, there would have been no reason to observe Passover in April rather than in March of that year! The equinox was March 23 at that time, and there would have certainly been some ripe grain for the priests to offer on the day of the Wavesheaf—March 28 by Pharisee reckoning and Sunday, April 1 by Sadducee reckoning.

The timing of three festivals during Christ's ministry is clearly shown in the New Testament. The Passover of 31AD would have occurred on a Wednesday **only** if there were a fixed calendar cycle making 31AD an intercalary year. A calculated calendar would have required Tishri 1 to be postponed from Friday to Saturday for the dating to work out properly. And the Last Great Day of 30AD would only have come on a weekly Sabbath if a calculated calendar were used, though no postponements within that calendar would have been necessary that year. As for the last holy day of Unleavened Bread in 29AD, it would have come on a weekly Sabbath **only** if a calculated calendar were used and the noon postponement rule was in effect. Clearly, the Gospel accounts show that these holy days occurred in a way that could **only have happened** if a calculated calendar using the postponement rules had been in effect in the time of Jesus Christ.

## A Calendar for the Church Today

The rules of the current Hebrew calendar—the calendar traditionally used by the Church of God—are based upon Biblical principles. These rules, as we have seen, can be deduced directly from scripture and do not depend on Talmudic traditions and legends. Furthermore, Scripture clearly reveals that God assigned to an authoritative body, anciently the priesthood, responsibility to name or to designate the annual festivals. This was never intended to be a matter of private interpretation. In addition, we have the example of Jesus Christ Himself, as given in the Gospel accounts. The calendar He used is far more in accord with the one the Church uses today than are any of the alternative models that have been proposed.

The Church has clearly and consistently judged that Christians should use the received Hebrew calendar in observing God's festivals. It is interesting that we have historical witness and testimony, from no less an authority than Roman emperor Constantine, that three centuries after Christ's crucifixion, the true Church was still reckoning its festival dates by the same calendar used by the Jewish community. At the Council of Nicea, held in 325AD, the timing of the Paschal festival was discussed (the early Catholics were replacing Passover with Easter, but were still using the scriptural name—the Greek term *pascha*).

Note some excerpts of Constantine's decree as preserved by the early Church historian Eusebius. He wrote that it seemed, "a most unworthy thing that we should follow the custom of the Jews in the celebration of this most holy solemnity... rejecting the practice of this people, we should perpetuate to all future ages the celebration of this

# Counting Pentecost 2001

**The Days of Unleavened Bread begin on a Sunday this year, and end on a weekly Sabbath. This configuration of the spring holy days does not occur very often. Whenever it does, it raises questions for some regarding the counting of Pentecost.**

Leviticus 23:15 instructs us to count Pentecost beginning with the Sunday of the Wavesheaf, and going forward seven Sabbaths until the day after the seventh Sabbath. The question thus arises—which Sunday is the Wavesheaf this year? Is it the Sunday that is the first holy day of Unleavened Bread, or is it the Sunday following the last holy day?

The answer is clear when we look not only at the instructions for counting Pentecost, but also at a specific biblical example of a year when the spring holy days fell just as they do in 2001. God does not leave His people having to guess at how to obey Him in this matter.

In Leviticus 23:6–8, Moses gave the people God's instructions for observing the Days of Unleavened Bread. In verses 10–14, he explained something additional they were to do, after entering the Promised Land, when they had crops to harvest. They were told to wave before God, on the morrow after the Sabbath, an omer of the first ripe grain. Only after this ceremony were they permitted to eat the newly harvested grain from their fields (v. 14). Naturally we may ask—when the first holy day of Unleavened Bread came on a Sunday, would that day also be the day of the Wavesheaf?

The answer is found in Joshua 5, which records the first Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread that Israel celebrated after crossing the Jordan River and

entering the Promised Land. From verse 10 we learn that the Israelites observed the Passover on the plains of Jericho. Verse 11 states, “And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain on the very same day.”

There are only two alternatives. In Leviticus 23:10–14, God gave Israel clear instructions about what to do after entering the Promised Land. We must either conclude that Joshua disobeyed this instruction from God, or we must conclude that he followed the instructions that Moses had recorded.

If he followed them—which he clearly did—then the day after the Passover that year was also the day of the Wavesheaf. The Israelites could only have begun to eat grain after the High Priest waved the omer that morning. Of course, the day after the Passover is *always* the first holy day of Unleavened Bread. Therefore, the first holy day of Unleavened Bread could only have come on a Sunday that year. It was also celebrated as the day of the Wavesheaf. The year Israel entered the Promised Land must have had the same calendar configuration that we have in 2001.

Pentecost for this year thus comes exactly seven weeks after the first holy day of Unleavened Bread. It will be celebrated on Sunday, May 27, just as God's word instructs.

rite, in a more legitimate order... Let us then have nothing in common with the most hostile rabble of the Jews... let us withdraw ourselves, my much honored brethren, from that most odious fellowship. It is indeed in the highest degree preposterous, that they should superciliously vaunt themselves, that truly without their instruction, we cannot properly observe this rite... [they continue] wandering in the grossest error, instead of duly reforming their calcu-

lation...” (*A Historical View of the Council of Nicea*, Eusebius, pp. 52–53). Constantine, like many self-styled experts today, considered himself more knowledgeable about the calendar than were the Jews, and asserted that they should reform *their* calculations. Constantine's attack was aimed, however, not at influencing the Jews, but rather at those Christians who followed the Jewish calendar in determining the time of the Passover. The true Church was

not following its own calendar model; rather it was using the same model that Jesus Himself had followed—the one preserved and used by the Jews!

Is the Hebrew calendar valid for the Church today? Absolutely! It adheres to the revealed guidelines of Scripture, was proclaimed by authorities accepted by Jesus Christ Himself and was kept by the Church of God from the beginning. For what more could we ask? ☐

# MILITARY SERVICE, THE DRAFT AND CHRISTIANITY

## *From the heart of a father to his son*

By Don E. Haney

### **Dear son,**

One of a parent's worst nightmares is the thought of losing a child in war. Many have made that sacrifice. But should Christian men be sacrificed in that way, for this world's armies and this world's wars? Our understanding of prophecy—the current events and coming wars in the Middle East and around the world—makes of special concern the possibility of the draft being resumed. I do not wish to see you or any of your friends in the Church caught unawares.

You and your friends who have grown up in God's Church will soon need to decide for yourselves, as adults, what you believe—and act upon it. Is this your parents' religion, or do you also believe the word of God as spelled out in the Bible? Christ said: "My Kingdom is not of this world. If My Kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight" (John 18:36). Will you be a servant of God, or of this world's governments? Are we citizens of His Kingdom, or of this world? What does God's word teach concerning Christ's disciples participating in this world's armies? If you are ever drafted to serve, how would you respond—and do you know how your nation evaluates conscientious objectors?

A review of the Old Testament will quickly show you many examples of God commanding His people to go into battle. We find God's instructions for induction into the military, and many examples of Israel's military conquests. Some of the most righteous men and women in the Bible were involved in military battles with God's blessings! Since we know God changes not (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), and since we in the Church of God continue to practice God's laws and believe in the Old and New Testaments, why does God's Church believe and teach that military service today is wrong for Christians?

This is an important subject to understand, and understand well, because the day will likely come when many young men (and possibly some women, as nearly happened in World War II) will face the draft. Their sincerity, genuineness, religious beliefs *and practices* will be called into question by a military panel of judges. To determine your conscientious objector status, that panel may examine your knowledge of Church teaching on military service, and your personal practice of what the Church teaches.

So we need to begin by finding in God's word His instruction regarding military service for Christians today.

Then we will cover some information on how the United States' draft process works.

God in times past instructed the Kingdom of Israel—His chosen nation—to go to war, and made provisions for His armies. Why then does God's Church today teach that Christians are not to go to war or to participate in this world's militaries? The key is in Christ's own words: "Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here'" (John 18:36).

Christ's Kingdom is not of this world. We are told to pray, "thy Kingdom come," but it is not here yet. Christ said He was going to prepare a place for us, and when He *comes again*, there we would be with Him (John 14:2–3). Until then, God's Kingdom remains in heaven! Luke calls God's Kingdom the "Kingdom of Heaven" because *that is where it currently is!* But when He returns to earth, we shall "reign with Him on earth" (Revelation 5:10). To reign means to participate in a governmental capacity. Scripture refers to the saints judging the nations "to execute on them the written judgment" when Christ returns to earth (see Psalm 149). They will be part of the "army" of God. So why is military service today wrong for a Christian? Because today's militaries are not God's—they are not of the Kingdom to which we must commit our allegiance!

Some will mention Peter's use of a sword. "And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. But Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?'" (Matthew 26:51–54). John's account makes it clear that it was Peter who cut off the high priest's ear with a sword.

Notice Christ's instructions regarding his disciples' use of the sword for defense. "Put your sword in its place," He said. Put it away! "He who lives by the sword, will die by the sword." Christ went on to remind the disciples that God was His source of protection, and that He could call on twelve legions of angels for protection if necessary. When Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, Christ healed the servant and told Peter to put the sword away. That is just not the way Christians are

to live! Even King David understood that it was not wise or godly to trust in weapons for defense: “For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. But you have saved us from our enemies, and have put them to shame that hated us” (Psalm 44:6–7).

Christians are not to fight, nor should they support a fighting establishment! Christ said we are to turn the other cheek awaiting His vengeance and His Kingdom—when God will again lead His armies like He did for Moses and David.

God inspired the Apostle Paul to write: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20). And again: “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ...” (2 Corinthians 5:20). A Christian’s “citizenship” is not of this world. Christian “citizenship” is in the Kingdom of God, which is currently in heaven but will again be on earth at the return of our King, Jesus Christ!

Think about it, son! Paul called us “ambassadors for Christ” our King. An ambassador lives in a foreign land as a representative of his own nation’s government or kingdom. Ambassadors do not go to war or participate in the politics or armies of their host nations. They are foreigners! They represent the nation in which their citizenship resides! If necessary they would support their own military, but never the military of a foreign kingdom. No wonder, when our King returns, we will then go to war on His behalf, but not today! Today, He tells us to turn the other cheek—not to fight! (Matthew 5:39–41) We are told to be peacemakers. We are told to do whatever Christ our King commands us! The day will come when Christ our King will command us to fight with Him to put down the armies that fight Him at His return (see Psalm 149; Revelation 19), but not today. Today we are to represent Him as ambassadors, foreigners, peacemakers and citizens of the Kingdom of God. Today we are commanded *not to fight* or be part of this world’s military establishments.

What then of the many Old Testament examples of God’s servants, such as King David and Moses, going to war? God was establishing the Kingdom of Israel as His own special people. God’s very presence was evident among them as a people—in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple. God told them when to go out and when to come in. God acted as their Commander-in-Chief, because Israel was a type of God’s Kingdom on earth. God had such a close relationship with Israel that He compared it to a marriage covenant. Israel as a nation was God’s Kingdom, and God was their supreme King. But the time came when, because of Israel’s disobedience and spiritual harlotry, God put Israel away and separated Himself from that marriage (see Jeremiah 8).

When righteous David faced Goliath, how did he refer to Israel’s armies facing the Philistines? “And David spoke to the men that stood by him, saying, ‘What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach

from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should *defy the armies of the living God?*” (1 Samuel 17:26).

David called the armies of God’s nation Israel “the armies of the living God.” They were *God’s armies—God’s citizens*—of the Kingdom headed by God! That is not the case today! God has not changed! God is and always has been a peacemaker. But He will make war when necessary, and then His servants will fight. That was the case in Israel, and it will be the case at the beginning of the millennium for spiritual Israel—but *only as God’s citizens*, under God’s rule and righteous command—in a Kingdom that is wholly God’s, to usher in eternal peace!

Neither the Church of God nor I disrespect the military. As ambassadors for Christ, that is not our right or job. On the contrary, I truly appreciate the dedicated service many men and women in uniform have given us. Your grandfather and your uncle—my father and brother—were both Navy men. Many have given their lives in pursuit of peace. We do not judge them. Not all now have the understanding or faith of Christ. Not all now are Christian ambassadors. The nations of this world are not yet ready to submit to Christ as King, nor do they understand God’s ways. As such, they do not look to God for protection the way a Christian is supposed to. Their time to be called of God will yet come. So we should not be anti-establishment or against the military. But neither is it right for us, as Christians, to serve in it!

I have explained the scriptural basis for our conscientious objection. Now let me explain to you how the draft applies to U.S. citizens, and how the Selective Service determines conscientious objector status.

The U.S. draft system has been based on a lottery, from which individuals are selected and categorized. Those classified 1A are immediately available for military service. Others may receive deferments for hardship, while some are given exemptions. Once the Selective Service System finds an individual “qualified for induction,” he has the opportunity to file a claim for exemption, deferment or conscientious objection.

One claiming conscientious objector status will be required to appear before a local board to explain his beliefs. The Selective Service explains, “He may provide written documentation or include personal appearances by people he knows who can *attest* to his claims. His written statement might explain: how he arrived at his beliefs, and the *influence his beliefs have on how he lives his life*.... The local board will decide whether to grant or deny a CO classification based on the *evidence* a registrant has presented.... A man’s reasons for not wanting to participate in a war must not be based on politics, expediency or self-interest. In general, the man’s *lifestyle* prior to making his claim *must reflect his current claims*.”

In short, the Selective Service may *investigate* and look for *proof* that a man’s claim of conscientious objection is

reflected by his conduct. If a person claims to be a religious man of Christ and an active member of the Church of God, his life must reflect that. If it does not, he may find his claim as a conscientious objector denied! Further, in order to make a claim as a conscientious objector on religious grounds, a person must *understand* and be able to explain his beliefs before the board (or the National Appeal Board if appeal becomes necessary). What *do* you believe, and does your lifestyle today reflect your beliefs? As an adult, you will need to know what God's Church teaches, and what you believe regarding military service by Christians. The above is just a brief overview; you may want to review the Selective Service Web site at <http://www.sss.gov> for further information concerning what will happen if the United States government reestablishes the draft.

We know Christ prophesied that the time of the end would be filled with wars and rumors of wars. His Church understands that the time of "Jacob's Trouble" will be riddled with wars—wars that "Jacob" will ultimately lose. Modern day Israel, and the whole world, will suffer the wrath of the Great Tribulation. So we can expect the time will come when the U.S. government will reinstate the draft. Can a true Christian prepare and protect himself from being drafted into scripturally forbidden military service? **Yes! Practice what you believe today!** Let your light shine! Those who suddenly decide to become "Christian" at the last minute may find their conscientious objector claims denied by a military board. Let your life, your regular Sabbath attendance, your conduct and convictions—accompanied by a genuine understanding of your doctrinal position—be known *today* by way of your living example. Then you will also have your advocate, Jesus Christ, and your faith in Him to aid you as a faithful servant when the time comes.

Several years ago I spoke to an Army recruiter who was giving a seminar on conscientious objectors. He explained that the conscientious objector review board would seek to find proof that the man in question really practiced his religion. If a man claims to believe the doctrines of a particular church, the board may seek proof of regular attendance by asking the church to provide attendance records. The board may investigate how—and how long—he has practiced and lived the doctrines of the religion to which he claims to adhere. The board may interview others in his church, his coworkers, schoolmates, friends and anyone else who can either confirm or deny his claim of conscientious objection on religious grounds.

Son, if you and your friends wish to claim conscientious objector status in a time of a draft, you need to be ***practicing and living that religion today!*** Your consistent adherence to all of God's ways NOW is your proof that

your conscientious objector claims are not self-serving! You know that the Sabbath is a sign (Exodus 31:13). Do you keep it? Really keep it? If so, that could be strong evidence in your favor as a conscientious objector in a time of a draft. But please let me be frank: if you claim to be a conscientious objector and believe the doctrines of the Church of God, but you are lacking in the outward signs of your Christian commitment—your Sabbath and other Holy Day keeping, Church attendance, tithing, forgiving and many other outwardly visible Christian practices—you could be denied conscientious objector status, and perhaps rightly so. Let our faith be reflected by our works (James 2:18). I would not wish to see any suffer, for lack of being warned.

You may wish to take some additional practical steps. U.S. law requires all males to register with Selective Service within 30 days of turning 18. But a clear note made on the registration card, indicating that you are a conscientious objector, can later help to prove that your objection was not the last minute thought of a coward.

You may also wish to study further the scriptures regarding this matter. Then write down your beliefs regarding military service, and have the paper notarized and dated. Mail to yourself a copy of what you have written, and mail another to someone you trust. (I sent mine to a minister/friend and to myself more than 25 years ago.) When you and your friend receive your letters, file them away **without opening them**. Then your statement will be recorded, postmark dated, as proof of your convictions long before any draft.

But above all *live God's ways today*. The blessings and promises are tremendous—including protection in the hour of trial that is coming to test the whole world—the Great Tribulation (Revelation 3:10; Luke 21:36)!

The Sixth Commandment says: "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). When God ordered His judges to carry out a sentence, or when God ordered His armies to carry out His righteous cause in battle that was God's prerogative. To kill under those circumstances was not murder. Remember: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Hebrews 10:30; see Romans 13:4). God says we are to love our enemies, be forgiving, be patient awaiting the return of our King and preach the Gospel as faithful ambassadors of Christ (Ephesians 6:19–20)! I warn you of these things now because "forewarned is forearmed," and because I love you. Son, God's ways are simply the greatest. But if we want His protection and blessings, we must be practicing His way of life, as expressed through His Son and His Laws, in how we live. If we do, our light will shine as proof of our Christianity. A governmental requirement of "practicing what we preach," to obtain conscientious objector status, seems reasonable and scriptural. You *can* do it!

**Love, Dad**

# ARE YOU *DOKIMOS*?

By Dexter B. Wakefield

**Y**ou have probably noticed that the U.S. Treasury Department has changed the design of several of its notes. The \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50 and \$100 bills now incorporate new features designed to discourage counterfeiting, which has become a major problem in recent years. Some of the changes include a watermark and a hidden strip of print that can only be seen when the bill is held up to the light.

## Is It the Real Thing or Not?

The problem of maintaining a reliable currency is an ancient one. In ancient Greece and Rome, gold and silver coins were often filed or shaved to remove part of their content. These filings could then be sold or made into counterfeit coins for a considerable profit, but the shaved, deficient, coins would be left in circulation. Consumers could get stuck with the counterfeit or shaved coins if they were not careful, just as we can get stuck with a counterfeit bill today.

The Greeks had a word for tested, full-value coins. They were said to be *dokimos*. The word was often applied to metals or ores that had been certified as genuine, but it was also used to describe a *person* who was proven and known to be trustworthy. “In one century, more than eighty laws were passed in Athens, to stop the practice of shaving down the coins then in circulation. But some money-changers were men of integrity, who would accept no counterfeit money. They were men of honor who put only genuine full-weighted money into circulation. Such men were called ‘dokimos’ or ‘approved’” (*Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*).

## A Word Study

This word *dokimos* and related forms such as *dokimon* and *dokimazo* are frequently used—about 40 times—in the New Testament. A brief word study can be very helpful as we encounter these terms translated variously into English as:

- Accepted, particularly of coins and money.
- To test, to examine, to prove, to scrutinize (to see whether a thing is genuine or not) as in metals.

- To recognize as genuine after examination, to approve, to deem worthy.
- Proving, trial, tried character.

In New Testament usage, *dokimos* generally refers to the genuineness of a follower of Christ; to a Christian approved and certified as the genuine article. A *dokimos* Christian is definitely not a counterfeit. Some examples of these scriptures are: “For not he who commends himself is approved [*dokimas*], but whom the Lord commends” (2 Corinthians 10:18). “Greet Apelles, approved [*dokimon*] in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus” (Romans 16:10).

## Counterfeits

The Adversary, in addition to being called the Great Deceiver, might also be called the Great Counterfeiter. His specialty is creating fakes that have an appearance and form similar to the genuine article, but that lack its substance. For instance, his counterfeit ministers present themselves as ministers of righteousness, but in fact are wolves among the flock. “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds” (2 Corinthians 11:13–15, RSV).

Jesus Christ is very interested in who is genuine and who is not, and He is quite capable of separating the wheat from the chaff. “His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:12). *How can we be confident that we are the real thing—and that we will remain so?*

Since the earliest days of the Church, doctrinal error has caused brethren to stumble. Paul cautioned the Ephesians, “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (Ephesians 4:14). Paul gave this admonition in the context

**Are You *Dokimos*?**  
*continues on page 20*

# Just for Youth: Is God Calling You?

*What are some common misconceptions that second generation Christians may have about conversion?*

By Rod McNair

**C**onversion is often a confusing topic for young people who grow up in the Church. Baptism can seem like an overwhelming commitment. It can seem like a commitment that only applies to parents, somehow “fake” for a second or third-generation Christian. And it can seem like a deterrent to “having fun” and “experiencing life.” Each of these perceptions can hinder you from taking that first step towards the Kingdom of God. But they need not do so.

## Thinking About Conversion Can Be “Scary”

You may have read in the Bible that true Christians will be persecuted for their faith—some even physically (Matthew 10:22). True Christians might even have to turn their backs on family members to follow Christ (Matthew 10:37). On top of that, you are probably approaching some of the biggest decisions of your life. Baptism, college, career and marriage—commitments cannot get much bigger than that! Big commitments can be scary, and they can frighten a person into doing nothing!

But God does not want you to be overwhelmed by fear of commitment. He wants to give you “power... love... a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7), which comes through His Spirit (v. 6). You can have access to that power right now, to work with you. Upon your own conversion and baptism, God’s Spirit will be even more powerful in your life, because it will be *in you*. God says fear causes torment, but “love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). Face your fears—and your decisions. Ask

God to help you make those decisions, through His Spirit. Think of the conversion process as learning to exercise that Spirit, as you begin to develop a personal relationship with your loving Father in heaven.

God wants you to look to Him as your provider and counselor. He wants you to see Him as your protector, ready to come to your aid when you need Him and call out for Him. Listen to how David described his relationship with God. “In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears... He bowed the heavens also, and came down with darkness under His feet. And He rode upon a cherub, and flew; He flew upon the wings of the wind... He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the LORD was my support” (Psalm 18:6–18). God is a powerful and caring ally to have on your side!

Do not be scared of conversion—God wants to “strengthen [and] settle you” (1 Peter 5:10). Even though baptism may yet be a few years off, beginning a relationship with Him right now will start to give you the courage to face adult issues and adult decisions. It is exactly what you need right now and in the years just ahead of you!

## Conversion Is “Just for My Parents”

Some youth in the Church have the misconception that conversion is just for their parents. Nothing could

be further from the truth. *God works through families*, and intends the faith of the fathers to be passed down to the children. God even gave a specific command for parents to teach their children this way of life, proving that it is not just for parents, but also for children. “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:6–7). One of the focuses of the end-time Work is to “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers...” (Malachi 4:6).

Of course, baptism is not for children, and that is why God’s Church does not teach “infant baptism.” Young people should wait to be baptized until they are mature enough to make this lifetime commitment. Baptism requires deep repentance and a commitment of lifelong obedience—both of which are adult decisions. However, that does not mean a young person cannot be *thinking* about baptism, and *preparing* for baptism by developing a relationship with God.

There are examples in the Bible of second and even third-generation Christians. Timothy was reared in the Church by his mother and grandmother (both solid, faithful members). “I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also” (2 Timothy 1:5). Paul encouraged Timothy to “continue in the

things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that *from childhood* you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:14–15).

Timothy did not consider being raised in the Church a handicap. For him it was an asset. He did not have to “unlearn” all the things that first-generation Christians had to. He just had to recall and retain what he had learned, which “made him wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

So do not fall for the trap of thinking that conversion is just something for your parents. It is for you! Did you know that God inspired Peter to speak directly about you in his first Pentecost sermon? Peter said: “For the promise [of the Holy Spirit] is *to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off*, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39). Claim that promise—it is not just for parents, but for you as well!

### **My Calling Might Be “Fake”**

Another concern for some in the Church is the sense that their conversion “would not be real.” You might hear them say, “but what my parents went through at their conversion was really dramatic!” Does a conversion have to be dramatic to be real?

Sometimes we fall into the “road to Damascus” mindset. Anything less than God striking us down with blindness and a bright light just is not real conversion! Notice Saul’s (Paul’s) story: “And as he (Saul) journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’... So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord,

what do You want me to do?’ And the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do’” (Acts 9:3–6).

Are you waiting for that to happen?

Would anything less seem not as real? Your parents probably have stories about how, at conversion, a “light

**Do not fall for the trap of thinking that conversion is just something for your parents. It is for you! Did you know that God inspired Peter to speak directly about you in his first Pentecost sermon?**

turned on” in their mind. Or, “suddenly it all made sense,” and they “for the first time understood what they were reading.” But it has not happened that way for you, right? If you are like most young people in the Church, you have been sitting in services most of your life, listening, learning and hearing God’s Word expounded. And it probably already makes sense! God probably does not need to use a dramatic miracle like lightning from heaven to open up your mind. You most likely understand already! Through your parents’ conversion, God is working with you, already, in a special way (1 Corinthians 7:14). And through that “sanctification” you already have access to God and His Spirit, and probably already understand His Laws and His Truth to a certain extent.

So do not expect a bright light from heaven to signal your conversion. That most likely will not happen! There is an interesting Scripture on how God works, in 1 Kings 19:11–12. It reads: “The LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the

earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.” God chose to speak to Elijah, in that instance, not through awesome miracles, but with a “still, small voice.” Are you listening for that “still, small voice?” God is probably already in the process of open-

ing your mind—all you have to do is listen for and accept the call.

### **“I Will Miss Out on All the ‘Fun’”**

Another misconception that some have is that if they commit to God as young adults, they will miss out on “experiencing life.” Some might say, “All those traumatic experiences that my elders got to experience (and repent of)—why can’t I experience them, too?”

That line of reasoning shows a very dangerous mindset, which will only cause grief and heartaches later on. In most every congregation there are adults—*who were reared in the Church*—who could tell you stories of how they *wished they had listened* instead of “going out and having their fun.” Many have made life-changing mistakes, and have repented bitterly.

Are you really missing out on fun by developing a relationship with God now? God does not look at it that way. Notice what He says: “How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowl-

**Is God Calling You?**

*continues on page 21*

# Are You Hospitable?

By William E. Schutz

**M**any people regularly offer and accept hospitality, but one could ask: do we really *need* to be hospitable? Should hospitality be considered essential?

Webster defines “hospitable” as: “given to generous and cordial reception of guests; offering a pleasant or sustaining environment.” We see examples of such conduct in Scripture.

The Apostle Paul told the Roman Christians in Romans 12: “I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (v. 1). A better translation here could be, “which is your spiritual service.” Your spiritual service is what you do in service to God—for a Christian, continually worshipping and devoting one’s life to God. “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (v. 2). Paul shows various aspects of this spiritual service: “rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer, distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality” (vv. 12–13). Here “hospitality” comes from the Greek *philonexia*, meaning “to entertain strangers.”

The Apostle Peter said: “Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:9–10). Here hospitality is *philoxenos*, fond of guests, given to hospitality.

From a purely human level, we need to be hospitable. But is there a higher purpose for which Christ is preparing us? Revelation 19:9 says “And he said to me, ‘Write, ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” And he said unto me, ‘These are the true sayings of God.’”

The marriage supper is one of the first experiences we, as sons and daughters of God, will share together with Christ at His return. Through God’s hospitality, the Father, Christ and the family bride will be able to get to know one another and plan for eternity. We are *called* to this supper now. Should we be practicing hospitality now so that we will be experienced and know how to handle ourselves then? Think about it.

Jesus told the disciples at the Passover meal: “And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed

one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29–30). Note that the verse *first* states that they would eat and drink at Christ’s table, *then* that they would sit on thrones and judge Israel. God is hospitable.

We are to be kings and priests. Kings govern and priests teach, and to be successful at these jobs we must know hospitality. Hospitality comes from your heart, but it must also be learned. Practice perfects the “art” of hospitality.

We are to grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior. Even in today’s world, a major role of presidents and kings is entertaining, and being entertained, with grace, ease and dignity.

Christ taught that a warm environment is needed to teach, but also to hear, learn and absorb what is being taught. “In those days the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said to them, ‘I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way for some of them come from afar’” (Mark 8:1–3). Compassion is sympathetic consciousness of others distress, with a desire to alleviate it.

Jesus had compassion on the multitude. There was a need. Did Jesus say “be warmed and filled” and send them on their way? No! He was hospitable. They not only had something to eat, they were filled and there was food left over (vv. 6–9). Jesus was given to hospitality, and did not complain about doing this as part of His work.

Accountability is a must in servant leadership. Is Christ, the true servant, accountable? You had better believe He is! There was a need for hospitality and He was hospitable. Do we ever doubt that the sun will rise tomorrow? No! God and Christ take accountability for their actions and always fulfill their responsibilities. We should be doing the same, raising our Christianity to a godly level, to *agape* love, or outgoing concern for others.

Notice what happened after Christ’s resurrection: “Then as soon as they [some of the Apostles] had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid it, and bread.... Jesus said to them, ‘Bring of the fish which you have just caught.’... Jesus said to them, ‘Come and eat breakfast.’ Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, ‘Who are You?’—knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish” (John 21:9–13).

When they had dined, Jesus taught Simon Peter. Notice: they ate first; then were ready for important instructions regarding the Church. The time for instruction was right. Christ was the host, and He was generous, showing hospitality.

Hospitality is so fundamental to forming and maintaining good relationships and teaching, that it is one of the *requirements* for all ministers (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8). An elder must be given to hospitality.

Hospitality unifies. “Then those that gladly received His word were baptized: and that day about three thousand souls were added to them” (Acts 2:42). Now notice what happened: “And [what did they do] they continued [first] steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” [secondly] and fellowship, [thirdly] in the breaking of the bread and in prayers.... So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart” (vv. 43–46). There was a spirit of unity through doctrinal agreement, fellowship and hospitality which produces joy, one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. We need to exercise hospitality! We are a family and we must be bonding with God and each other.

“Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for by doing some have unwittingly entertained angels” (Hebrews 13:1–2). Notice the word “entertained”—*philoxenos* in the Greek—indicating hospitality “entertaining strangers.” So we ought to practice brotherly love in entertaining or lodging Christian brethren.

## Gaining Wisdom

(continued from page 3)

yes, if you *cry out* for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:1–6).

Again, God’s inspired Word instructs us: “Wisdom is the principal thing; *therefore get WISDOM*. And in all your getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she will promote you; she will bring you honor, when you embrace her” (Proverbs 4:7–8).

As I have said, please learn to carefully *think through* all the pros

and cons before making any important decisions. *Get the facts*. Think. Meditate. Consider not just the immediate but also the *long range RESULTS* of your decisions. How will they affect *others*? How will they affect your ability to serve God and your brethren over the long haul? Is your decision really what *Jesus Christ* would do in the same situation?

Of course, a vital part of wisdom is learning to *seek* and to *ACT ON* wise “counsel”! Proverbs 19:20 tells us, “*LISTEN to COUNSEL*.”

Again, God instructs, “Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established” (Proverbs 15:22). Ask yourself, “Do I systematically *seek* and *ACT on* wise counsel from a fair number of sound, objective and

In Genesis 18, Abraham showed hospitality to Christ and the angels. Right after this meal, Jesus revealed to Abraham the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham was able to communicate his thoughts to Christ towards his nephew Lot. Hospitality gives us a chance to really let our inner feelings be known and understood, generating the right atmosphere to build unity.

Now read Christ’s own words about the judgment at the end of the age (Matthew 25:31–35). It is important to understand the meaning of the phrase “you took me in.” In Greek this phrase indicates “to entertain, hospitality, to take in.” We should seriously think about what happens to those not interested in doing these things, including those not hospitable to others in need (vv. 41–43).

Christ also says that when we make a dinner or a supper we are to call, or invite to these dinners, the poor and maimed, the lame and the blind—not just our friends, family and business acquaintances (Luke 14:12–14). Christian hospitality focuses on the guests and not ourselves. It is servant based.

We have been given the main ingredient, the Holy Spirit, to become one with others, as God and Christ are one. We need to use hospitality to move this process along. Surely Christ will not marry a divided bride.

In our quest to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, let us be sure that hospitality becomes a way of life—and that we practice it without grudging or murmuring, to produce joy and good. ☐

experienced individuals? Or do I just try to find some one or two people who *agree with me already* and only listen to *their* advice?”

Brethren, the book of Proverbs is literally FILLED with *wisdom*. I urge all of you to *study this book!* Go through it carefully over and over. Ask God to help you understand and apply its teachings. As future kings and priests, you and I need WISDOM!

With God’s help, and with the practice of *seeking wisdom* in the right way, we may all develop—through God’s Spirit—the ability to properly administer AWESOME responsibilities in the age to come. Christ is working *with us* toward this end. He will help us and guide us. *But we must do our part!* ☐

## The Bible Code: What Enthusiasts Overlook

(continued from page 6)

“the first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him” (Proverbs 18:17). Solomon also wrote, “in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22). Books that promote the Bible code make it sound like an astounding, airtight discovery. Yet when you take the time to read books and articles that critique the research methods and conclusions of code promoters (getting a multitude of counsel) an entirely different picture emerges—one that has some pretty big and dangerous holes.

Jesus admonished His disciples to “be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16). We cannot afford to accept and believe just any book or author who is out to prove that God inspired the Bible. We must be cautious and carefully evaluate what is being said.

One final lesson is that we need to know and understand what the Bible *actually says*. Paul admonished Timothy to “be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, *rightly dividing the word of truth*. But shun profane and idle babblings” (2 Timothy 2:15–16). Jesus warned numerous times that widespread religious deception would exist just before His Second Coming (Matthew 7:15–23; Matthew 24:4–5, 11, 24). Brethren, keep your eyes open. Study your Bible. Learn to think carefully and critically. Determine to live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4). The Bible code promotes a mystical, Kabbalist interpretation of the Bible that ignores the plain message of Scripture. Skip codes turn the Bible into a mass of letters and create messages that contradict Scripture. There is nothing hidden or secret about this matter—it is obvious—when you compare the Bible code to the Bible! 

## Are You Dokimos?

(continued from page 15)

of pointing out how Christ maintains and teaches His truth in His Church—through His faithful ministry. “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, *for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*” (vv. 11–12).

Sadly, there have always been errant ministers who serve their own needs over the needs of the brethren and the Work by using doctrinal changes and “new truth” to corral sheep for themselves. Jesus warned, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:15–21).

Jesus Christ Himself has told us to beware when someone seeks to persuade the brethren to depart from the truth they have known. Doctrinal error is a bad fruit. Yet some in the scattered fellowships seem drawn to these errant teachers like moths to a flame. The Apostle Paul continued the warning: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths” (2 Timothy 4:3–4, NAS).

With so much religious material available these days over the Internet and by mail, many brethren read widely. But while the ministry strongly urges us to avoid material that attacks our faith, it does not try to censor what Church members read. The member who insists on engaging material that disagrees with our belief and practice should not do so without being prepared to do all the studying and research required to deal effectively with the author’s views and to protect one’s own faith. Lacking such a commitment, some have gotten off track.

Jude exhorted the brethren “to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Again, we are told to “test [*dokimazete*] all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Jesus warned us to “beware” of those who promote doctrinal error.

But if we love and obey God, he promises to make all things work together for the benefit of His Church (Romans 8:28). “For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are **approved** [*dokimon*] may be made manifest among you” (1 Corinthians 11:19, KJV).

## Are You Dokimos?

What is one very important way that God instructs us to remain genuine—*dokimon*—in our calling? “Study to shew thyself **approved** [*dokimon*] unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, *rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV).

Regular Bible study should be a constant part of a Christian’s life. It is one very important way we can remain the *genuine article* in God’s sight. 

## Is God Calling You?

(continued from page 17)

edge... Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded... because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, they would have none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies. For the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; *but whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil*" (Proverbs 1:22–33). Choosing not to listen to

God's instruction is not more fun, even though it might appear to be in the short run.

God wants us to enjoy life and recapture the true values of fun (Ecclesiastes 11:9). As Phil Sena wrote "to the young" in a recent *Living Church News* ("You Can Look Forward to Jesus Christ's Return," September-October 2000, p. 12), "Remember that real fun does not require repentance." Applying the wisdom of God's Word, the Bible, produces joy, success and fulfillment.

Is God calling you? Do you understand what you are hearing in sermons and reading in your personal Bible studies? If you do, then He is already beginning to open your

mind to the Truth. Respond to the call—it is real! It is not just for your parents. The only thing to fear is *not having a relationship with God*, because a life without God's help is a life of pain, suffering, sorrow and disappointment. Jesus said, "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). He also said, "Take My yoke upon you... for My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:29–30). Develop a relationship with God. Ask Him to guide your conversion process, to grant you true repentance. Think about God's promises and calling. If He is opening your mind right now, that calling is for you! ☺

## Are You Really a Christian?

(continued from page 2)

cerned about which job or responsibility they have in mind for us in the future—and about whether we are PREPARING for that responsibility by humbling ourselves now, learning every lesson we need to learn, and GROWING to reflect the mind and character of Christ in every possible way.

*How are we doing?* Are we truly yielding ourselves totally to God, really LEARNING the lessons He has for us and genuinely *reflecting Jesus Christ* in everything we think, say and do?

*Be honest with yourselves, brethren!*

Are you personally "different" from the way you were two or three years ago? Are you really CHANGING some of your basic attitudes and approaches so that you can genuinely reflect every aspect of Christ's character more than ever? Are you making progress in "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"? (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Or, are some of you the "same old Joe" or the "same old Jane" that you always were?

As God's minister I cannot really help you without bringing these things to your attention. But I love you, *and I want to help you!* So please, everyone, *take these things seriously!* If we are to be blessed, protected and mightily used by God during the months and years ahead, we absolutely MUST make Christ's mind and character more a part of our thoughts and actions and approaches to this world. We must be willing to get over "hurt feelings," NEVER carry grudges, and truly give, serve and SACRIFICE to prepare for the soon-coming government of our Savior to be set up on this earth.

I encourage each one of you to personally "evaluate" *yourself*. Our ministry is stretched far too thin for them to go around and make constant "house calls" and have long personal Bible studies—as some used to do—with each family in the Church. That would be wonderful if they could—although some of them might not do it perfectly and therefore some of you might even *resent* them coming to your home and trying to help you personally.

But this puts the responsibility more back on YOU. You, personally, must "examine yourself" week by week and year by year. As the Apostle Paul was inspired to tell us: "*Examine yourselves* as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

We need to make this self-examination *regularly*. Not just before Passover but perhaps *every single Sabbath* we should do this. Some might prefer to wait until after the Sabbath sermon and fellowship to have a period of self-examination each Sunday as they start the new week. That is up to you. But in love and earnestness I urge every one of you brethren to start carrying out a systematic form of self-examination and comparing yourself to CHRIST—not to other human beings.

Then, as you see your faults more clearly through meditation, study and earnestly asking GOD to reveal them to you—you should take definite steps to overcome the selfish and vain thoughts, words and actions that emanate from you. Truly, brethren, time is short. Let us act NOW!



# So You Are Being Called for Jury Duty

By Tom Turner

In recent months, increasing numbers of those affiliated with Living Church of God have been called for jury duty. Many courts have begun to use drivers' license data to locate potential jurors instead of voter registration information.

Those who receive a jury summons sometimes ask the Church for assistance in being excused. Regrettably, the Church is generally unable to offer actual legal assistance (since the Church is not in the practice of law), but it can indeed provide support of your request to be excused.

To assist those who receive a summons but wish to refrain from jury duty, the Church has published a Jury Duty Exemption Request form. This form is fairly self-explanatory and includes a "Legal Precedents" section which cites several successful court cases, including one involving a Church of God member, which rose to the U.S. Supreme Court. The form includes supporting references and is available from ministers who pastor Living Church of God congregations. It can also be obtained directly from Church Headquarters.

Should you receive an initial summons to jury duty, and choose to refrain on religious grounds, please contact your pastor (or Headquarters, if this is not possible) to obtain the Exemption Request form. You will need to fill out the top portion of the facing page, and your minister will need to fill out the bottom portion. The form presents your request to be excused on religious grounds, your minister's verification that you are a member in good standing, and a statement of the Church's support of your request to be excused on religious grounds.

Your jury duty summons should include a section regarding grounds

for excusal. If the summons gives you a place to seek excusal on grounds of religious conviction and/or conscience, fill in that section as the summons instructs. Most commonly there will be no specific mention of religion, and you will need to fill in the section marked "Other." In that case, write in "Religious Convictions—Please see attached Jury Duty Exemption Request." The Jury Duty Exemption Request, including all back-up documentation, should be stapled together as one unified enclosure.

Make sure you read your jury summons carefully and comply with all its instructions. It is important that you return the summons promptly and correctly, along with your Jury Duty Exemption Request, if you wish to avoid problems with the court.

If the court denies your first request for excusal (such rejection most often comes from a low-level clerical worker, rather than an actual court clerk or judge), read the denial notice carefully to discern whether it contains any avenue of appeal. Carefully comply with such instructions. When returning any appeal, you should attach another copy of your completed Jury Duty Exemption Request form, since the person reading your appeal may not be the same one who originally denied your request.

If you receive a denial notice containing no avenue of appeal, or an otherwise final denial, you may wish to consider consulting your attorney. If you do not have an attorney, you may wish to contact a legal aid office near you or a lawyer referral service. Such organizations are dedicated to helping people who have legal problems and who need to

obtain qualified legal advice or representation.

Though unable to provide legal services, the Church remains committed to supporting members and prospective members who choose not to serve on a jury for religious reasons. It will do so by providing relevant information at its disposal, documentation of its beliefs, and verification of an individual's membership status or such other information that it may reasonably provide—in addition to any applicable spiritual counseling by its ministry.

How should one feel about approaching a court to exercise one's legal rights?

It is true that when the Bible mentions court action, it does so mostly in a negative light. The Apostle Paul rebuked the Corinthians for going to court to settle differences between brethren (1 Corinthians 6:1–6).

Yet *Paul himself* asserted his rights as a citizen of Rome (Acts 22:25–29)! Therefore, disputes involving your rights as a citizen, with those who are not members of God's Church, must be settled outside the Church. In the world, that usually occurs in a court of law. Paul, in Romans 13, showed that God has allowed the governments of this world to maintain law and order and to punish crime. Matters involving the laws of this world, therefore, can be settled in the world's courts. It is not wrong to use the protection of the law. Certainly, one ought to pray wholeheartedly for God's help in resolving difficulties peaceably. And one should always remember that God offers wisdom and guidance to those who seek Him and obey His commandments (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; James 1:5–7). LCM

## New Web Commentaries!

Beginning February 1, visitors to the official Church Web site, [www.livingcog.org](http://www.livingcog.org), will be treated twice a week—every Monday and Thursday through the month of February—to a new installment of an eight-part commentary on the books of Joshua and Judges, given by Mr. John Ogwyn.

Beginning on March 1, [www.livingcog.org](http://www.livingcog.org) will feature commentaries on Matthew's gospel, present-

ed by Dr. Meredith every Monday and Thursday. This series should continue until sometime in June.

Unlike previous commentaries, these new items are being released online in video as well as audio and text formats. As before, commentaries will remain archived online, so if you miss one when it is released, you can go back and catch it later at your convenience.

## IN LOVING MEMORY

Saw Lay Beh, age 75, died in Sa Khan Gyi, Myanmar on November 13. He came in contact with God's church in the 1960s, was baptized in 1975 and was ordained as an elder in 1977. He has been serving Living Church of God brethren in this remote Myanmar village since 1995, looking after 38 people, including children. Saw Lay Beh was a very dedicated minister pastoring the brethren under difficult circumstances of location, weather and resources. "Because of his leadership, the Myanmar brethren are firmly behind Dr. Roderick C. Meredith, the Headquarters Church and the Work," Carl McNair, Director of Church Administration said. He is survived by his wife Tial Hniang, seven adult children and his son-in-law Thomas Tial Hoe, an elder in the Living Church of God.

Mrs. Ruth Cronmiller, a long-time member of God's church, died on October 17, 2000 from lymphatic cancer. She will be remembered as a giving, kind and loving woman who loved God's way of life. Baptized in 1985, Mrs. Cronmiller served as God's tool to call her husband and children into the truth. Mr. Cronmiller died in the faith in May, 1997. Three children and one granddaughter survive her.

Trofimo L. Lagare, age 57, of Bogabongan, Mindanao, Philippines, died of a heart attack on December 21, 2000. Mr. Lagare was born on September 19, 1943. He was a government employee, working for the Department of Agrarian Reform. He was ordained a deacon in 1986 and served in the Bogabongan church until his death. Mr. Lagare is survived by his wife Alicia, one son, one daughter and grandchildren. Mr. Tex Benitez, the pastor of Northwest Mindanao, conducted the funeral.

John Francis "Jack" Phelan, Jr., age 72, of Tahoe City, California, died on December 9, 2000 after a battle with cancer. Mr. Phelan, a long-time faithful member and active deacon in the Church of God, was born in Los Angeles, California, on December 20, 1928. He was baptized in 1965 and ordained a deacon in the early 1970s. He and his wife were initially introduced to the Truth in the 1960s through contact with Feast-goers at the Squaw Valley Feast site. His wife Judy, two sons, grandchildren and a sister survive him.

## Wedding Anniversary

Orville and Reva Freeze of Ellsinore, Missouri celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on November 4, 2000 with the help of the Rolla, Missouri Living Church of God congregation. The Freezes, who were married October 27, 1950, raised five children, who have given them 12 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

The congregation provided a special meal following services, which included an anniversary cake and recognition for their "shining example of marital fidelity and the love they have shared for half a century," in the words of minister Rod Reynolds.

Mr. and Mrs. Freeze were baptized together on April 8, 1989.

# Announcement

## LYC 2001—APPLY NOW!

Are you interested in fun, friends, adventure and a chance to learn how God's way works? If so, plan now to be a part of Living Youth Camp 2001! Applications are now being accepted for this two-week trek to Northwoods Christian Camp, near Pickford, in Michigan's beautiful Upper Peninsula. Many of our teens have enjoyed this camp in the last several years, and remember the deep blue skies, the scent of clean fresh air, Hercules the fawn growing into a seven-point buck and the warm fellowship with teens of like mind.

On the list of this year's activities will be flag football, dance, Fitness for Life, Christian living, canoeing, communications, fellowship time, cookouts and, of course, the overnight canoe trip. In past years campers have explored the deep blue waters of Lake Huron surrounding the beautiful Les Cheneaux Islands and the Two Hearted River, which empties into Lake Superior at the campsite. Most of all, however, you will be able to spend time with friends from camp and the Feast and make many new friends.

Arrival day for camp will be July 24, with departure August 6. Tuition is \$325 for the first camper in a family, \$300 for the second and just \$275 for the third. Applications will be made available through your church pastor or video host beginning in January. Applications are also available by writing to:

**LIVING YOUTH CAMP • 16935 W. Bernardo Dr., Suite 260 • San Diego, CA 92127**

You may also request an application by phone at: (858) 673-7470, or by e-mail at: [lyc@cogl.org](mailto:lyc@cogl.org) or [sruddlesden@cogl.org](mailto:sruddlesden@cogl.org). Any other questions regarding camp should be addressed to:

**Gerald Weston • 2200 Cherokee Strip • Blue Springs, MO 64015 • (816) 228-2035**

Applications should be received by April 16, 2001. Until that date, preference will be given according to factors including age and number of times one has attended LYC. If the camp is not full by then, we will accept qualified applicants in the order we receive them until we are full.

High school workers must be 16 years of age and willing to work hard. The cost for high school workers will be \$100, and applications should be received by April 16. Counselors must be at least 19 years of age and be able to arrive for camp no later than noon, July 22. Worker applications are also available through your pastor or video host, or by the means listed above.

In years past, we have accepted incomplete applications. This year, any incomplete applications will be returned. All applications must be completed *before* they will be considered. *A completed application requires a photo and all applicable signatures.*

Do not hesitate! Apply now!

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
US POSTAGE PAID  
SAN DIEGO, CA  
PERMIT NO. 3207