

"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth." Jeremiah 23:5

the OLIVE BRANCH

SPRING 2009

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FROM THE OVERSEER'S DESK

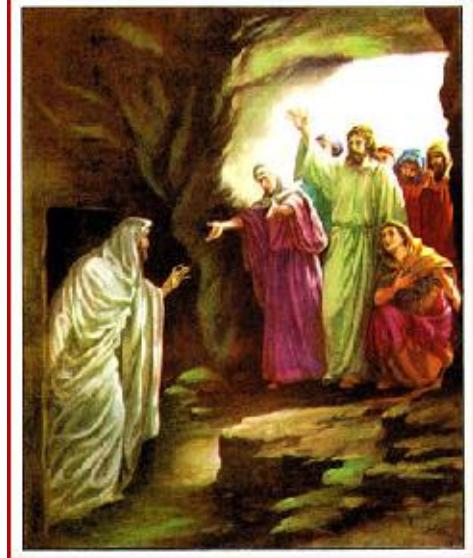
'Abundantly Above'

From Glory to Glory: Part 7

In the previous two sermons of this series, the theme has been considered that one way by which we are "*changed ... from glory to glory*" (2 Corinthians 3:18) is through transformational experiences that the Lord purposely places in our path as we walk with Him.

We have looked at two examples of such experiences in the lives of the apostles as described in Matthew 14 – the *feeding of the 5,000*, when the disciples became the Master's hands through which to feed that multitude, and, then, *Christ walking on the sea* to meet His storm-tossed friends.

Both of these described marvelous experiences through which the disciples learned to trust the Lord and His judgment -- the kind of experiences many Christians would love to have.



Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead

Yet, most everyone reading those sermons might quickly say, "I doubt I'll ever see events as glorious as these! I'll never know such a glorious manifestation of His holy presence working through me or in my behalf." My response is: "Why would you want to so limit the Lord?" Such experiences could and should be a daily part of our lives.

The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. John 3:2

In the third chapter of the Gospel of John, we find the account of a mighty and noble man called unto God. His name was Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, one bred to learning, a scholar. The spirit of Christianity was in total contradiction to what Nicodemus was – his education, his principles, the rules of his sect. He was a ruler of the Jews, a member of the great Sanhedrin, a man of authority in Jerusalem.

Surely Nicodemus had heard the teachings of Christ and heard of His miracles performed during the daytime meetings when Jesus was surrounded by people. For his own personal encounter he chose to go to Jesus by night. He desired to be alone with Christ. He wanted to talk with him by himself, in private.

Nicodemus recognized the value of discussing the condition of his very own soul with this skillful, faithful teacher. Malachi 2:7 instructs us, *For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.*

Jesus Christ, the perfect priest, fulfilled these words. While others were asleep, Nicodemus was seeking knowledge and wisdom concerning his soul. Nicodemus acknowledged Jesus as a "teacher come from God." He based this on the great works and

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doubt that Nicodemus would have put forth the effort to seek out this great One.

No matter how tired or weary Jesus was from the activities of the day, He took the time to teach the most fundamental Sunday School lesson ever taught – the lesson of the new birth and regeneration. Jesus used fundamental life factors such as birth, kingdom and wind, but Nicodemus' response was "*How can these things be?*" (vs. 9) Christ goes on to expound Moses and the brazen serpent – faith meant salvation. He used the symbolism of light and life and darkness and death.

This lesson apparently seemed fruitless on Nicodemus at the time, but it did have an effect upon him. At the Feast of the Tabernacles, when the Sanhedrin was enraged at Christ because He claimed to be the "living water," Nicodemus boldly stood up in Christ's defense. Once again, Nicodemus made no personal testimony of his faith in Christ. He defended Christ on a point of the Jewish law.

Finally, at the burial of Christ, Nicodemus made a public profession of being a follower of Christ. His wealth enabled him to

SUNDAY SCHOOL



*Sunday School
Coordinator
Gary Satanek*

provide the *mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight*, with which the body of Jesus was embalmed. (John 19:39)

History states that Nicodemus stood in favor of Christ at the trial before Pilate. This show of support caused Nicodemus to be deprived of his office and banished from Jerusalem by the hostile Jews. He was later baptized by Peter and John. His remains were said to have been found in a common grave along with those of Gamaliel and Stephen.

As it was for even Jesus, a faithful Sunday School teacher may not have the opportunity to see the effects of his or her efforts. Commitment to Christ is not always quick. It takes some pupils time to accept and realize the value of what has been given to them. Once the Word of God is accepted and internalized, it is then that the blessed life can be manifested and a real change can be observed. The *teacher from God* will faithfully teach at each opportunity. Patience will allow the teacher to wait for eternity if need be to see the results.

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Let's look at the life of Stephen as described in Acts 6:8-15.

He was a Jew by birth, was born in Greece and was a preacher. He was a man of learning and refinement and had rank and reputation. Stephen was also a faithful man – faithful to the gospel, faithful to The Church of God, faithful to Christ, faithful unto death.

Stephen served God – whether it was distributing food to the poor or preaching a powerful Gospel message. His life reminds us that, as God's children, we are His servants in this world. It matters not what our service is, where our service is or who is aware of our service. The only thing that matters is that we faithfully serve our Lord.

Stephen was a man "full of faith." That is what the word faithful means – "full of faith." He believed God, His word and His will. Because he was full of faith, he was "full of power." He preached the gospel, taught the people and defended the truth of God with power, boldness and courage. Faith makes naturally timid men courageous and bold. And it is faith that makes gospel preachers powerful. The man who believes what he preaches, preaches with power. Being full of faith and power, Stephen, "did



great wonders and miracles among the people."

In verses 9-10, scripture indicates that every word spoken for God and every work done for God accomplishes its purpose. Though Stephen convinced none of those who disputed with him, though none were converted at the time, though none accepted the gospel, though the preacher himself was stoned to death, this faithful servant of God successfully accomplished what God sent him to do.

Two things and two things alone determine the success of any person's or any church's labor for God – the purpose of God and the power of God. We are entirely dependent upon God! If we are God's servants, doing God's service, failure is an impossibility. No one serves God in vain.

Verses 11-14 demonstrate the fact that the Gospel is offensive to men. When these religious men

were convinced that Stephen's doctrine was the truth of God revealed in the Holy Scripture, they still would not yield to the claims of Christ. Instead they hired false witnesses to twist and pervert Stephen's words.

Verse 15 shows us that God is faithful to his servants. Stephen's conscience was pure from guilt with regard to the charges made against him. Therefore, he had nothing to fear. In the face of death, he was calm and courageous. In the hour of his greatest trial he did not forsake his God, and his God did not forsake him.

What an example Stephen is, to you and I. Let us be as faithful – until we hear those words: "Well done thou good and faithful servant."

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*WMB Coordinator
Diana Seese*

WMB

*2008-09 Theme:
"Faithful Servants"
Matthew 25:21*

CONTACT US

The Olive Branch is a publication of The Church of God Northeast Region, which serves churches in Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York and Pennsylvania and new works throughout the greater area. It can be viewed online at www.tcog-ne.org.

Reports and other **submissions for the SUMMER 2009 issue** must be received by **June 1**.

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Around the region

The region met in district conventions early this spring. The Western District event was March 21 at the Grove City, PA church. More than 50 were in attendance.

The Eastern District met April 4 at the Pittsville, MD church, with 16 in attendance. The highlight of this event was when a new member took the Church covenant near the end of the convention. Israel Morrero is now a member in Philadelphia, PA.

Here are some photos from the two events:

Top: *Israel Morrero is welcomed as a new member during Eastern District Convention activities.*

Middle and bottom: *Music and ministry during the Western District Convention.*



Special services were also conducted in mid-April at the Philadelphia, PA and New Rochelle, NY churches, with 11 attending the former, and 14 the latter. Here are pictures from those gatherings:

Top, left: *Members and attendees from both churches and Sis. Nancy Smith, wife of the regional overseer, second from left, enjoy food and fellowship in New Rochelle.*



Top, right: Sis. Joyce Bryan, a member of the New Rochelle Church of God, left, and Sis. Dolly Nathan, pastor of the Philadelphia church, right.

Bottom: Members and attendees of the Philadelphia church gather in that city with Regional Overseer James Smith, left.



The theme for this year's ABM work is taken from 1 John 4:7: "*Let us love one another.*" We can all say that love is very important in our lives. We think of love as a feeling, but 1 Corinthians 12 tells us that love is a choice and an action. God is our source of love. He loved us all so very much that He sacrificed His own Son for each one of us. Jesus is our ultimate example of what it means to love. In Luke 23:32-36 it tells of this love:

(32) *And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.*

(33) *And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand and the other on the left.*

(34) *Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.*

(35) *And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.*

(36) *And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar.*

Jesus was willing to endure great pain and suffering, even death – not for personal gain, but out of love for everyone. He

said,
"Father forgive them..." You and I were not there that day, but I can only imagine that maybe

He repeated that phrase over and over again with each hammer blow, at each insult, at each and every stripe He received. He said forgive "them." Of whom was He speaking? Those who ridiculed Him, those who beat Him, those who nailed Him to the cross – those whose sin drove Him to the cross? Perhaps He was speaking of you and me. Why? Because He loved us that much.

We live in a world today where some don't understand what real love is about. Love today is superficial and it doesn't last forever like the love of the Lord. Thanks be unto God that I have experienced the love that Jesus has for me. Have you? I pray that you have.

As never before in the history of the ABM, we need to band together in prayer and in loving one another. We need one another's prayers and love and support to make it in a world of

ABM

2008-09 Theme:

*Let us love one another
1 John 4:7*



*ABM Coordinator
Nancy Horchar*

chaos, confusion, deception and temptation. John 15:13 reads: *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* I am not sure if we will ever have to do this. But we need to be there for one another to uplift and be a strength for our brothers and sisters in the Lord. This is one reason why prayer bands are so important. To lay down your life for a friend – this is the kind of love that Jesus had. Oh, to have this kind of love. I'm not really sure if we'll ever have this degree of love. But I really want to try and give it my best to be like Him. Is that your desire – to be like Jesus?

Reminder: Don't forget to pay your Emergency \$5.

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2009 calendar

Ladies Retreat – May 1-3, Camp Sonrise, Markleysburg, PA

Regional Youth Convention – May 15-16, Uniontown, PA

BTI – May 31-June 13, Cleveland, TN

Youth Camp - Family Camp – June 19-22, Mt. Chestnut, Butler, PA

Northeast Regional Convention – July 10-12, Uniontown, PA

General Assembly – Sept. 8-13, Abba's House, Chattanooga, TN

It doesn't matter what newspaper you pick up or what news program is being aired on TV or radio – the lead story is the same: the economic crisis and the efforts being made to cope with it. There is more or less general agreement that the financial crisis is worse than any that the U.S. and world has seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s. I was born in November 1939, so I can't really make a first-hand comparison, but when I was growing up, conversations I overheard among older family members clearly indicated that times during the 1930s were hard.

This financial crisis is only one of many recent world events coming together with biblical prophecy that will guide us into the emergence of the Antichrist and the second coming of Christ. Old Testament prophets such as Haggai spoke of these: *"For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the Desired of all nations shall come."* (Hag. 2:6-7)

Although many of these events are quite unsettling, we have to remember that God is in control and has made specific promises to those who love him. That's what Jeremiah said in the letter he sent to the captives in Babylon: *"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end."* (Jer. 29:11)

Nevertheless, the current financial crisis is unsettling to

CPMA

2008-09 Theme: *That We Present Every Man Perfect In Christ Jesus.* Col. 1:28



*CPMA Coordinator
Roger Fuester*

say the least. Like all other crises, this one brings costs and opportunities. You have already heard plenty about the costs or perhaps have felt them. Most of us have been badly shaken by the tumultuous events on Wall Street in recent months. If you have an IRA or some kind of retirement plan, no doubt you took a major hit. You might even have lost your job. You may even be fearful. I understand. You would have to be a brass monkey not to flinch a little bit.

But there is one thing that we need to remember – that fear is always the enemy of faith. This is paramount, because, *"Without faith, it is impossible to please God."* The financial markets are His. The world is His. Here is something else to remember: God often uses adversity for His greatest blessings – in several ways in this case. Christians are called to do the best things in the worst of times. Above all, we must remember that God is on his throne. Maybe the "eat, drink, and be merry" attitude of Americans needed a little adjustment. Even many professing Christians exhibit a spiritually casual attitude.

If there is anything that has characterized this financial crisis, it is uncertainty -- nobody knows what to do. Most Americans hope that the

interventions that the federal government is taking will work, but there is not much confidence that they will. Nevertheless, as this financial crisis spreads uncertainty throughout the markets and across the nation, there's an opportunity on the table: the opportunity we Christians have to witness to our neighbors. How you react to this crisis – in conversations with friends, in helping a neighbor in difficulty, in how you live within your means – will speak volumes about the confidence you have in Christ and in the sovereignty of God. If somebody asks you if you are worried, tell them, "No, my God is in control."

Christ is coming soon, and we want to show others that The Church of God is seeking to be perfected. In the February 2009, *Evening Light*, our CPMA General Coordinator hit the nail right on the head: "There is a place for each of us to fill and we are the only ones who can fill it, so let us strive for perfection in all that we are and all that we do. The CPMA needs you. Our goal is for every church to 100%." Let's make it happen!

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OVERSEER

continued from page 1

We may just need to learn to better anticipate and recognize them. Consider the words of Paul given in Ephesians 3:14-21:

- (14) *For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*
- (15) *Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,*
- (16) *That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;*
- (17) *That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,*
- (18) *May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;*
- (19) *And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.*
- (20) *Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,*
- (21) *Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*

Paul here shares with the Ephesians his prayer for them: that they: "... might be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ..." In 2 Kings 6:15-17, Elisha prayed for his fearful servant that the Lord might "open his eyes" to behold the presence and glory of the Lord manifested by the mountain "full of horses and chariots of fire."

How often it is that only after having experienced His glorious manifestation in our lives that we finally recognize Him -- that He had been there all the time. Following his vision of the ladder reaching into the heavens, Jacob said in

Genesis 28:16: "... Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not."

Only after their post-resurrection walk with Him and sharing a meal with Him did His disciples recognize the glorious experience they had just witnessed, as described in Luke 24:31-32:

- (31) *And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.*
- (32) *And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?*

So, what should we expect? What should we look for as demonstrations of his glorious presence and working in our lives? Paul closes his prayer for us with a peek into what the Lord has in store for His children in Ephesians 3:20-21:

- (20) *Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,*
- (21) *Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*

This scripture was brought home to me recently while I listened on Southern gospel radio to an interview with Bill and Gloria Gaither. Mrs. Gaither was witnessing how in recent years that the way she prayed had fundamentally changed. She had been taught to "explicitly tell the Lord what you need of Him" -- be it healing, supplying some earthly need, or deliverance from or victory



*Regional Overseer
James Smith*

over a trial or test.

She described how at that time she was praying an intercessory prayer for their son who had a special need. As she prayed, she felt in her heart the Lord reply to her prayer, "I can do that ... pause ... OR, I can do above and beyond what you can ask or think."

Wow! What an answer to receive from the Lord. Think about it: We cannot pray a prayer of need that the Lord cannot answer. The question then is "our way" or "His way?" Which shall it be?

Because of that experience, her prayer life has fundamentally changed. Now when she prays, her prayer is that He would have His way. She invites Him to do "abundantly above all that she could ask or think." And so He has done, and continues to do – time and again!

I would like to share with you a similar experience from my own life – one where the Lord did far above and beyond what was asked of Him. I was born with a degenerative eye condition. Not only did I not see, but my eyes were degenerating – a condition that left me in considerable pain and discomfort. On July 7, 1953 my father had been killed by an accident on his job as an electrician. Because of the special attention that I would require, the social workers advised my widowed mother (22 years old with two small children) to place me into the Mississippi School for the Blind, where professionals could give me the care they said I would require.

Having just lost my father in death, to also lose her son was about more than my mother could bear. Later that month, the Church in Mississippi held its annual state convention in Eupora. As was their custom, during the convention they

had a healing service. A prayer line was formed and the sick and others with needs passed through this line while ministers anointed and prayed for them.

My mother carried me through this healing line with the prayer request that the Lord would ease my degenerating condition and suffering, at least sufficiently that she would be able to keep me at home with her and my younger sister. NO ONE THOUGHT TO ASK THE LORD TO COMPLETELY HEAL ME!

When reaching the end of the prayer line, my mother -- who had been carrying me all that time -- allowed me to stand beside her. My being in a strange place, she expected that I would have grabbed and clung to her legs. Instead, I broke and ran from her towards the front of the building.

The thought that my blindness had been completely healed still had not registered with the people, not even with my mother! She ran after me, as she feared my tumbling down the steep set of steps that awaited me at the front door of the tabernacle. Upon reaching the front door, I easily navigated those steps and headed out into the front yard. When finally my mother caught up with me, I was sitting beside a tub of chilled soft drinks where I was inspecting bottle caps on the ground for the first time.

Needless to tell you that the Lord did indeed answer my mother's prayer that day – in a manner that far exceeded what anyone had thought to ask of Him! That day the Lord demonstrated one more time that He indeed can and will perform “*exceeding abundantly above all that we ask and think.*” No doubt, many of you can witness to similar glorious experiences in your own lives.

Learning His ways

Sometimes the Lord purposely takes a round-about route to His answering our prayers. In John 11 we find such an example: the Master purposely delayed His responding to the urgent call of Mary and Martha for Him to come and heal their brother Lazarus.

Christ would use this occasion as an opportunity to demonstrate far more than “yes, one more time He could heal.” He had a reason for His delay: *“This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.”* (John 11:4). Despite His explanation for why they tarried, His disciples misunderstood Him, until He declared “...unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.” (John 11:12)

Both Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, expressed their faith in the Lord. They had unshakeable faith that He had power to *heal* their brother – John 11:21, 32:

(21) *Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*

(32) *Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*

Just to have faith for the Lord to repeat one more time that which He has done many times before is no small matter. (I still stand in awe and marvel every time He divinely heals someone -- however small or great it may appear to be.) But can we trust Him to do “*exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think?*”

This is what He was about to ask the sisters of Lazarus to do -- to trust Him to raise from the dead. And, not even someone who had just died – He previously had

raised Jairus' daughter from the dead in Mark 5:22-43, and had restored the widow of Nain's son to her in Luke 7:11-15.) -- but their brother, who had now been dead four days.

The sisters declared their faith that He was indeed the Christ (John 11:27), yet this was too much for them to expect of the Lord. In John 11: 39: *“...Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.”* It was now time for the Master's good pleasure to do “*exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.*”

Our scriptural theme for this year's work has been taken from 2 Thessalonians 1:10-12:

(10) *When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.*

(11) *Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power:*

(12) *That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul yearned for the day when “... he (Christ) shall come to be glorified in his saints” – a day when “*the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him.*”

We, in our own merits, are so unworthy of His divine providence in our lives. Yet every day the Lord seeks opportunities to “*fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness*” in our lives – to do “*exceeding abundantly above all that we ask and think.*” All we must do is be yielded and willing vessels through

OVERSEER

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which He might “*fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness.*”

The Lord desires that same joy, pleasure, exaltation and, yes, humility and reverence that the apostles experienced when the Lord used them in the feeding of the 5,000 and when He had calmed their storms to be manifested in each of His children. As we yield ourselves as instruments for His use and “*good pleasure,*” He indeed will perform “*exceeding abundantly above all that we ask and think*” so “*that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him.*”

As the day of His return draws closer (remember, this chapter of 2 Thessalonians is about the Lord’s second coming!), the demonstration of His glory will no longer be the exception but rather will become the rule as His people learn to lean completely on Him, to trust completely His perfect working in their lives.

After nearly some 2,000 years since Christ walked this earth, and the Scriptures quoted here in this sermon were written, we have only begun to experience “*what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height*” of the extent of how He desires to manifest His works for and glory through His children. As the day of His return approaches, as we yield ourselves completely to Him, we shall surely see Him perform “*exceeding abundantly above all that we ask and think.*”

Outside our experience

Consider the following account of a miracle of our day and time (not one from 2,000 years ago), as documented in the book *MegaShift* by James Rutz (pages 107-109). It is summarized below:

On the night of September 1, 1999, in the remote tribal village of Sukropath, Madhya Pradesh, a Christian woman of 25 named Sukhwan Bai gave birth to a baby girl. ... It was not a happy event. It was a tragedy.

The baby had two heads. It was not even a Siamese-twin type of problem, but a case where a second head was growing out of the top of the first. Also, it had only one real eye; the other three places that ought to have been eyes were just lumps of flesh. ... they felt they should just put the thing in a clay pot and throw it out into the jungle for the animals to eat.

But finally they decided, *No, we’re Christians now, so we shouldn’t do that. We should pray for this baby.*

It’s hard to think positively when you’re praying over something that a supermarket tabloid wouldn’t touch, and it’s your own flesh and blood. But in pure faith they went ahead. ... They prayed fervently for healing, unaware of the standard Western postulate that God just doesn’t do such things.

As they poured their hearts out in intercessory prayer, the Lord was moved, and the girl’s face began to change. They prayed all night, and by morning, she was a beautiful infant girl, normal in every way, with one head and two normal eyes! A new day dawned in Sukropath -- and the rest of the world.

... The facts of this event leave no basis for debate. We simply have too many eye witnesses -- plus some photos ...

Because you may never have heard of such a fantastic move of the Lord, do you doubt? I have told you of my own divine intervention by the Lord. Let me ask you simply the same question that the Lord asked of Sarah, who was promised she would bear a son named Isaac in Genesis 18:14: “*Is any thing too hard for the LORD?*”

What then is required for us to experience such powerful manifestations of the Lord’s glory in our lives? An unshakable trust in and yielding to the Lord to work His perfect will in our lives – whatever it may be. Then, He will be glorified in us! The three Hebrew children had reached this point of consecration in their lives in Daniel 3:17-18:

(17) *If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.*

(18) *But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*

In the New Testament, Paul demonstrated that same consecration in Act 20:22-24:

(22) *And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:*

(23) *Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.*

(24) *But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*

A fresh challenge

When you were baptized with the Holy Ghost, did you not have to die out to the world – to all the hopes and desires it represented – and to yield yourselves unto His perfect will? Renew your vow – that commitment to His will for your life – every day. See if He will not “*do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think!*”

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The theme of this year's **Youth Convention** – scheduled for May 15-16 at the Uniontown, PA church – is *Destination: The Winner's Circle* from 1 Cor. 9:24-27.

Here's a quick look at the schedule, although changes may occur between now and then:

Friday service will open at 7:30 p.m. with Bro. Levi Stephens. Following will be worship with a youth choir led by Sis. Lisa Smith, an offering, special singing and an evangelistic message and altar service by guest speaker Sis. Sharon Griffin, general youth coordinator.

On Saturday, the day will begin at 9:30 a.m. with a youth march. Youth should meet in the fellowship area 10 minutes prior carrying church flags and banners with the theme of a race.

VLB



*VLB Coordinator
Bro. Levi Stephens*

Following will be comments by Bro. Stephens, youth choir worship, an offering, special singing and an evangelistic message and altar time with Sis. Griffin. After a lunch break, convention programming will continue in the early afternoon with the introduction of the incoming regional VLB coordinator as Bro. Stephens will soon relocate to Alaska.

Youth should also be preparing for **Youth Camp/Family Camp**, scheduled for June 19-22 at Mt. Chestnut Nazarene Center

in Butler, PA. This is near Pittsburgh. This is both a youth and family camp, with hotel-like rooms in addition to dormitories.

This year's theme centers on spiritual freedom.

Contact Camp Coordinator Alma Kelley at (724) 756-8841 for more information.

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The conclusion to the verse that is this year's BTI theme (see at right) is that, "*the people who do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.*"

BTI is placed in the Church to teach the people of God the bread of life – making us strong and nourished and thus able to do great exploits for our Lord and the Church.

Looking further, in Daniel 11:33 it states: "And they that understand among the people shall instruct many." BTI is continuing to do this – thus empowering us to fulfill the Great Commission as the Holy Ghost leads and guides us.

BTI

*2008-09 Theme:
That We May Know Him
Daniel 11:32*



*BTI Coordinator
Wendell Flick*

I encourage all of you to go to BTI in Cleveland, TN May 31-June 13. God bless BTI.

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Some final thoughts...

God is definitely a planner. I reminded myself of this fact when yet another chapter of Isaiah reminded me of the current unstable state of the world. A handful of neighborhood women and I began studying this book verse by verse almost two years ago in a weekly home Bible study.

It certainly wasn't my first choice -- we had just finished an encouraging but easy-breezy study of the Fruit of the Spirit. As books of the Bible go, Isaiah is more like broccoli than figurative apples, cherries and the like. Yet, following the Lord's prompting, we launched forth with nothing but the Holy Spirit, our Bibles and a massive *Matthew Henry's Commentary* to guide us.

Of course, that combo has been more than enough and we have often commented that God must have been planning ahead to prepare our hearts for this global crisis. It is uncanny how similar what the nation of Judah was facing in Isaiah's time is to today's problems.

For those of you who haven't delved into this text in depth yet, a quick summary: God, through the prophet Isaiah, spends much of the book warning His people of two judgments that were coming upon them for their sin. The first was an invasion by Assyria that would bring the enemy to Jerusalem's gates but no farther. The second was a complete defeat by the nation of Babylon that would be followed by 70 years of captivity.

Interspersed amongst these frightening prophecies are strong encouragements to the faithful remnant inside Judah -- including not only protection through and eventual deliverance from the coming tribulations but ultimate deliverance from the consequences of the sin in prophecies of a coming Messiah.

Studying Isaiah has made me think about what prophecy is for. Is it to scare us? Confuse us? From what I have learned from Isaiah, I think it is God's way of preparing us. He is planning



*Assistant Editor
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ahead and He is letting us in on His plans so that we can plan ahead, as well.

This can be earthly planning -- as when God gave Joseph the wisdom to store many years' worth of food against a coming famine to save the lives of Israel and many others.

Yet, as we look at current world problems and remaining Bible prophecies of a beginning of sorrows preceding the Great Tribulation, I suspect our planning should be more like the faithful among Judah during Isaiah's time. To them, God gave such preparation plans as not trusting in man for deliverance and continuing in holiness. He told them to remain strong, trust Him and not be fearful.

Strong plans for tough times. That's what God's people needed when Assyria and Babylon were knocking at the door. That's what God's people need today. Yes, the Bible's remaining prophecies should not paralyze us with fear. They should cause us to deepen our commitment to God and His plan, to reach out to those outside His fold and to live a religion that is pure and undefiled. That's a plan that will serve us from here to eternity.

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