

# The Quarterly Journal



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## Not Every Promise in The Book is Mine Trinity Broadcasting Network and the Gospel of Greed

by Robert L. Griffin

As children, many of us sang, with fervor:

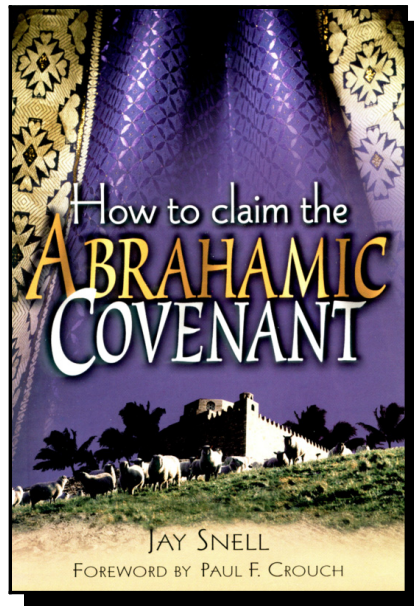
*"Every promise in The Book is mine,  
Every chapter, every verse, every line,  
I am standing on His Word divine,  
Every promise in The Book is mine."*<sup>1</sup>

The message was simple and the tune was "catchy." The whole experience was intended to underscore the fact that we believed in and could rely on God's Word.

But, as is too often the case, the words of the song contained error — it wasn't true then and it isn't now. Simply stated, God recorded *some* promises in His Word that were intended for specific individuals, and it is futile, or worse, for anyone else to try to claim them.

### PROMISES, PROMISES

Someone has surmised that there are more than 30,000 promises in the Bible (probably based on the fact that there are over 31,000 verses — depending on the translation — and the view that almost every one of them implies a promise). However, the late Dr. Herbert Lockyer reported a more precise survey of the Bible's promises,



which had been conducted by school-teacher Everet R. Storms, of Kitchener, Ontario:

"During his 27th reading of the Bible, this devout student tried to tally up the promises, a task which took him a year and a half. Storms came up with 7,487 promises by God to man, 2 by God the Father to God the Son, 991 by one man to another..., 290 by man to God. 21 promises were made by angels, one by man to an angel, and two were made by an evil spirit to the Lord. Satan made nine, as when he promised the world to Christ if He would fall down and worship him. Storms then gives us the grand total of 8,810 promises."<sup>2</sup>

Lest there be any misunderstanding, let us clarify the basis on which we consider the promises of God:

- The Bible in its entirety (the 66 Books of canonical Scripture) is God's (continues on page 16)

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# Editorials

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## THE PROTESTANT COLLEGE OF CARDINALS

A pastor related an incident that occurred after a recent Bible study he conducted: A man in the study chided him for teaching ideas contrary to those of televangelist Jack Van Impe, who has embraced the Pope and the prophecies of Nostradamus and embarrassed himself with faulty prophetic claims and date-setting.

It is clear that some Christians no longer trust local pastors, preferring to heed other voices.

Parishioners check their pastor's theology on the basis of Tim LaHaye's *Left Behind* series of novels, forgetting that they are just novels. Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* has sold 35 million copies and keeps selling, but is as outdated as a 25-year-old newspaper. Lindsey, who has turned to writing about Islam, with Muslims rather than Russians as the main culprits, may not be any more accurate than he was in his heyday.

People presume that writers of best-sellers are experts and that all television preachers know what they are talking about, never suspecting that these celebrities might have achieved prominence through money and marketing alone.

This elevation of televangelists and best-selling authors at the expense of local pastors is the result of the rise of what could be called the *Protestant College of Cardinals*.

These are the power brokers, authors, televangelists, pastoral superstars, and those who have made themselves very visible with media attention and the trappings of success: books, tapes, conferences, advertisements, and large ministries. These are the people to whom many Christians listen.

Richard Brown points to the late 1940s as the time when this phenomenon began:

"The mind-set of American Christianity was altered in 1949. This was the year of the Billy Graham Crusade in Los Angeles. It was also the year, according to Richard Quebedeaux, that marked the beginning of the modern personality cults in American Christianity. Since then, American religion and the media have created an increasing number of 'born-again celebrities,' church growth superstars and nationally known evangelists" (*Alliance Academic Review* 1997, pg. 119).

This concept of Christian celebrities has become so ingrained in the minds of some Christians that they could not even think of Christianity without them.

As the United States grew more media-driven, the evangelical Church allowed this *Protestant College of Cardinals* to develop and looked to them for direction and meaning. Because those in the *College* have great visibility, they are presumed to have the definitive word on just about everything. After all, they are sought for

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## JOYNER RECEIVES CURIOUS ENDORSEMENT

Rick Joyner hails from a new breed of self-proclaimed prophets and self-appointed apostles. Members of this “elite” movement share platforms and promote each others’ ministries. (See further, *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2000, pg. 4.) Recently, however, Joyner received a glowing endorsement from another modern-day, self-proclaimed prophet — one which Joyner most likely would have preferred not having.

In the days following the discovery of kidnapped Elizabeth Smart, the Salt Lake City teenager who disappeared in June 2002, came bizarre details of her abduction and her alleged abductor, Brian David Mitchell. Mitchell, an excommunicated member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, calls himself Immanuel David Isaiah, and, like Joyner, claims to be a prophet of God. As the investigation into the Smart kidnapping progressed, authorities discovered Mitchell’s 27-page religious manifesto titled, “Book of Immanuel David Isaiah.”

Mitchell, in his manuscript, describes “The Seven Diamonds Plus One.” True to his Mormon roots, the King James Version of the Bible, *The Book of Mormon*, and the “inspired words of the prophets of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day [sic] Saints” make up three of his “Seven Diamonds Plus One.” He also includes *Embraced by the Light* by Betty J. Eadie. Eadie’s book was a best-seller in the early 1990s and purports an out-of-body, near-death experience where she went to heaven and met with Jesus Christ. (See further, *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 1994, pg. 1.)

Yet, the more intriguing item on the list is Mitchell’s seventh diamond, “‘The Final Quest’ by Rick Joyner.” Not only does Mitchell place Joyner’s 1996 volume in his list of divine writing, but highly reveres the founder and Executive Director of the North Carolina-based Morning-Star Publications and Ministries. Mitchell, in true modern-day prophetic form, writes:

“Hark and rejoice! For I say unto you, that I raised up my servant Rick Joyner unto the Lost Ten Tribes of Isreal [sic] and I gave unto him visions and dreams and I revealed unto him the many glorious truths which shed far greater light upon my true doctrine and upon the coming forth of my great and marvelous work in these last days. And behold I commanded my servant Rick Joyner to write it in a book and by the power of the Holy Ghost he wrote it and he named the book *The Final Quest* and it

came forth by my power. And lo, because the book, *The Final Quest* sheds far greater light upon my true doctrine and upon the coming forth of my great and marvelous work in these last days it is of great and eternal worth unto all the House of Isreal and unto all the inhabitants of the earth saith the Lord.”

While Joyner may not wish to accept Mitchell’s patronage, it is curious to note that Mitchell’s words are remarkably similar to the “divine” accolades served up by those within the Charismatic prophetic movement. Perhaps, had the words been penned by one of Joyner’s colleagues, they would likely find their way onto the back cover of a future printing of *The Final Quest*. Joyner, like Mitchell, disparages true Scripture by looking beyond the Bible for divine guidance.

—MKG

## ONCE A FALSE PROPHET, STILL A FALSE PROPHET

Benny Hinn received more bad publicity as 2002 drew to a close when NBC’s *Dateline* devoted a full hour to scrutinizing the controversial faith healer. Days before the NBC program aired, Hinn began a series of pre-emptive strikes against the news broadcast, calling it a “wicked program” and “demonic lies.”

Hinn also platformed fellow modern-day prophet John Paul Jackson, who prophetically extolled him by saying, “Pastor [Hinn] is going to rise up and he’s going to become more powerful and more anointed because now God will be justified in giving him a greater anointing” as a result of the *Dateline* broadcast.

Hinn said the Holy Spirit had already begun “speaking” to him with “powerful visions and dreams.” Prior to the *Dateline* program, he said: “The Lord said, ‘You cannot share it yet. The timing is off.’ He has allowed me to give you the first line. I—I—I awakened hearing, *rivers of blood, rivers of blood*. Almost somebody shouting it in my—in my—in my—in my ears. And I awakened with the — with the words, *rivers of blood*.”

He said he would be allowed to further reveal his “visions and dreams” on a special *Praise the Lord* show, which would air two days following the *Dateline* broadcast.

On the *Praise the Lord* broadcast, Hinn revealed just enough to keep intact his track record as a false prophet. He told viewers: “Three-and-a-half months from now a

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# EXPERIENCING MYSTICISM

## Critiquing the Teachings of Henry Blackaby

by G. Richard Fisher with M. Kurt Goedelman

Earlier this year, *The Quarterly Journal* examined how Charismatics undermine the sufficiency of Scripture and travel “a journey into mysticland.”<sup>1</sup> It is a dangerous thoroughfare that leads one to “confusion, chaos, deception, disappointment, mysticism, subjectivism, and perhaps even demons.”<sup>2</sup> Yet Charismatics are not alone. Those in fundamental or conservative groups find themselves increasingly exposed to teaching that can cause them to drift from the moorings of Scripture.

One of the leading exponents of non-Charismatic subjectivism is Southern Baptist Henry Blackaby. His writings include the best-seller, *Experiencing God*. Charismatics have called Blackaby one who is “shaking Southern Baptist tradition.” *Charisma* magazine, reporting on Southern Baptist leaders who are disavowing their traditional roots, said of Blackaby:

“Perhaps the most significant trend began in 1990 when a Bible study workbook by Southern Baptist prayer leader Henry Blackaby began to circulate in SBC circles. Called *Experiencing God*, it urges individuals and congregations to break free from religious traditions in order to follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance.”<sup>3</sup>

Blackaby’s writings are hugely popular. Some of what he says is right. Some of what he says may be helpful. And he has tapped into every Christian’s desire to love God more and to have more intimate times of fellowship with Him. In an age of pressure-cooker intensity, Christians long for more quality time with the Savior. The question is: Will the teachings of Henry Blackaby take us there?

Some love his teachings and others are disturbed by what they see as semantic and hermeneutical confusion. Some say that what Blackaby gives with one hand in exalting the Bible, he takes away with the other through nuances and caveats. Blackaby’s book has good parts, questionable parts, contradictory parts, and problematic parts. An evaluation of the book depends on the evaluation’s focus.

Writer Michael Horton, in his book on mysticism, offers this perspective:

“Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King have co-authored *Experiencing God* and *Fresh Encounter*, and although these are celebrated as fresh treatments of the subject, they are simply repetitions of the Keswick ‘Higher Life’ teaching.

In fact, in an article for *Charisma* magazine, the authors offer seven steps or principles for experiencing God.”<sup>4</sup>

Christian Research Institute’s Elliot Miller writes:

“I do think [Blackaby’s] teaching is largely extrabiblical and Scripture is arbitrarily and subjectively used to support principles he has really observed from his own experience. I think his teaching can do some harm, and it disturbs me that he is so widely influential, especially in his own Southern Baptist denomination, which is usually pretty solid.”<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Jay Adams also comments negatively on Blackaby:

“In [his] book the changes are rung on the word ‘sensing.’ One is guided by sensing God’s will, by sensing that He is at work, etc. ... It has been a long time since I have read a book containing more misleading ideas about guidance. There is no doubt that this book has the potential to do much harm.”<sup>6</sup>

Adams is right on target. Blackaby’s co-author Claude King says “the biblical understandings and illustrations

in *Experiencing God* come primarily from Henry's personal experience."<sup>7</sup>

Consider this example of Blackaby's personal experience and his advice from these events:

"When God gave directions to our church in Saskatoon, most of the time He gave them through persons other than me. Most of them came from the members of the body who were **sensing** a clear direction of God. We created the opportunity for people to share what they **sensed** God was leading us to be or do. Our desire was not to find out who was for it and who was against it. In our business meetings we never took a vote asking, 'How many of you are for this and how many of you are against it?' That is the wrong question. ... The right question is: 'With all of the information and all of the praying that we have been doing, how many of you **sense** that God clearly is directing us to proceed in this direction?' This is a very different question. It does not ask members for *their* opinions. It asks them to vote based on what they **sense** God is saying to His church."<sup>8</sup>

Blackaby may argue that his methodology "does not ask members for *their* opinions," but without employing the counsel of the objective Word of God — which he does not include in his cited formula — that's exactly what he's getting. Even more disturbing is the spiritual intimidation he exploits in getting people to "sense" the direction God was supposedly providing:

"People often ask, 'Did you always wait until you got a 100 percent vote?' No, I knew that we were so out of fellowship with the Lord that they could not hear His voice. Another might be purposefully disobedient. ... Their disagreement indicated that they might have a fellowship problem with the Lord."<sup>9</sup>

Blackaby appears ignorant of the fact that Christians who adopt subjective

practices — although claiming to use Scripture — apply human reasoning and personal experience over revealed truth. It becomes a matter of what one wants or thinks Scripture says, not what it actually says. But if a definite minority biblically disapproved against what the majority "sensed" God was saying, they can, according to Blackaby, be written off as having such poor fellowship with the Lord that they are not hearing "His voice" or may even be "purposefully disobedient." If one applied a form of Blackaby's premise to the ten Promised Land "explorers" (and subsequently the entire Israelite community) who stood against Caleb and Joshua (Numbers 13:1-14:10; Joshua 14:7-8), we see how unscriptural this guidance by the "sensing" of the majority can be.

### CRITICS OF THE CRITICS

Those who defend Blackaby say his detractors take him out of context by quoting insufficiently from his writings and thereby obscuring or confusing his real intent. However, the real problem appears to be that Blackaby, at times, contradicts himself or is ambiguous, unclear, and open to interpretation. A confused writer produces confused readers and will generate mixed reviews.

Blackaby adds to the confusion by promoting on his web site<sup>10</sup> a book by mystic and heretic Madame Guyon, and a volume by Catholic monk Brother Lawrence. The trumpet sound is uncertain and off-key here. One has to question Blackaby's discernment, theological orientation, and bias.

### SEPARATING WHEAT AND CHAFF

Pastor and author Gil Rugh observes that there is abundant chaff in Blackaby's writings:

"Upon our review of *Experiencing God*, we have come to the conclusion that this book contains serious theological errors that disqualify it from being a helpful Christian resource. To summarize, we believe that *Experiencing God* is in error in the following areas: 1) it teaches that God speaks directly to Christians in

ways outside of the Bible; 2) it promotes a view of presenting the Gospel that is essentially the same as the 'power evangelism' approach of the Vineyard movement; 3) it takes a neo-orthodox approach to Scripture; 4) it promotes a low view of the person of Jesus Christ; 5) it seriously misinterprets and misapplies texts of Scripture; and 6) it promotes a view of Christian living that is unbiblical."<sup>11</sup>

Rugh further adds that his whole pastoral staff collaborated and agreed in their written critiques and concerns about Blackaby. They make a solid case for their six points from Blackaby himself.

To use an analogy, if we said of a man, "He is a great guy. He is good at home and exemplary at work and at church, but he is verbally abusive with his Sunday school class on occasion," just how much would we be willing to tolerate? Letting the issue go would be one approach. Correcting him would be another. Still another approach might be a suggestion that he learn to deal with anger from a biblical counselor. This article is an attempt at correction, but the readers in the end have to decide how much doctrinal abuse they will tolerate and just when it overshadows and overrides the good that one sees, especially if there are better teachers and better books with less chaff and more wheat.

Some may try to direct at critics the words of Jesus about "straining out a gnat" (Matthew 23:24). Jesus' point was not that gnats are acceptable. Jesus was pointing out the dangers of being *inconsistent*. They were straining gnats out of the wine vats but "swallowing camels." By use of this exaggeration, Jesus was saying they should not apply the little to the exclusion of the large, but to do both. Consistency — or the lack thereof — is a major issue with Blackaby, as we will see.

### MAJOR CONCERNS

In discussing Blackaby's teachings, three major concerns need be highlighted: 1) contradictory statements along with a questionable Christol-

ogy, 2) grandiose claims, and 3) confused hermeneutics resulting in covert mysticism.

With respect to the first concern, Rugh expresses serious reservation with *Experiencing God*. Rugh believes it contains several internal contradictions:

“It is not uncommon for Blackaby to make a statement in one part of the book and then make a contrary point later on. In chapter 14, for example, the reader is told that ‘God speaks through circumstances’ but is then told, ‘Never, ever determine the truth of a situation by looking at the circumstances’ (p. 200). These contradictions make it difficult, at times, to know exactly where he stands on an issue.”<sup>12</sup>

Elsewhere Blackaby counsels: “Watch to see where God is working and join Him! ... **God Is Always at Work Around You.**”<sup>13</sup> However, this may not be possible as later in his workbook he describes “**The Silences of God**” and informs readers that “*God will let you know what He is doing in your life when and if you need to know.*”<sup>14</sup> Blackaby appeals to what should be the desire of every Christian, but then frustrates those ambitions by describing a God who may withhold vital information.

Blackaby tries to offer consolation to his readers. Yet, his solace radiates a dangerous and shocking teaching concerning God and Jesus Christ. Blackaby asserts that Jesus wasn’t exactly clear on knowing His Father’s will. Blackaby first says, “Jesus perfectly fulfilled every assignment God gave Him. He never failed to do His Father’s will.”<sup>15</sup> However, elsewhere Blackaby qualifies that biblical concept by claiming Jesus had to make concessions:

“God is at work. He pursues a love relationship and invites Jesus to be involved with Him by revealing what He is doing. Jesus then makes the adjustment to do what His Father is doing.”<sup>16</sup>

It gets worse. According to Blackaby, Jesus found Himself having to make “major adjustments” to be in perfect cooperation with His Father:

“You may be thinking: *But God will not ask me to make major adjustments.* If you look to Scripture for your understanding of God, you will see that God most certainly will require adjustments of His people. He even required major adjustments of His own Son.”<sup>17</sup>

Yes, God requires “major adjustments” of His people. For example, we are told:

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).

However, Blackaby, with his unbiblical teaching that Jesus had to modify His course to keep up with what His Father was doing, denigrates our Lord into the category of sinful man. This error has now moved Blackaby from an unhealthy subjectivism to a defective Christology. Jerry Johnson responds to what he labels as Blackaby’s “most disturbing teaching”:

“The divine nature and all its attributes, including the will, are superior to the human nature and its will. Therefore, the Divine will was in Christ, leading Him and He knew at all times what He was to do. ... Jesus never lacked knowledge concerning the will of His Father. He was mindful from all eternity about what He was to do. Jesus did not need to look to see where the Father was at work. Scripture never indicates that Jesus looked to circumstances as a form of revelation to see ‘what the Father was doing.’”<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, the various Scriptures Blackaby cites from John’s Gospel<sup>19</sup> to buttress his unbiblical concept exemplify poor hermeneutics. These verses do not speak to the Son having to make “adjustment[s] to do what His Father is doing.” Rather these verses establish the intimate relationship between the Father and the Son, and from Whom the Son derived His

authority — neither of which the Jews possessed.

## HUMAN ACCOLADES

Second on the list of concerns about Blackaby are his claims, which are somewhat grandiose. Testimonials are easy to come by, and how well they hold up in years to come we may never know. Reports started to come in that people were sending copies of *Experiencing God* to friends and family all over the world. Missionaries were studying it and had renewed senses of call and outbreaks of revival. The book was even being used for church planting, but for all the passionate claims there was not a scintilla of documentation.

Although no names and addresses are given, Blackaby’s co-author Claude King cites exciting testimonies from longtime Christians:

- ‘I wish I had known these truths forty years ago. My life and ministry would have been totally different.’
- ‘This is the most wonderful time in my Christian life. I never knew I could have an intimate and personal relationship with my heavenly Father.’
- ‘My whole life and attitudes have changed since I began this study.’
- ‘I sensed God’s call to missions [or the ministry] while I was studying *Experiencing God*. That is how God got me to the mission field.’
- ‘Our church is not the same church. It has come alive again. We have started eleven new ministries in the past year.’<sup>20</sup>

What is especially disconcerting is to observe that none of the claims made for Blackaby’s book are made for the Bible. Although maybe not intended, the testimonials in *Experiencing God* of “experiencing God” appear to transcend what Scripture is able to do in one’s life. Consider that the reader is volleyed with testimonies of exhilarating intimacy with God, life-changing experiences, and church revival, all of which have come, not through the living Word of God, but through Blackaby’s book.

Christians can and should rejoice with any who have found spiritual renewal, but perhaps this exuberance needs to be tempered and the real depth and duration of this devotion considered, given that the dynamics are based on a man's book and not God's Book. Perhaps it was the Scripture in Blackaby's book that affected lives and, if so, we give thanks.

### FURTHER DOWN THE ROAD TO MYSTICLAND

The third major concern is Blackaby's confused hermeneutics, which result in covert mysticism. Those monitoring Blackaby awaited his book *Hearing God's Voice*, which was released last year and was written with his son Richard. The monitors had hoped that there would be clarification, a bit more precision, and perhaps serious consideration given to the rebukes of his critics. This was not the case. The book is clearly an apologetic for the first book and a struggle to hang on to the word "speak." There are chapters on the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and prayer that are, for the most part, carefully worded and largely acceptable. These certainly could be used to ward off even more criticism. However, other parts of the new book are extremely troubling.

There is an attempt by the Blackabys to pin down the elusive word "speak." In the "Questions Often Asked" chapter, they write:

"When we talk about God speaking in this book, we are referring to any way God communicates with people. ... He can choose to speak to us any way he chooses, and that includes speaking audibly."<sup>21</sup>

It is a dangerous exercise to suggest Christians listen for God to speak "audibly." Even more disturbing is that this claim is the only consistent part of his response to the question, the rest is unclear and cannot be called "speaking."

In the Preface of *Hearing God's Voice*, the Blackabys further polarize by suggesting that there are only two kinds of people — people who "know when God is speaking to them" and "those

who question whether God communicates with people at all."<sup>22</sup> Initiating an "us vs. them" mentality is not healthy or honest. It sounds more like saying, "Agree with us or we say you are a person who does not believe in God communicating with people."

There are many positions between the Blackabys' extremes that begin with defining the word *speak*. The Blackabys simply confuse the issue further by stating:

"It is impossible to read the Bible without seeing a clear pattern of God speaking to people. Yet because some have not heard God speak to them personally, they conclude that God chooses not to speak today."<sup>23</sup>

### WHEN IS "SPEAKING" SPEAKING?

There is no doubt that Blackaby creates his own muddle with imprecision and clichés. In an interview printed in a North Carolina church newsletter, Blackaby said:

"If God's people start to move away, He will quite often begin a process of *speaking* to them. And He has a thousand ways to *speak*."<sup>24</sup>

In his *Experiencing God* workbook, Blackaby contends that "God speaks through a variety of means. In the present, God primarily speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church."<sup>25</sup> In *Experiencing God*, he adds to the mix and maintains that God can speak in "some other way" other than the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church,<sup>26</sup> but he never tells us what the other way is. He creates the maze and then leaves his readers to wander.

One instrument he excludes is the breastplate and the Urim and Thummim of the Old Testament priestly garments. These were a method of knowing God's will for His people (Exodus 28:29-30). However, perhaps, Blackaby and his publisher have a more enjoyable (and lucrative) vehicle. On the back of his workbook readers are told:

"To add meaning to your study, purchase a CD or cassette tape of

*Experiencing God: Music for Knowing and Doing the Will of God* at your favorite Christian bookstore."<sup>27</sup>

Additionally, the Bible does not support Blackaby's teaching that God speaks to believers during prayer. Any thoughts and impressions that believers get during prayer are of human origin and must be compared with God's Word. If God providentially helps us bring comforting Scripture promises to mind while we pray, we could perhaps call it God speaking, but it would be imprecise. We can only be sure that we are thinking properly if those thoughts align with Scripture.

Blackaby blurs all lines between revelation, miracles, and providence. When we make no distinction between revelation, miracles, and providence, we run into the danger pointed out by Michael Horton that "we will end up either failing to see God as intimately involved with the great majority of our lives, or trying to turn everything into a miracle."<sup>28</sup>

Blackaby also makes no distinction between revelation, inspiration, and illumination. When those distinctions are not made and observed, all the safeguards go out of our ability to rightly divide the Word of truth. One writer affirms that the "biblical doctrines of providence, revelation, inspiration, and illumination carry within them the answers our theologically unaware generation needs."<sup>29</sup>

God inspired the Scripture writers directly and uniquely to write the words of the Bible. Christians are going to be confused if they are waiting for God to "speak" as He spoke to Scripture writers, even though chapter 16 of *Experiencing God* indicates that we can have the same kind of unmediated experience. If the Scriptures are not complete and direct revelation continues, we are in huge trouble and without a final word in the Bible. It means that we may not have all of God's Word yet and have to wait for new information — a canon beyond the canon. If our new revelations have to agree with the Bible, then we don't need them. Blackaby, no doubt, would give lip

service to a closed canon, but his writings undermine the idea. While he may say many right things about the Bible, those things are diluted or neutralized by other statements.

To use the term “God speaking to me” as in “God said to me” or “God told me” needs to be challenged simply from a linguistic and definition standpoint. These battered clichés have lost all meaning. Christians ought to drop them once and for all. They call too much attention to the user and are self-serving.

Is God really “speaking” in “a thousand ways”? We must be very careful here for, as one writer says, “My own experience often lies to me.”<sup>30</sup> Even Blackaby cannot, and should not, make the claim of God literally speaking if it is not literal speech based on a simple definition of the word speak. *The New World Dictionary of the American Language* defines “speak” as:

“to utter words with the ordinary voice; talk ... to express or communicate opinions, feelings, ideas, etc. by or as by talking ... to make a speech.”<sup>31</sup>

If my wife grunted at me or made a face, I could not say she spoke to me if I did not hear her voice. Even my impression of what she meant could not be referred to as her speaking to me. How much more important it is to understand my relationship with God.

## WHAT AND HOW

Blackaby affirms that God “speaks” to us and then leaves us to figure it out. While he tries to make the process of God speaking removed from those of Old Testament times, it apparently is just as unequivocal. He writes:

“Does God really speak to His people in our day? Will He reveal to you where He is working when He wants to use you? Yes! God has not changed. He still speaks to His people.”<sup>32</sup>

For those who may not be sure that they’re hearing God speak, Blackaby shows no mercy and employs spiritual debilitation of the worst sort. “If

*you have trouble hearing God speak, you are in trouble at the very heart of your Christian experience,”* he writes.<sup>33</sup>

Additionally, the issue of “God speaking” cannot be argued by saying, “God has not changed. He still speaks to His people.” The real issue is what we can expect God to do, based on His Word. Just because He spoke audibly to some prophets and specially chosen people does not mean everyone can expect it. Direct revelation in the past was not always speech, but dreams and visions, as Blackaby admits. God communicated truth at times in dreams and visions, but may not have spoken. The only other way God defines *speak*, is His written communication in the Scriptures (see, for example, Hebrews 3:7).<sup>34</sup>

Millions of people all through Bible times did not hear “God speaking,” direct revelation, or revelation with a view to writing Scripture. Exodus 18:15 is one clear Old Testament example. Likewise, the Apostle Paul held authority as God’s messenger unparalleled by other New Testament saints and believers. The chosen vessels for revelation and inspiration were few and far between. In every case there was a time, a place, and a purpose. Blackaby, in his aspirations to hear God speak and do His will, misses these crucial facts.

There is much confusion when we attribute something to God that He does not promise to do and is not doing. It is dangerous to claim things for God and misrepresent Him. Blackaby himself warns:

“You also need to be very careful about claiming you have a word from God. Claiming to have a word from God is serious business. ... If you have not been given a word from God yet you say you have, you stand in judgment as a false prophet.”<sup>35</sup>

Yet despite his warning, Blackaby says, “If you have been given a word from God, you must continue in that direction until it comes to pass (even 25 years like Abram).”<sup>36</sup>

Even if He spoke in the past to *some* with an audible voice, He did not

reveal Himself to all in the Scriptures or in biblical times in this way. Even if we were to say, for sake of an argument, that God spoke to someone audibly today, we could not conclude that He “speaks” to every believer like this.

Blackaby needs to recall the fact that it was Moses alone who ascended Mount Sinai when God spoke to him (Exodus 19:20 ff.). It was also Moses alone who went into the tent of meeting to hear God, while all others remained outside (Exodus 33:7-11). Yet, Blackaby’s readers will conclude, “God did it for Moses and He has to do it for me.” Blackaby writes:

“If anything is clear from a reading of the Bible, this fact is clear: God speaks to His people. He spoke to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis. He spoke to Abraham and the other patriarchs. God spoke to the judges, kings, and prophets. God was in Christ Jesus speaking to the disciples. God spoke to the early church, and God spoke to John on the Isle of Patmos in Revelation. God does speak to His people, and you can anticipate that He will be speaking to you also.”<sup>37</sup>

Blackaby has God “speaking” to us in a thousand ways, but apart from his standard four methods does not explain how He does it the other ways (although he does list ways recorded in the Old Testament). Herein is the confusion and contradiction of Blackaby, that speech becomes a thousand things and loses its meaning to be anything. Speech is in the ear of the beholder. Speech and speaking will end up being whatever Blackaby wants to make them — a small inner voice, circumstances, or whatever. If Blackaby does not really mean speak (in its accepted meaning), he needs to say so and clarify what it is he thinks God does and tell us how He does it.

Blackaby’s confusion is evident as one interviewer asked him: “Is there a theme or message that you sense is on the heart of God for us?”<sup>38</sup>

Now God “speaking” gets reduced to a “sense” — really an opinion — of

what is on God's "heart" and sounds like Mormonism or mysticism. Feelings, emotions, or imprecise teaching can never produce a normal, consistent, or healthy growing Christian life. Kenneth Woodward once observed, "Americans love the search so much that the idea of a destination is lost."<sup>39</sup>

Blackaby's response to the question was that "God is trying to speak to His people. Others will get a message, but they will not be able to understand it if they don't know the Lord. But God's people ought to know what God is trying to say."<sup>40</sup> What Blackaby delivers is just more vague generalizations, misspeaks, improper word usage, and an appearance of being deep.

Consider the following statement by Blackaby:

"The Scriptures will be your source of authority for faith and practice. You cannot depend on human traditions, your experience, or the experience of others to be accurate authorities on God's will and ways."<sup>41</sup>

Later, in the same book, Blackaby writes:

"God speaks to His people by the Holy Spirit. He can speak in any way He chooses; but the most common ways through which God speaks today include the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church. He speaks to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways. When what God says through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church begin to line up to say the same thing, you can proceed with confidence to follow God's directions."<sup>42</sup>

Even overlooking the use of the word *speaks*, there are a number of things wrong here. The latter statement contradicts the former. For all of Blackaby's insistence that we are to "Always check to see if you have asked the right question before you pursue the answer,"<sup>43</sup> he neglects his own advice. The correct question is not what God can do, but what does He do and how He communicates truth to us. Deserted on an island

with a Bible, we would find God's Word sufficient without the other trappings.

Blackaby's initial statement is solid, but his second statement suggests multiple lines of authority that sound good in a perfect world, but do not work in real life.

As any pastor who has had to undertake a case of church discipline can testify, experience and emotions cried out "No!" knowing the difficulty ahead. He had to struggle in prayer, feeling tossed, upset, and ambiguous. And, in some instances, the guilty person was against the church's discipline and the church was not unified. The church's leadership had to move ahead on the bare essentials of Matthew 18 and obey God in matters of blatant, gross, and unrepentant sin. Nothing but the Word told them to obey Christ. God had already communicated His will in writing for that situation.

### NO FINAL COURT OF APPEAL?

The chaos regarding guidance and authority grows when Blackaby indicates that the Bible alone cannot be a clear indicator of God's direction. Blackaby writes:

"[God] uses the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church (other believers). *No one of these methods of God's speaking is, by itself, a clear indicator of God's directions.* But when God says the same thing through each of these ways, you can have confidence to proceed."<sup>44</sup>

So they all must agree — the Bible with them or them with the Bible, because the Bible alone is not enough. Blackaby becomes very clear here that no one method, even Scripture, can give us God's direction. This in no uncertain terms marginalizes, minimizes, and weakens the Bible, making it merely one of several equal authorities.

The Bible is the source of daily comfort and guidance. Michael Horton reminds us that "God's secret files cannot be accessed by clever technicians, but he has left us with more revelation than we will ever master in

our lifetimes."<sup>45</sup> He further notes: "We experience God in truth, not in experience itself. It is because he reveals himself so magnificently in his Word that genuine experience has any chance of emerging."<sup>46</sup>

Dr. Jay Adams concurs:

"To discover the Lord's will you should pray for help to understand the Bible in a proper way. It should be prayer for the ability and strength to do whatever you discover God wants of you as you study the Scriptures. We are not given the Urim and Thummim for our day, but we have been given an inerrant and infallible Book, which contains all we need by way of precept and example for living a life pleasing to God. All that is necessary to love God and our neighbor is found in one form or another, in the Bible. Today we consult God by turning to His written Word."<sup>47</sup>

We can get advice from friends in the church. We can evaluate circumstances in wisdom. We can do all that, knowing Scripture is over them all and the final arbiter of truth. Many of our decisions, if not clearly unbiblical, free us to make personal individual choices that God will bless without us being tied up in knots trying to make sure everything "lines up" or that we hit that perfect bullseye of God's will.

Not that all these things couldn't or shouldn't "line up," but lining up is not the acid test of guidance. As Proverbs says, "there is safety in a multitude of counselors," assuming that the counselors are scripturally oriented and not giving "counsel of the ungodly" (Psalm 1).

Much of life cannot be reduced to formulas. Many of life's choices just have to be made. If a friend fell on the floor with a heart attack, we would not go through a formula for guidance, but based on the biblical principle of saving a life, we would call 911. Likewise, the person would be free to make a choice of one cardiologist out of five available.

Pastors do not have to struggle and agonize over every element in a

worship service as much as do everything with decency and order (1 Corinthians 14:33,40), praying for the Spirit to use each part, and desiring that God would be glorified. Filling our mind with Scripture helps us to walk in wisdom and make wise choices based on the principles of the Word of God. Scripture often allows us to make any one of a number of choices. In the gray areas, Christians often may find that when they do not know precisely what to do, they always know what *not* to do based on Scripture, and that keeps them safe until they can find a clearer biblical path. God may withhold guidance to force us back into the Word.

It is amazing that Blackaby has not developed awareness of the uniqueness of the Bible, Bible times, and the doctrine of inspiration. He floats the assumption that everyone can hear God in exactly the same way as Noah, Moses, Isaiah, Peter, and Paul. Henry Thiessen gets right to the heart of the issue:

“We must not confuse inspiration with revelation. Revelation is the communication of truth that cannot be otherwise discovered; inspiration has to do with the recording of the truth.”<sup>48</sup>

According to this standard definition, even Blackaby must agree that God is not communicating truth outside the Bible that cannot otherwise be discovered, and He is not inspiring men to record and write down the truth and create a new canon. Blackaby and his son write:

“You will not discover a truth about God that he has not expressed through his written Word. So why does God speak to us? He takes the revelation found in his Word and applies it to our lives.”<sup>49</sup>

Immediately, however, they take back what they say and present a hermeneutic that sounds mystical:

“God does speak to people today, but we don’t want you merely to take our word for it. We want *you* to hear his voice. We want *you* to experience his guidance.”<sup>50</sup>

After all the nuancing, the Blackabys end up with what most would define as illumination. They sensationalize illumination and carry it over to other things outside the Bible.

The Blackabys’ readers must be confused at this point as to what “God speaking” really means and whether God only “speaks” through Scripture, because the Blackabys spend 265 pages telling of the various ways they think God “speaks.”

The Blackabys’ ideas might be categorized as soft mysticism. Mysticism has been defined by D.D. Martin as “an experienced, direct, nonabstract, unmediated knowing of God.”<sup>51</sup> It is judged by Arthur Johnson:

“Much of what has been taught about spirituality in general, and about the ‘deeper spiritual life’ specifically, has its roots more deeply in medieval Catholic mysticism, and in the mystical experiences of more recent persons, than it has in Scripture. Being convinced by their own experiences that a mystical approach is valid, these persons have interpreted Scripture to fit. This often gives a meaning to the written Word that may be nearly the opposite to that intended by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>52</sup>

In the Old Testament, God mediated His presence — which was a consuming fire — through priests and the tabernacle. At times it was through a cloud. The unadorned glory of God cannot be approached. A crude analogy would be the raw power of electric lines. Just as the powerful electrical force in those lines must be mediated through a breaker box, so God designed a mediated approach to Himself. Moses knew that no man could look upon God and live (Exodus 33:20). Yahweh, covered by angelic presence, had Isaiah trembling with an awareness of his own frailty and uncleanness (Isaiah 6).

God mediated Himself in Jesus (John 1) and today mediates Himself through His own written Word. Some may ask, why not commune directly with Christ in us? That idea is never

suggested in Scripture. Since experience can easily deceive us, that ought to drive us to look outside ourselves to the Bible.

## AMBIGUOUS GODSPEAK

The Blackabys express a prayer that “God will clearly speak to you as you read this material.”<sup>53</sup> Yet as one reads the volume, there is a nagging thought that there is something wrong and inconsistent. The Blackabys set up hypothetical situations as if we are in a confusing and almost impossible dilemma:

“Christians want to choose the spouse God knows is best for them. They need direction with their careers. Baffled parents are desperate for God’s wisdom in rearing their children. Every day numerous events magnify the awareness that Christians need a timely, specific word from God.”<sup>54</sup>

Those who rely upon Scripture alone for these answers certainly will take issue with such a statement. There are all kinds of Bible verses on these matters and it is, for us, a timely, specific word from God. Struggling parents can go to Proverbs, Ephesians, and many other places to find a wealth of help — even though the struggle may not be easy. Everyday events and even guidance for families and careers are addressed in the Scriptures. The Blackabys make it sound as though we are deficient without their help.

Even counsel for the mundane is available. For example, should one keep in good repair an old car or sidestep regular maintenance to save money? The accumulation of defects in the car could constitute a hazard to the person’s family. Knowing what the Bible says about a man’s responsibilities to his wife and children (1 Timothy 5:8; Titus 3:14), the biblical choice is not hard to make. Scripture is clear on so many of our priorities that decisions are not as difficult as the Blackabys make them.<sup>55</sup> Arriving at such a decision might not result in thrills and chills, but God’s Word will provide the power and motivation to follow through.

When God told Adam and Eve not to eat of the *one* tree, it meant that they could eat of *all* the others in liberty and with personal choice. Genesis 2:16-17 really demonstrates the breadth of God's will; that there is more freedom than restriction. No doubt they enjoyed all the provision in the garden with thanksgiving and gratitude to God. Structure and liberty were in balance in the garden. Structure and liberty are God's perfect ideal.

The will of God is much broader than the Blackabys describe, and there is much more room for choice and personal freedom than they state.

The Blackabys write, "Life can be aggravatingly complex. The best choices are not always readily apparent."<sup>56</sup> While this is true, for the Christian it may mean we need more time to study the Word of God and make more informed choices, not that we have to look outside the Word for guidance. Too many Christians already suffer from a "paralysis of analysis" and need to become more astute in the Scriptures.

For all of the Blackabys' stories of ministers and missionaries agonizing over God's perfect will for the absolutely right place of ministry, perhaps 1 Timothy 3:1 is just too simple for them. Paul said, "If a man *desires* the office of a bishop, he *desires* a good work." God very well may put that *desire* in a man for a ministry. Scripture says so and we do not have to make it some kind of "speaking" voice of God. Could it also be that our individual gifts and abilities (Romans 12) are a part of the calling of God? That, as well, might be too tame for some, but it happens to be more biblical.

Sometimes an agenda can blind one to the simple truths of Scripture. Defending a book rather than correcting it can lock one into blind spots. Perhaps, in the end, recognizing God in our desire for Him and His work, and recognizing with gratitude His gifting in us, is a better way than the cliché, "God told me."

The Blackabys move away from Scripture and derive support from

"examples of some of the great Christians of history" and "examples from our own lives."<sup>57</sup> This will end up being a fruitless enterprise because there are "great Christians" who would vehemently disagree with the Blackabys, and others whose experiences are just the opposite.

As far as examples from others' lives, we must recognize at least eight areas of basic weakness in the Blackabys' approach:

1) Often those quoted are giving subjective interpretations of their experiences. Each person's experience is different and therefore cannot be applied to anyone else.

2) Some of those quoted are interpreting their experience through a 19th century higher life/victorious life theological frame of reference.

3) The Blackabys are then adding their interpretations to and extrapolations of these experiences.

4) Other godly men and women have experiences far different and even contradictory to those selected by the Blackabys.

5) Many of the experience stories are taken out of the larger unknown context of those persons' lives. In past journals, PFO has documented the lives of a number of the deeper life/higher life quasi-mystics and found the rest of the story. A number of these so-called higher life teachers washed out in the Christian life, proving their experiences unreliable.

6) Selecting experiences can be subjective and we can choose those that simply agree with us and ignore the rest.

7) Questions may be asked about the accuracy of the reports of the experiences and their interpretations.

8) The only real safe model for Christian behaviors is Jesus Himself (1 Peter 2:21, "Follow His steps"). Likewise, the only safe guide is the Scriptures.

### A LESSER WORD?

The Blackabys appear to emphasize the Scriptures. They state: "God speaks through his written Word. The

Bible is the standard by which everything else is to be measured"<sup>58</sup> and the "best way to hear God speak to you is to spend regular time reading, studying, and meditating on his Word."<sup>59</sup> Yet, it is questionable as to whether they really believe this.

The Blackabys' fundamental error becomes clear when they make a false distinction between two types of revelation/inspiration:

"Talking donkeys and burning bushes are not common, contemporary occurrences. Nevertheless, a closer examination of the Scriptures reveals that while God did indeed speak on matters of great significance through supernatural means, he also clearly communicated with men and women from all walks of life regarding matters of seemingly lesser importance."<sup>60</sup>

The Blackabys present no reason for separating "supernatural means" of God speaking to "great significance" and "lesser importance" matters. The reader is left to conclude that the less dramatic ways which God communicated in Bible times are what we are to look for today. That is, skip looking for the talking donkeys and burning bushes and just listen for that small, still voice.

Whether they know it or not, the Blackabys present readers with two different kinds of Scripture. However, orthodoxy knows nothing of this kind of dichotomy — that is, some communication or Scripture from God being lesser in importance than other forms of communication from God. All Scripture is important and all Scripture is a unity.

The Blackabys' error still is that anything God may choose to do in our world through sovereignty, providence, and grace is confused with revelation and inspiration of a lesser sort, of course, and is called "God speaking." The Blackabys find themselves in a muddle working off of inaccuracies and wrongly defined concepts. They then assume that this makes guidance more clear when, in fact, it makes it more complicated and subjective. Although the lack of clar-

ity may satisfy charismatic extremists, as well as the evangelical mainstream (with evangelical clichés), it will irk the true Berean.

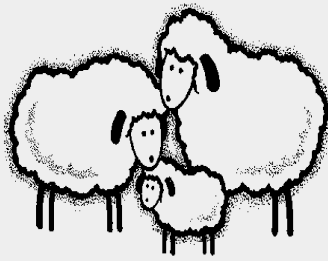
Clearly, *Hearing God's Voice* is a rewrite of *Experiencing God* with an apologetic attempt. What remains unclear is how one can really "experience God" and find His guidance. The Blackabys suggest, "One of the best ways to ensure you are hearing God correctly is to keep a record of what you clearly heard him say before."<sup>61</sup> This sounds distinctly like collecting something from inside of you that is beyond the Scriptures. As such, one's impressions and thoughts — and not the Word itself — become the direction of God. The Blackabys may say those thoughts should agree with Scripture, but creative and determined people can find proof texts out of context.

The Blackabys create so many straw men and so grossly misrepresent other views throughout their book that it would take an entire book to refute them. They either are uninformed about alternate views or knowingly misrepresent them. They charge that those who hold that the Bible is sufficient for guidance do not see Old Testament people as "models for modern Christians" and maintain that "God is too busy ... to bother with the personal lives of billions of people and their comparatively minor issues."<sup>62</sup> The Blackabys also accuse the opposite camp of believing that God "made us his equal."<sup>63</sup> All these statements are unequivocally false.

Responsible writers should not characterize others with outright distortions and false statements in regard to their position. An astute reader has to holler "foul." Denigrating other positions does not make the Blackabys' position right. If it does not make us question their honesty, it should make us question their scholarship. Besides, they offer no quotes or documentation to back their accusations regarding those who take opposing views.

### HIDE AND SEEK

The unstated premise that runs through Blackaby's writings is that



# LISTENING FOR THE MASTER'S VOICE?

by Micah K. Goedelman

Christians rightfully want to know how to make decisions in accordance with God's will. They want to know if God speaks to His children today and, if so, how.

Henry Blackaby and others who deny the sufficiency of the Bible in this area offer the following guidelines in addition to Scripture as ways by which God can speak to us and reveal His will for our lives:

- Advice from Others
- Circumstances
- Dreams and Visions
- Feelings and Emotions
- Peace with God
- Prayer

A brief analysis of the methods above will reveal the flaws in each of them:

**Advice from Others** — It can be prudent to seek biblical counsel from godly individuals, especially if they have a better understanding of God's Word. Proverbs 15:22 tells us that plans do succeed when drawn with the help of many counselors. Yet we must remember, as Jay Adams writes, "God makes no promise to reveal His will through others." Human nature can cause us to seek the advice of those who may encourage what we secretly (or openly) desire, not what God desires for us (Psalm 1:1, Proverbs 27:5). When others offer counsel, it must be from God's Word alone and with proper application. Psalm 119:104 tells us: "I gain understanding

from your precepts [God's Word]; therefore I hate every wrong path."

**Circumstances** — Although we can look in the rear-view mirror of life to see the care and guidance of God, we cannot use circumstances as a road map for the future. "Open doors" may lead to dangerous places and harmful consequences. Consider a toddler facing an open door at the top of the cellar steps. Additionally, individuals are apt to read situations in different ways depending on their ambitions, along with their spiritual maturity and character. For example, members of a missionary team may view a "closed door" for a planned mission trip with very different interpretations. God does not guide through circumstances.

**Dreams and Visions** — These images, at best, are the fanciful creation of a mind processing the day's anxiety (Ecclesiastes 5:3a), or from a medical condition and its treatment, or from other life issues. At worst, they can be the result of sinning against our body (i.e., sleep deprivation, substance abuse, etc.). They are fantasy, not fact. Moreover, their interpretation is open to all types of subjective methods. The writer of Hebrews states: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son" (Hebrews 1:1,2a). While God did speak in the "past" with dreams and visions (even though these were sparingly used), today

the will of God is difficult to find. Blackaby characterizes finding the will of God as a struggle that he can make easier. Pastor and author John MacArthur labels this as a "cosmic killjoy" theology and says:

"God must appear to be a sort of divine Easter bunny who has stashed His will, like eggs, some-

where out of sight and sent us running through life trying to find it. And He is up there saying, 'You're getting warmer!'"<sup>64</sup>

MacArthur argues that nothing could be further from the truth. God's will is stated clearly all through the Bible in either specific commands and

we have the full revelation of Jesus contained in Scripture, and with it what we need for life and godliness.

**Feelings and Emotions** — Believers are not to rely on feelings or emotions for God's guidance. Feelings are a comprehension of physical condition. As such they can rapidly change as a result of someone's attitude, the weather, diet, the amount of sleep, illness, and so forth. Scripture never advises us to trust our feelings. Jeremiah 17:9 warns: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" Jesus repeats this judgment when He said: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts..." (Matthew 15:19).

Likewise, feelings are not a test of truth. Mormon missionaries say they know Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and that their church (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) is true because they have prayed about it and they have received "a burning in their bosom" (i.e., a "God-imposed feeling") that their beliefs are true.

**Peace with God** — People will often maintain, "I know this is right because I have peace with God about the matter." However, this conclusion may be the result of a variety of human factors. It could result from ignorance of Scripture, or a heart so hardened by sin (1 Timothy 4:2) that a guilty conscience is no longer present. Some who support "peace" as a genuine factor that God has "spoken" will cite Colossians 3:15 as a proof text. This passage pertains not to guidance, but to our relationship with fellow Christians. Peace may well be a by-product of being in God's will, but it is never the litmus test or guide.

**Prayer** — We do not receive God's guidance in prayer by waiting for God to respond with a "still small voice." Prayer is a "one-way street." Within prayer we may begin the process of receiving guid-

ance by asking for it (James 1:5), but in Scripture prayer is always represented as man addressing God. Never are we told to "listen" for an "answer" in prayer. Prayer is a way of asking God to show you guidance. To discover the Lord's will we should pray for help to understand and use the Bible in a proper way.

There are two other major aspects in the guidelines which must also be considered. The first is the human element in all of the above. Our hopes and desires, ignorance, and sinful nature are all key players in using the cited methods as determining factors for perceiving God's will. Secondly, all of the above undermine the sufficiency of Scripture. What it says is that God has not given us all we need to know about our life and godliness through His revealed Word. The Bible, however, says otherwise: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3).

The Bible is the only certain way to know the will of God. Scripture says: "Thy Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105). It does not say advice, circumstances, dreams, feelings, peace, or prayer are that light.

Guidance comes only from the Bible. Advice from others can be sought, not for their opinions, but for assistance in using the Bible to make a decision that will honor God. Circumstances can be misinterpreted and misapplied. Dreams are more fiction than reality. Feelings and emotions are not to be trusted because they can change from day to day. Perceived peace with God is irrelevant. Prayer is helpful to ask God for help, but is not a two-way exchange. Thus, the Bible is the only source of revelation from God and the only sure guide to pleasing Him. Nowhere else can one find His will for his life.

directives or in principles. Even in the gray areas of life and in the small decisions, there are biblical parameters that are clear and that we cannot transgress or ignore as we make our choices in that framework. The big problem today is not that the will of God is hard to discern, but that people *know so little of the Bible they*

*have no basis on which to find God's will.*

God's will is stated all through the Bible. When the term "the will of God" is used, the context gives specifics. The epistles are replete with the term "the will of God" (Ephesians 1:9; 5:17; 6:6; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 5:18; 1 Timothy 2:4; 1 Peter 2:15; 4:19). Understanding the will of God is tied

to God's Word as Paul states: "Consider what I say, may the Lord give you understanding in all things" (2 Timothy 2:7). Peter speaks of the fact that his letters, along with the Apostles' teachings, are "commandments" (2 Peter 3:2).

Rather than lining up certain things based on a formula, we need to line up our schedules and have a daily, consistent Bible study time and commit many verses to memory. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

## THE CHORE LIST

Imagine a parent giving his children detailed, comprehensive, written instructions on chores and related items. They certainly would read that in the context of years of relationship and know the parent's love and concern for them. They could look around and see the evidences of that love and care. The chore list would be a directive from their father, not a stranger. It would be silly for them to keep coming back and ask what was to be done.

In the parent's absence they could ask a sibling to help them with a clarification or insight into the directions, and ideally that is what we do when we seek counsel of others. We seek those who know God's Word and ask for insight and perspective on our heavenly Father's directives. Even if circumstances and feelings militated against them (along with the neighbors' kids), the child would be expected to do the chores. However, this analogy, like all others, is somewhat imperfect because we also have God's Spirit to illumine the chore list (Bible) and empower us to do it.

One would think that a book called *Experiencing God* would have heavy doses of the doctrine of God, exposition on the names and character of God, and information on the covenants of God. It does not.<sup>65</sup> There is little doubt that a book of that nature would not sell since we are in an experience-oriented time and culture.

Christians should testify that the deepest times of "experiencing God" in their life come about during times of Bible reading and study sessions

on topics of the doctrine of God and Christ, the names of God, along with study of the doctrines of God's grace and redemption. Other times of "experiencing God" can come as they sit, perhaps broken and convicted, under solid and godly preaching.

### SOMETHING LOST

For some reason, we have lost the concept that we can "experience God" fully in the pages of the Word as the Holy Spirit reveals redemptive truth. We need a reintroduction to Psalm 119 where the Word is called everything for every area of life. It is our light, our delight, our joy, our manna, our water, our comfort, our strength, our word from heaven, our shield, and our defense as it conveys God's heart, mind, and will to us. This is not just a "book," it is our Father's Book.

While technically it is incorrect to say God "speaks" to us in the Bible because an audible voice is not heard, we need to affirm that God communicates truth to our minds and spirits as the Holy Spirit Himself illumines the pages and the verses. There is a real dynamic of warmth and excitement that can only be dimly explained in the illustration of us reading a letter from someone whom we dearly love. Just as their words thrill us and move us, how much more do those of God, Who is actively present by His Spirit as we "experience" Him each time we open His Book.

When it comes to open doors and closed doors, the Blackabys say that God may or may not speak through an open door and may or may not speak through a closed door. In their chapter on circumstances (which some call open or closed doors) they suggest: "You, too, will not know the truth of your situation until you hear from God."<sup>66</sup> So even after analyzing the open and closed doors, you still must "hear" from the Lord, whatever that means. Also they state that "we must continually lift up the circumstances of our lives to God and allow him to reveal his will to us through them."<sup>67</sup> Thus, they say, the believer cannot know the truth of the situation until they hear from the Lord and they keep "lifting the circumstances" to allow Him to reveal His will

through them.

Then they offer, under "Guidelines for Understanding Your Circumstances," this advice: "Do not try to understand God based on your circumstances."<sup>68</sup> They weave in and out of others' experiences and throw in the concept of "peace" as a way to know.<sup>69</sup> For illustrative purposes, they detail the story of the dream of George W. Truett, former pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas, which they label "a word from God."<sup>70</sup> Though never specifically stated, we can assume if Truett found "a word from God" through a dream, we must be able to do so as well.

Jeremiah 23 gives a stern warning regarding dreams that can take us away from God if we follow them (v. 27). It alerts us to how dreams can be false (v. 32) and it talks of the absolute superiority of the Word of God over dreams (vv. 28-29). There were probably fewer than a dozen dream events recorded in the Bible.

Dreams today as a means of direction would be a step down — not up — as explained by author and counselor Dr. Robert Smith:

"Since we have the completed revelation of God in His Word, dreams are no longer needed to learn God's will or for Him to reveal Himself. Today some erroneously try to understand a person's behavior from an analysis of his dreams. Freud popularized that concept. Those who disagree with Freud may still use the Bible to support such a revelatory approach. But as stated above, there is nothing biblical about it. There is no new revelation today as was received in Bible times. Conclusions people reach today are based on sin-cursed human thinking. It is true that one's daily activities and thought life may affect the content of dreams. For example, one under great pressure during the day may have dreams reflecting that pressure during the night. However, one cannot use those dreams to reach absolute conclusions about the thought life or day time actions."<sup>71</sup>

### WHEN IN DOUBT, HOLD OUT

Despite their mapping of the various avenues for knowing and doing God's will, the Blackabys concede that sometimes there will not be explicit guidance. Therefore they advise:

"If there is no clear instruction, wait and do the last thing you know God told you to do. Waiting is not inactivity but continuing until God speaks."<sup>72</sup>

It is likewise debilitating when the Blackabys conclude their book this way:

"There is nothing more important in life than understanding when God is speaking to you. If you are disoriented to God's voice, your life is dangerously vulnerable."<sup>73</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Blackaby plays into the hands of fringe groups. One can find whatever one wants in his books. Subjecting his ideas to the light of Scripture shows some of them to be blemished and off-target. Though presented as being "scriptural," a large part of his teaching is decidedly unbiblical. Blackaby conveys biblical words and biblical realities, but in improper and misdefined ways, leading to faulty, mystical conclusions.

We all know that in our devotional times of Scripture reading and prayer, and in our corporate worship times, there is something deep, personal, meaningful, spiritual, vital, sanctifying, and subjective going on. It is not an unmediated encounter with God, but a coming to God in God's way. The only safe way to explain it is in biblical terms. We cannot run the risk of the extremes of pure sterile propositionalism or covert mysticism.

There is no biblical warrant to say "God told me," "God spoke to me," or "I heard Him saying." In reality, the focus ends up being on the proclaimer and not on God. Christians need to stop describing their musings and promptings, along with their life events, as "God speaking." It misrepresents the dynamics and confuses others. It may also promote a spiritual elitism.

There needs to be a major biblical reframing in this area of study. In expressing opposition to the "God told me" cliché, one runs the risk of being accused of challenging orthodoxy and not believing God is involved in the life of a believer. These charges are foolish and untrue.

There is work to be done in a biblical reframing of Christian experience. Blackaby and others skew and mix up the doctrines of revelation, inspiration, and illumination. We need to define and speak properly about our experiences in devotions, prayer, and worship. We need to call impressions and feelings just that. They may be wrong, but God's Word never is.

We can more consistently reframe and restate by saying, "The Holy Spirit ministered deeply to me through the Scriptures," or "the Holy Spirit deeply comforted me as He communicated Christ to me in the Scriptures."

The "eureka" moments come from God and His Word (Psalm 119, Romans 15:4), not by our channeling God or Christ. The Church at large needs a reintroduction to and study of John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15; and 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

Paul's prayer for believers was not that they hear the literal voice of God, but that they would be "strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man" and that we would more deeply comprehend the love of Christ and be "filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:16, 18, 19).

The Apostle's prayer for the Colossians was that they might walk in Christ and be "rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith as you have been taught abounding in it with thanksgiving" (2:7). He then points them to the route they were to take: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (3:16). Walking in the Word or walking in the way of wisdom would be a far more accurate description of the life of faith.

When Paul instructs us on our armor of protection, he lays out righteousness, the Gospel, faith (trust in

God and His Word), salvation, the Word of God, and prayer (Ephesians 6:14-18). Conspicuously absent is that we must hear God speak.

Christians who buy into Blackaby's advice will find themselves in the muddle of the old higher-life school, trying to discern God's voice and hear God speak. Christians need not jump through all of these hoops, but ask God to help them to understand the power of His Word and to commit to daily devotions and Scripture memorization. These things will bring strength, comfort, direction, and consistency.

We need to confront our clichés even if it extracts the sensational out of our claims. Clichés may lead to gross imbalance in the life of new or untaught believers. We may think it makes us sound like Moses, Isaiah, or Paul, but God wants us to be ourselves.

Certainly there is something significant, spiritual, and life-changing in our devotional encounters with God because of His powerful Word and powerful Holy Spirit. Wishing for more when we have so much may leave us vulnerable to losing the reality of His providence and presence in the normal. It may throw us off balance and push us toward being mystical misfits.

As we struggle with defining the subjective elements in our faith (Philippians 2:13), an understanding of John 14-16 with an appreciation of the potency and power of the Word (Hebrews 4:12), and the Spirit's ministry are a safer bet than Blackaby. We see through a glass darkly and there will always be some mystery and incomprehensibility in our faith. We cannot take biblical dynamics past and present and mislabel them. We cannot create a new paradigm of two kinds of Scripture. That is a fast track to delusion.

Blackaby's advice — do this, try that — does not inspire confidence or hope. It is akin to a doctor who diagnoses and offers the treatment of: "Try this medication, and this one, and if that does not work try this, this, and that one over there. If they do not work, try a few more of the


other brands." Blackaby wants his readers to connect all the dots, but in the end they may all be just a bunch of meaningless lines.

## Endnotes:

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3. Ken Walker, "Shaking Southern Baptist Tradition," *Charisma*, March 1999, pg. 76.
4. Michael Horton, *In the Face of God*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996, pg. 168.
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6. Jay E. Adams, *The Christian's Guide to Guidance*. Woodruff, N.C.: Timeless Texts, 1998, pp. 45-46.
7. Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994, pg. xvi.
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11. Gil Rugh, *A Critique of Experiencing God*. Lincoln, Neb.: Indian Hills Community Church, 1999, pg. 7.
12. *Ibid.*, pg. 5.
13. *Experiencing God* (Discipleship Workbook), op. cit., pg. 15, italics and bold in original.
14. *Ibid.*, pg. 93, italics and bold in original.
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16. *Ibid.*, pg. 68.
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25. *Experiencing God* (Discipleship Workbook), op. cit., pg. 83.
26. *Experiencing God*, op. cit., pg. 144.
27. *Experiencing God* (Discipleship Work-

book), op. cit., 2001 edition, back cover.  
 28. *In the Face of God*, op. cit., pg. 217.  
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 30. *In the Face of God*, op. cit., pg. 98.  
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 32. *Experiencing God* (Discipleship Workbook), op. cit., 1990 edition, pg. 36.  
 33. *Ibid.*, italics in original.  
 34. See further, "say" (*lego*) in W.E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984, pg. 995.  
 35. *Experiencing God* (Discipleship Workbook), op. cit., pg. 37.  
 36. *Ibid.*  
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 38. "Watchman Prayer Alert," op. cit.  
 39. Quoted in *In the Face of God*, op. cit., pg. 172.  
 40. "Watchman Prayer Alert," op. cit.  
 41. *Experiencing God*, op. cit., pg. 6.  
 42. *Ibid.*, pg. 210.  
 43. *Experiencing God* (Discipleship Workbook), op. cit., pg. 14.  
 44. *Experiencing God*, op. cit., pg. 56,

emphasis added.  
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 46. *Ibid.*, pg. 205.  
 47. *The Christian's Guide to Guidance*, op. cit., pg. 34.  
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 49. *Hearing God's Voice*, op. cit., pg. xi.  
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 51. Quoted in Winfried Corduan, *Mysticism*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991, pg. 23.  
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 53. *Hearing God's Voice*, op. cit., pg. xii.  
 54. *Ibid.*, pg. 2.  
 55. See further, *Step by Step*, op. cit. This volume's appendix has an "Assessing My Priorities (AMP) Worksheet." The dynamic of this item points out that understanding God's will for an individual's life is something that need not be monumental, mysterious, or mystical. The worksheet alone makes this book very practical and very helpful.  
 56. *Hearing God's Voice*, op. cit., pg. 2.

57. *Ibid.*, pg. xi.  
 58. *Ibid.*, pg. 91. See also, *Experiencing God*, op. cit., pg. 6 for a similar statement.  
 59. *Hearing God's Voice*, op. cit., pg. 110.  
 60. *Ibid.*, pg. 3.  
 61. *Ibid.*, pg. 230.  
 62. *Ibid.*, pg. 4.  
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 64. John MacArthur, Jr., *Found: God's Will*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1973, pg. 6.  
 65. In fairness to Blackaby, it must be said that *Experiencing God* has a brief listing of the names and descriptions of God in chapter 1 (Unit 4 in the workbook), and a fuller treatment in an eight-page appendix (a two-page appendix in the workbook). However, these are a small counterbalance.  
 66. *Hearing God's Voice*, op. cit., pg. 155.  
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 68. *Ibid.*  
 69. *Ibid.*, pg. 154.  
 70. *Ibid.*, pg. 156.  
 71. Robert D. Smith, *The Christian Counselor's Medical Desk Reference*. Stanley, N.C.: Timeless Texts, 2000, pg. 136.  
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## NOT EVERY PROMISE

(continued from page 1)

written Word to mankind. It was given by the inspiration of His Spirit, Who also has superintended it through the ages until it arrived in our hands to be believed in our hearts.

- The Bible is wholly reliable in doctrine and history, and in all other areas in which it speaks. Its religious affirmations and its historical accounts are equally true.

- The Scriptures are infallible. That is, they do not mislead or deceive us. Because the Bible is inspired by God, it has the quality of divine truthfulness and is wholly trustworthy.

- Likewise, the Scriptures are inerrant. Because the Bible is God's Word, it is free of factual or conceptual errors and is to be received as valid.

- The inspiration of the Bible is plenary (all parts of it are equally inspired), verbal (God gave His message in words, not just vague concepts), and confluent (literally, "a

flowing together;" by inspiration God expressed His truth through man's personality to produce His intended written Word).

- Also, the Word of God is perspicuous. That is a seldom-used word that means that God is pleased to make His Word clear and understandable to all who approach it in simple faith and obedience, without a personal agenda to proof-text.

- Every promise that God has given in His Word either has been or will be fulfilled, without fail. In no way do we imply by this article that God is incapable of, or unfaithful in fulfilling His promises. God keeps His Word!

But, not *every* promise in the Book is intended to apply to *every* person. This is illustrated in many ways in the Scriptures, including the following examples:

- The angel of the Lord said to Hagar after "she fled from the face" of her jealous mistress, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude" (Genesis 16:10). That

promise was fulfilled to Hagar, but not to every person who has read this passage.

- Concerning Sarah, God said to Abraham, "And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her" (Genesis 17:16). God fulfilled this promise to Sarah, but not to every believer.

- To David, He said through the prophet Nathan, "And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a great name, like the name of the great men who are on the earth. Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously ... And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:9, 10, 16). The prophet's words of divine promise have been and are being fulfilled, but only to David.

## THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JAY

During his November 2002 "Praise-A-Thon," Paul Crouch, Trinity Broadcasting Network president, offered as a premium for a donation, a book called *How to Claim the Abrahamic Covenant*, by Jay Snell. The promo stated that all believers have the right to claim all that God promised to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant. Jay Snell's web site lists 11 books that he has written, at least nine of which are based on his novel approach to the Abrahamic Covenant.

If the name Jay Snell is not familiar, four things should be noted:

1. At one time he was a Southern Baptist pastor and evangelist, and seems to have achieved some degree of recognition, in numbers of followers and influence, during those years. Apparently exercising great care to avoid understatement, the introduction on his web site includes the following:

"He has been told he holds the SBC record for the number of evangelistic campaigns held in a given time span.<sup>3</sup> As a pastor, every church he served experienced exploding growth. One pastorate gained over five hundred in average Sunday School attendance his first twelve months on the field. Considering the location of this church, the condition of the buildings and the poor financial posture of this church, this ministry also set records. During that same pastorate, Jay led that state in baptisms all five years he was there."<sup>4</sup>

Reflective of his Southern Baptist roots, Snell's web site includes a section headed "Previous Recommendations by Southern Baptist Leaders" (as an addendum to current letters of commendation). The wording in that section appears to be dated, and some of the leaders cited are long-since deceased.

2. His on-line newsletter article called "No Thief Gives Warning Signs" (he has a book by the same name) seems to indicate that Snell is

well-versed and committed to the pre-tribulation, pre-millennial Rapture position. Considering just this one issue, one might assume that he is a Scofield/Chafer-type dispensationalist, which, while not necessarily the rule, certainly would not be exceptional for a Southern Baptist pastor or evangelist. However, the points below make it obvious that he is not a dispensationalist.

3. His writings make it clear that he adheres to the "health and wealth," "name it and claim it" philosophy. In discussing "guaranteed" physical healing, material prosperity, and family well-being for the Jews, he writes:

"Christianity must do the same in the Christian era. Otherwise, Old Testament Judaism is superior to Christianity. This author will not accept that Christianity is inferior to Old Testament Judaism."<sup>5</sup>

4. His web site also explains how he came to believe in these things:

"While still a Baptist, God revealed to him that Healing, Prosperity and Well Being for our families is [sic] contained in the Abrahamic covenant and consequently belongs to all Christians now. He showed him why Jesus must heal and prosper us Christians today. Then the blessed Lord instructed him to research and document from both Greek and Hebrew this Abrahamic revelation of Healing and Prosperity. Finally, He showed Jay that he wanted him to write in books everything he had researched and documented. This task required seven years to research and write the first four books described elsewhere in this Site. Trinity Broadcasting Network became aware of these books and interviewed Jay many, many times concerning them. ... These books answer the question, 'Why must Jesus heal and prosper you now?'"<sup>6</sup>

### A "REVEALING BOOK"

Thus, it should be no mystery why TBN was shilling *How to Claim the*

*Abrahamic Covenant* as its donation premium last November. In the book's foreword, Paul Crouch wrote:

"Are you blessed with everything you need? Are you well in body with no sickness of any kind? Do you have a good job with good income so that you can be a blessing to others? Are your children and loved ones saved and in the Kingdom, and are well [sic] in body, soul, and spirit? *IF NOT, THEY CAN BE!* Yes, the covenant and blessings promised to Abraham in Deuteronomy 7:12-15<sup>7</sup> are ours *if* we will **DO** and **KEEP** our part of the covenant or contract! Jay Snell, in this **revealing book**, shows us **HOW** to **CLAIM** these awesome benefits."<sup>8</sup>

What this "revealing book" actually reveals is an astounding propensity to misuse, misinterpret, and misapply the Scriptures. In the first few pages, Snell asserts the following:

- That the "promises" by God to bless Abraham with "wealth" are to be claimed by Christians today;<sup>9</sup>

- That he (Snell) proved in an earlier book "that the word 'bless' contains four things: healing, prosperity, well-being for your family, and salvation for your soul;"<sup>10</sup>

- That Genesis 24:1 (which states that "Abraham was old, and well stricken in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things") means that "his old age was not only prosperous, but was also healthy" and "his entire life was filled with divine health and prosperity;"<sup>11</sup>

- That there "is a Greek construction [in Hebrews 6:11-12], that does not translate, which tells us that the promises Abraham obtained are the same promises Christians are presently inheriting. In other words, what Abraham obtained, healing and prosperity, is exactly what Christians are presently inheriting."<sup>12</sup>

From these assertions, Snell maintains that there are "two basic things Abraham did to 'begin and maintain' the flow of wealth from God to

himself. Then, in the remaining chapters, we shall see how you too can open up the flow of provision from God to yourself.<sup>13</sup> What are the two basic things? First, *“he gave a tithe”* and, second, he made *“offerings in addition to his tithe.”*<sup>14</sup> And why did he tithe and give offerings in addition to the tithe? According to Snell:

“Could it not have been that he was indeed looking to the sowing and reaping law but *only after it had been combined with an added power from God which made inanimate things reproduce themselves? ... God supernaturally added the power inherent in ‘bless’ to his sowing, and inanimate things supernaturally reproduced themselves many times over.* No wonder Abraham tithed and gave offerings even when God did not require it of him.”<sup>15</sup>

So there you have it: *The Abrahamic Covenant* provides health, wealth, well-being, and salvation to all people who follow Abraham’s example of faith (i.e., “The Abrahamic Seed Group,”<sup>16</sup> to use Snell’s term), and, coupled with the “Law of Sowing and Reaping,” even inanimate objects (“material wealth such as a precious metal, gemstone, money, etc.”<sup>17</sup>) reproduce themselves.

Snell would have us believe that we cannot settle for “His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). Many biblically instructed believers have been content just to be “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Romans 8:17); to be blessed “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3); and, to lay up for ourselves “treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matthew 6:20). Paul didn’t say, “And my God shall supply all your need according to the provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant.”

### NO SALVATION?

To understand the unjustified extreme to which Snell takes his empha-

sis on the Abrahamic Covenant, consider his later contention:

“Learn to think in terms of the Abrahamic Covenant, because there is no blessing, **no salvation**, no healing, no prosperity, there’s no nothing [sic] for you as a Christian apart from the Abrahamic Covenant. It all goes back to Abraham. Consequently, he [i.e., a member of “The Abrahamic Seed Group”] acknowledges and confesses that all these things are because God promised it to him in the Abrahamic Covenant through the fathers.”<sup>18</sup>

We are thankful for God’s faithfulness in keeping his promises to Abraham, but it is not in Abraham that we are saved and receive the blessings of God.

### A-TISKET, A-TASKET, PUT IT IN A BASKET

In explaining how present-day Christians [i.e., “The Abrahamic Seed Group”] are to emulate Abraham in his giving of tithes and offerings above the tithe, Snell makes a leap to the instructions given to the children of Israel concerning the “first fruits” offering in Deuteronomy 26:

“I am going to point out eight things from these scriptures that the members of *The Abrahamic Seed Group* are to do with their first fruits. The first fruits, for you, has to do with the first thing that you get from your labors. Whether you get it from your land, whether you get it from your job, whether you get it from somebody giving it to you, is immaterial. But it is the first fruits of that which comes into your possession.”<sup>19</sup>

He then goes on to say that, in order to do it right, “The first thing you do, then, is take the first fruit and put [it] in a basket.”<sup>20</sup> He continues to attempt to mix Old Testament giving instructions with present-day Christian stewardship by saying:

“This first fruits offering should be brought in a basket, and given to the priest. **The pastor-priest is**

**an interchangeable term.** The pastor-priest shall set it down before the altar of the Lord thy God.”<sup>21</sup>

Based on that contention, he further asserts:

“This says to me, again, the way we usually receive an offering just won’t get it. It’s too casual. It is too nonchalant. It’s just too much form. It’s too easy. There’s not that setting before the Lord of the first fruit. Yet that is part of the instructions. ‘Thou shalt set it,’ verse 10, ‘before the Lord thy God.’”<sup>22</sup>

Devout believers certainly would not promote nor condone nonchalance or mere form as we worship in giving tithes and offerings to the Lord. But one fails to see how requiring that the offering be placed in a basket and then given to a pastor-priest will avert such problems. Paul dealt with a similar situation when he wrote of the legalistic influence in the church in Galatia: “How is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?” (Galatians 4:9)

### ORAL SOWED THE SEED

Snell is not alone in trying to lift covenants and instructions out of the Old Testament context and misapply them to Christians. Not all are as extreme as he, but many others use Old Testament texts or misinterpreted New Testament concepts as a carrot to entice, or a verbal cudgel to intimidate. Most of the time such teaching is directly connected with the money-raising schemes of televangelists. One of the first was Oral Roberts, who, in the 1950s and 1960s popularized the use of such concepts as the “Blessing Pact” and “Prayer Pact.” Then, “the full development of the idea came in 1970 ... with the publication of *The Miracle of Seed-Faith*, a book that quickly surpassed one million copies in distribution.”<sup>23</sup>

Author James Morris in his book, *The Preachers*, contends that Seed-Faith “is a widely-advertised concept in the occult magazine *Chimes*.”<sup>24</sup> Many

others have since “piggy-backed” on that type of device:

- John Avanzini and his “100-fold return” message, later modified, after complaints from dissatisfied customers, according to *The Christian Sentinel*, to the “optimum harvest” message;<sup>25</sup>

- Jessie Duplantis, who expanded the “100-fold” message and, according to a report from “We Care Ministries,” affirms that “every time you give God \$50, He gives you \$5000. Every time you give Him \$100, He gives you \$10,000. Every time you give Him \$1000, He gives you \$100,000. Every time you give him \$100,000, \$10 million. ... You pick the denomination, God picks the multiplication;”<sup>26</sup>

- John Hagee and his “Salt Covenant Partner” program;<sup>27</sup>

and,

- Rod (“I want your money. I deserve it.”<sup>28</sup>) Parsley’s “Storm the Gates Resurrection Seed 2003” offering.<sup>29</sup>

### “GOD NEEDED SOMETHING”

Not to be outdone, Paul Crouch, on his March 6, 2003, *Behind the Scenes* telecast, combined the promise of the “seed of woman” in Genesis 3:15, with the parable of the soils in Matthew 13, and the warning about fruitlessness in John 16, before concluding:

“He’s [God] speaking to some of you right now. I need a hundred of you to go to the phone tonight and say, ‘Paul, God helping me, I’m making a faith commitment of \$1000 tonight.’ A hundred of you. God spoke to me just now. A hundred of you are going to go to your phone tonight and say — you say, ‘I don’t have it.’ Doesn’t matter. I’m glad if you don’t. You’ll get a double miracle then.”<sup>30</sup>

In the process of arriving at that conclusion, Crouch also had said:

“God had a need. ... And, of course, the heretic hunters will be all over me on this one too. But God needed something. ... I

am a little god. Heretic hunters deal with it — deal with it!”<sup>31</sup>

Heretic *hunters*? Who needs to *hunt* steers in the middle of a cattle stampede?

God has made many promises in His Word, and He has or will keep every one of them. But it is dishonoring to Him and a disservice to the impressionable, the immature, and the gullible, when anyone takes His promises out of their context, combines them in contrived ways, and uses them to fleece the flock.

The Apostle Paul reassures us, “for all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us” (2 Corinthians 1:20). Four observations should be made about the implications of God’s absolute fidelity in keeping His promises.

1. As God fulfills His promises, the results often have an impact on many others in addition to the individual or group to whom the promises were given. For instance, the promises of the Messianic Kingdom pledged to King David were limited in their primary focus to David and his descendants. But, since Jesus Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, the entire human race benefits from God’s faithfulness to His Word.

Also, the promise of an uncountable multitude of Ishmael’s descendants was of special significance to Hagar and her progeny, but the implications of that promise are far-reaching. For millennia the entire world has reaped the bitter fruit of hatred and bloodshed that has resulted from the failure of the “father of those who have faith” to believe that God would really keep His promise and give him a son of the Covenant, even in the elder years of both Abraham and Sarah.

2. In interpreting and applying the Scriptures, we must always be careful to heed the admonition of 2 Timothy 2:15 to rightly divide the Word of Truth. Harold Berry states:

“...from the context it is evident that Paul was concerned that

Timothy properly handle the Word of God and not misuse or misinterpret it. The believer must always be careful not to twist the Scriptures to fit his own theology but rather to conform his theology to the Scriptures. Good Bible study seeks to glean all that can be derived from a given verse, but one must also be careful not to derive more than the verse actually says.”<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, William Hendriksen affirms:

“The man who handles the word of the truth properly does not change, pervert, mutilate, or distort it, neither does he use it with a wrong purpose in mind. On the contrary, he prayerfully interprets Scripture in the light of Scripture. He courageously, yet lovingly, applies its glorious meaning to concrete conditions and circumstances, doing this for the glory of God, the conversion of sinners, and the edification of believers.”<sup>33</sup>

3. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all the Divine Covenants. Ultimately, all of God’s eternal promises will be fulfilled in Him. Charles Finney expressed it well:

“Faith in Christ puts us in possession of Christ as the sum and substance of the blessings of the Gospel. Christ was the very blessing promised in the Abrahamic covenant. And throughout the Scriptures He is held forth as the sum and substance of all God’s favors to man. He is ‘the Bread of Life,’ ‘the Water of Life,’ ‘our Strength,’ ‘our All.’”<sup>34</sup>

Likewise, from the writings of William Walker:

“The highest and final fulfillment of God’s promises to man will be realized in and through the Lord Jesus. As the covenants carry the thread of the redemption story, they testify to the exaltation of the Person and work of Christ. As a beautiful string of pearls, the covenants are united in Jesus Christ.”<sup>35</sup>

4. When we see in the Word that God makes promises and always keeps them, we learn truths about the character of God that enable us to better respond to Him in faith and obedience. It is perfectly legitimate to learn how God acts and to infer general principles for ourselves based on specific promises that He gave to others. For instance, we are deeply stirred by the promises of the Lord in the familiar passage of 2 Chronicles 7:14-16:

“...if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place. For now I have chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.”

Note that this is part of God’s response, including other promises, to the plea of Solomon on the occasion of the dedication of the Temple (2 Chronicles 6:14-42). The wise king had said, “...if Your people Israel are defeated ... When heaven is shut up and there is no rain ... When there is famine in the land, pestilence or blight or mildew ... When Your people go to battle ... When they sin against you (for there is no one who does not sin) ... [and they repent and cry out to You] Now, my God, I pray, let Your eyes be open and let Your ears be attentive to the prayer made in this place [i.e., the Temple].”

Solomon’s requests were very specific, and God’s answer (2 Chronicles 7:12-22) dealt with those specifics. Believers today do not have the warrant of Scripture to lift that passage out of its context and attempt to claim its promises as personally directed to them. However, believers can and should learn from 2 Chronicles, and many other passages, how prone we humans are to wander away from God, to disobey Him, and to fail to respond in faith to His kind provision.

The promises of God to Israel should cause one to marvel at His graciousness and to understand that He is pleased to hear the humble and repentant prayers of His people, to forgive us, to restore us, and to shower His mercy upon us. All of that is available to us, not because He is bound by what He said to Solomon as the new Temple was dedicated, but because that is His nature, and that is the way He blesses us in Christ. It pleases Him to be gracious and forgiving.

As referenced earlier, it reflects what He said through Paul to the believers at Ephesus, “[He] has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (1:3); and at Philippi, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (4:19). It is a worthy pursuit to learn from all of His Word the principles by which He makes Himself known, by which He proves Himself faithful, and by which He deals with us. We rejoice in the wonderful promises that He made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and Solomon, and are thankful for whatever blessings we may reap from the universal aspects of His ancient covenants. But the universal aspects of all biblical covenants are fulfilled in Christ. His promises to me in Christ are quite sufficient and far more thrilling than the skewed teachings of health and prosperity that Jay Snell, TBN, and others have foisted upon the Abrahamic Covenant.

#### Endnotes:

1. Author unknown.
2. Herbert Lockyer, *All the Promises of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962, pg. 10.
3. No mention is made of where those statistics are cataloged, and the authority who passed that news on to Snell is not identified.
4. Information posted on Jay Snell’s web site home page ([www.jaysnell.org](http://www.jaysnell.org)) as of 4/8/03; print-out on file.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., “About Dr. Jay Snell” page.
7. Here Crouch demonstrates his lack of sound Bible hermeneutics. Actually, Abraham had been dead for hundreds of years when the Deuteronomy 7 promises were given to the Israelites.

8. Paul Crouch in Jay Snell, *How to Claim the Abrahamic Covenant*. Livingston, Texas: Jay Snell Evangelistic Association, 1995, unnumbered foreword page, capitalization and italics in original, bold emphasis added. Note: The cover and title page have *How to Claim the Abrahamic Covenant*, but the copyright page has *How to Amass Abrahamic Wealth for Yourself and Your Family*.
9. Ibid., pg. 8.
10. Ibid., pg. 5.
11. Ibid., pg. 6.
12. Ibid., pg. 7.
13. Ibid., pg. 8.
14. Ibid., pp. 9, 10, bold/italic emphasis in original.
15. Ibid., pg. 13, bold/italic emphasis in original.
16. Ibid., pg. 15.
17. Ibid., pg. 13.
18. Ibid., pg. 65, emphasis added.
19. Ibid., pp. 59-60, italics in original.
20. Ibid., pg. 60.
21. Ibid., pg. 61, emphasis added.
22. Ibid., pg. 64.
23. David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Oral Roberts: An American Life*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985, pg. 461.
24. James Morris, *The Preachers*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973, pg. 123.
25. Jackie Alnor, “TBN fundraiser, John Avanzini, defends his failing prosperity teachings,” *Christian Sentinel*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Summer, 1992, pp. 11, 15.
26. “Jessie Duplantis,” We Care Ministries article, available at: <http://homepage.nflworld.com/david.mcallister3/JessieDuplantis.htm> [sic].
27. Advertisement in *JHMagazine*. San Antonio, Texas: John Hagee Ministries, Vol. 15, No. 2, (2003), pg. 17.
28. Parsley quoted in Jim Bebbington, “An Empire of Souls,” *Columbus Monthly*, May 1993, pg. 35.
29. Posted on Rod Parsley and World Harvest Church web site. Available at: [www.breakthrough.net](http://www.breakthrough.net), as of 4/8/03, print-out on file.
30. Paul Crouch, *Behind the Scenes* broadcast, Trinity Broadcasting Network, March 6, 2003, video tape on file.
31. Ibid.
32. Harold Berry, *Gems from the Original*. Lincoln, Neb.: Back to the Bible Broadcast, 1975, Vol. II, Studies in II Timothy, pg. 68.
33. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of The Pastoral Epistles*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1957, pg. 263.
34. Charles Finney in Stephen L. Nelson, *A Heritage of Great Evangelical Preaching*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997, quoted from CD-ROM version.
35. William Walker, *Progressive Revelation*. Cherokee, N.C.: Spanish Publications, Inc., 1971, pg. 16.

appearances on *Larry King Live*, so they must be important. The more people who follow them, it is assumed, the more likely they are perceived to be right about everything.

Even the secular world recognizes this. *Newsweek* says of Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Franklin Graham that they are "three of the best-known religious leaders in America, with tens of millions of followers and huge political influence" (Oct. 21, 2002, pg. 40).

The masses are confused because the new unelected *College* is itself a mass of confusion and conflicting theologies and beliefs. The membership of the *College* runs the gamut from hyper-Calvinism to hyper-Charisma, and from doomsday scenarios to utopianism. It is filled with propagators of predictions, Bible codes, new keys to power, anointings, fads, prophecies, flukes, gimmicks, promises, warnings, anointed prophets and seers, and even a few legitimate exegetes.

There are competing wings in the *College*: a prophetic wing; word-faith wing; Kingdom Now wing, with bizarre promises of glorification anytime *now*; an exorcist wing, with dueling exorcists; and, of course, the latest-fad wing. The wings multiply. Though they say they are just an arm of the local church, one realizes that the Church now has so many "arms" that it is a grotesque monster grabbing the gold. They all compete for the same gullible constituency. The Golden Rule has been changed to "He who has the gold rules."

In the past, Oral Roberts, Jim Bakker, and Jimmy Swaggart captured the field. Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson or anyone who now controls the field with a best-seller or a "cause" moves up the ranks to become an "Archbishop." If anyone is the unelected "Pope," it is TBN President Paul Crouch, who holds the "keys to the Kingdom": television time. While Crouch is the electronic "Pope," Steven Strang may be the top contender in printed media.

It was distressing to see D. James Kennedy seated with Crouch and his wife, Jan, last December, as Kennedy instructed the audience on science and Crouch instructed Kennedy on Bible codes, ELS (*equidistant letter sequence*), and secret messages in the book of Genesis. Kennedy acted as if he did not know much about the topic and appeared all too willing to take Crouch's word for it. In the end, the endorsements were all about Kennedy's book and web site and Crouch's planned book on Bible codes. One cannot imagine that the people of Coral Ridge can be anything but confused when Kennedy, their pastor, appears to endorse a word-faith promoter and the purveyor of major heresies.

PFO wrote to Kennedy and received a stock response with a number of excuses, one of which was that others do it. The explanation with the least carrying power was that "The Apostle Paul turned the synagogues, which

were hardly compatible with his ministry, into golden opportunities to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Paul would not have let a local rabbi flatter him and instruct him on the benefits of numerology and *gematria*.

Mutual endorsements are part of the fuel that stokes the *College's* engines. Falwell now endorses John Hagee, even though Falwell's newspaper once labeled him a heretic. Falwell also welcomes to Liberty University Benny Hinn, who claims to communicate with the dead, as well as receive unorthodox messages from God.

Reinhard Bonnke claims to have raised a man from the dead, but in reality has had more people die at his meetings than have most faith-healers. Bonnke has been given a thumbs-up by Kennedy, who endorsed his book, *Time Is Running Out*. Kennedy himself teaches a companion witness of Scripture, namely that the Gospel is in the stars. He, along with other "mainstream" preachers, endorses the fading aberrant Bill Gothard.

Tony Evans now teaches what he calls "transdispensationalism," saying that some who have never heard the name of Christ can be saved if they live up to the light of natural revelation. Though not full-blown inclusivism, it is a soft form. Somehow, Evans says, sincere heathens in foreign lands are seen by God just as Old Testament saints are seen by God. An inquiry about his view of Romans 1 yielded no response. Here is a man with a large following, large book sales via Moody Press, and a television and radio ministry. Certainly with his success and charisma, he is considered more reliable than a local pastor. Might is right, and notoriety and financial success equates with truth in our mixed-up society.

Evans is simply parroting the views of J.N.D. Anderson. Anderson in turn got them from A.H. Strong. K. Neill Foster says that the idea that "Some 'holy' pagans may be saved without ever hearing the name of Jesus Christ" is "zig-zag hermeneutics" that are a "violation of the grace principle" (*Alliance Academic Review* 1998, pp. 123, 129, 134).

The frightening thing is Foster's observation that a "more recent estimate suggests penetrations of inclusivism as high as fifty percent among denominational leaders and professors in 'mainstream evangelical colleges and seminaries'" (*ibid.*, pg. 125). Some of these universalists are up-and-coming celebrities and future members of the *College*.

Gregory Boyd advocates open theism (a finite God) and was allowed to teach at a Baptist college known for its orthodoxy. So today, inclusivism and open theism are topics for discussion and seen as valid ideas and in the pluralistic climate are accommodated as equivalent views. "Do Jews really need Christ as Messiah?" is a hot-button topic as well, even though the Apostle Paul would not have considered it open for discussion.

James Dobson, while usually focused and orthodox, wades into politics and serves up questionable self-esteem teachings that are already being jettisoned by the secular world.

In conjunction with this sad state of affairs is the American mind-set that we can pay the *College* to do the job of the local church. The *College* readily accepts the accolades and false trust along with money. For years, Christians have invested in media schemes based on claims that the big boys would keep us safe and clean up the airwaves.

Moral majority movements were supposed to keep us safe from feminism and homosexuality, but delivered nothing. Anointed prophets and healers were going to Christianize the world, but the world is less Christian than ever. Demonologists claimed to be able to trace malignant spirits right down to their ZIP codes, but the spiritual condition of our cities got worse. Vital resources of manpower and money have been sucked away from the local church and legitimate missions and spent on harebrained, utopian schemes. They have produced nothing but weakness because uninvolved believers simply sat back and waited for their superheroes to deliver.

Crouch instructs his viewers to plant their "seed" (i.e., money) in good soil and declares "TBN is preaching the Gospel around the world — there is no other better soil I know of." Millions have been squandered on his gaudy television studios and the content of his broadcasts are more vile than ever.

Harold Camping has declared the Church obsolete, claiming special insight into the timing of the death of all local churches. The pride and gall of one man to dispense judgment on all but himself is breathtaking and staggering, yet little is made of it in the *College* itself. Camping's leverage: millions of dollars of holdings and a media platform for others of the *College*, renders them mute.

Thank God there are some voices in the wilderness. Good, sound, local pastors are still upholding the Scriptures, searching them as the Bereans did, and speaking the truth in love. They are staying with the Apostles' doctrine and contending for the faith. As well, countercult ministries address heresies and false doctrine. These ministries are goads for truth and discernment, though are maligned by many in the *College*.

Some within the *College* seem to hate modern-day Bereans more than sin itself. Anyone seeking to discern is written off as judgmental, critical, mean-spirited, and unspiritual. The code seems to be that there is merit in every new fad and some good in every opinion, except opinions of the whistleblowers.

When Paul entered Ephesus and with the truth began cutting into the profits of the silversmiths, there was a hue and cry. Things that were untrue, we are told, brought gain, and when that gain was threatened, there was an outcry against the messenger of truth. Today things have not changed.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul dealt with the celebrity and superstar syndrome, and referred to the Corinthians as carnal, babes, shallow, and immature. Paul had to address so-called superapostles in 2 Corinthians. Like today, the Corinthians were looking for the best show in

town and living off the crumbs that the big names would throw them. Paul was not a celebrity, but referred to himself as a servant.

Vicarious relationships with a media star can never compare to an intimate relationship with Christ. Connections with others in a local church are much more meaningful than connection with a television set. Unfortunately, truth is no longer considered as much a value as fame and fortune. No man but Christ should be the authority for one's spiritual life. We can learn from men, but should not idolize them.

It is time to shut off the television and go back to the Bible for spiritual nourishment. It is time to stop seeing Christianity as entertainment and get back to our churches with the servant's attitude of Philippians 2. It is time to boycott Christian bookstores with their smorgasbord of heresy and insist they carry doctrinally correct literature.

Unless these things are done, the evangelical Church can only limp into the next few decades with no voice at all in a world desperately in need of truth. Left unchecked, there may be little or no evangelical Church surviving. Ultimately, the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. But we know from Church history that the Church in its earthly form can go into an eclipse as it awaits another Luther, Calvin, or Zwingli; genuine reformers who are willing to stake their lives on the truths of the Bible. God had his remnant in Israel and may have to have remnant local churches more interested in truth than earthly fame and worldly success. May God help us.

—GRF

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## NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

great event is going to take place in the world, followed by a mighty move of God in the Church. Three-and-a-half months from now something is going to happen in this world. Headline news, you'll know it. I will not tell you what I see, you'll just know it. And something mighty will follow in the Spirit. God the Holy Spirit is saying to His Church, 'Watch Israel. Watch My people Israel. You will know as you read the Scriptures and watch Israel. For the days are short,' says the Lord."

The *Praise the Lord* program aired Dec. 29 and set Hinn's "three-and-a-half-months" date no later than April 15. As with all of Hinn's prophetic statements, this date came and passed without incident or fulfillment. During the same broadcast Hinn said: "I'm hearing it from the Lord right this minute as I'm standing here. I'm hearing from the Holy Spirit that a change is coming — a mighty change. Yes, Lord, thank you. Yes, Lord, thank you. I'm just hearing the Lord tell me when. I'm telling you. March 3rd. I just heard March 3rd in my ears."

The March 3 date also passed without incident.

Those monitoring Hinn suggest that his March 3 date was merely an attempt to “piggyback” on a purported vision by Ted Haggard of the World Prayer Center in Colorado Springs. Haggard said: “The Spirit of the Lord woke me in the middle of the night and powerfully spoke to me. He told me that if we could mobilize 1,000,000 intercessors to pray for Saddam Hussein, that he would leave Iraq, thus avoiding the need for a war.” Haggard urged worldwide prayer on March 3 (03-03-03) at precisely 3:33 p.m., local time. Even though another ministry, the “Presidential Prayer Team,” had recruited 1.4 million people, Hussein did not pack his bags and leave Baghdad, Iraq, and the war started March 19.

Hinn continues to fail miserably in his endeavors to be a prophet of God. In 1990, he erroneously predicted that God would destroy the homosexual community in America by fire no later than 1994 or 1995, and that Cuban leader Fidel Castro would die in the 1990s. In 1999, he claimed divine revelation that thousands would be raised from the dead by placing corpses in front of a television set tuned to the Trinity Broadcasting Network. TBN viewers continue to bury their dead.

Hinn’s followers are so mesmerized by the popular healing evangelist that they are quick to ignore, dismiss, or forget his spurious revelations. They are ignorant of the fact that his claims, and the claims of others like him including Haggard, bear false witness against the Holy Spirit as they say the third member of the Godhead revealed these oracles to them.

Hinn’s critics indicate that the December *Dateline* broadcast broke no new ground in exposing the faith healer’s escapades. However, the broadcast was revealing for those unfamiliar with Hinn’s methodology and clearly demonstrated that he has made no dramatic reformation in recent years.

—MKG

## LAUGHING EVANGELIST’S DAUGHTER DIES

The teenage daughter of self-titled “Holy Ghost bartender” Rodney Howard-Browne has died of complications resulting from cystic fibrosis. Kelly Howard-Browne died on Christmas morning 2002, *Charisma* magazine reported. She was 18.

Kelly had been diagnosed with the terminal genetic disease as an infant. According to her mother, Adonica Howard-Browne, “She had been hospitalized so many times before and got better.” In late 2001, the illness began to take its toll as her respiratory system deteriorated. During the next several months, Kelly “suffered serious bouts with her illness.” According to *Charisma*, Howard-Browne and his wife “said they believed God would heal their daughter until the end.”

While the girl’s mother says “it was His plan for her [that prevailed], not ours,” Howard-Browne offers a varying judgment. “My daughter dying is the worst career move the devil could have made. We’re going after 100 million souls, and he will pay,” he told *Charisma*.

With tragic personal consequences, Howard-Browne’s health and prosperity message has been proven wrong.

—MKG

## CATHOLICS UPDATE ENCYCLOPEDIA

Following more than three decades of striving to keep current through supplementary volumes, Roman Catholics have published a revised second edition to their *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. The work was originally published in 1967. The new edition, released last October, consists of 15 volumes, 12 million words, and 12,000 entries from over 4,000 scholars.

According to religion writer Richard Ostling, writing for the Associated Press, “The 1967 version was far less rigid than the defensive Catholic Encyclopedia of 1907-14. ... The current edition takes even greater note of dissent from the church’s official positions.” For example, the revised edition notes that the church’s ban on artificial birth control “has not been effectively received or widely practiced” and allows for the secular concept that homosexuality is “inborn, immutable and a normal variant of human sexuality.”

The encyclopedia’s chief editor, the Rev. Berard Marthaler was saddled with the task of deciding what to salvage and what to cut from the 1967 edition, along with what new material to include. About 3.5 million words needed to be deleted from the earlier edition to make room for up-to-date content. Marthaler said it “had to be done with a meat cleaver, not a scalpel,” indicating that entire sections were deleted.

Critics maintain that the revised edition perseveres in the liberal bent of its 1967 predecessor. The *Christian News* writes, “The encyclopedia teaches that the Bible includes legends, fiction and myths. Doubt is even cast on the resurrection of Christ. It supports the notion of modern theology and the Jesus Seminar that one cannot be certain that Jesus actually made many of the statements attributed to him in the Bible. It promotes the notion that man gradually evolved from some primary organism. It says that evolution has been thoroughly established as a fact.”

The Catholic University of America was responsible for the encyclopedia’s content, while The Gale Group provided the necessary funding and publication skills to make the massive work available. The retail price of the printed encyclopedia is \$1295.00, with an “eBook version” available for \$1425.00.

—MKG



# Books in Review

## **HYPNOSIS: MEDICAL, SCIENTIFIC, OR OCCULTIC?**

by Martin and Deidre Bobgan

EastGate Publishers, 142 pages, \$9.95

Martin and Deidre Bobgan have updated and expanded their study of hypnosis. The revamped edition is more than twice the size of the original 61-page volume published two decades ago by Bethany House Publishers.

A lot of material is covered in this evaluation of a risky practice that is carried out under the auspices of “science” and “medicine.” The use of hypnosis goes far beyond parlor tricks, and therein lies its potential and extreme danger. The authors survey the origins and key components of hypnosis. They explore its “creative manipulation” and use in the New Age practice of “past lives” regression.

The judgment of their earlier work — that “hypnotism is potentially dangerous at its best and is demonic at its worst” — is preserved and even more compellingly presented. While it is not surprising that “Christian” psychologists and psychiatrists sanction hypnosis, it is alarming to know that some apologists — past and present — do not openly condemn it. The chapter which bears the same title as the book, along with the following one, “The Bible and Hypnosis,” leave no doubt that a “Christian should not allow himself to be hypnotized for any reason.”

A welcome addition to the updated volume is the chapter “Hypnosis in Unexpected Places.” These “unexpected places” can include a “biblical” counseling session where regressive therapy is used or even in a church service. Mood-altering hypnosis long has been a staple for the success of healing evangelists such as Benny Hinn.

The book is a quick and easy read. It is loaded with citations from pro-hypnosis sources to sustain its indictment of being a dangerous occultic practice. Hypnosis runs the gamut from the New Age to “Christian.” This is an important resource for the Christian’s arsenal.

—MKG

## **DNA VS. THE BOOK OF MORMON**

by Living Hope Ministries

49-minute video, \$19.95

Mormons have always faced insurmountable obstacles in their attempt to prove their claims that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the only true Christian Church. Historical documents have disproved many of the LDS’ most fundamental claims. Archaeological evidence — or lack thereof — has invalidated *The Book of Mormon’s* account of vast American civilizations in the pre-Columbian era. Now, forensic science has dealt another setback.

Joseph Smith claimed divine guidance in receiving and producing *The Book of Mormon*, which is said to be a work of “American history.” The book says that the American Indians are descendants of Israelites who journeyed to the Americas around 600 B.C. Anthropologists have long raised an eyebrow at such a claim. Genetic testing has proved these claims to be false.

Living Hope Ministries, of Brigham City, Utah, has collected the facts and produced a fascinating video. The presentation opens with a quick history of the claimed origin and contents of *The Book of Mormon* and a brief lesson in the basics of DNA research.

Several of the experts interviewed on the video who acknowledge that DNA research undermines the LDS’ scripture are themselves Mormons. The anthropologic, linguistic, and geographical evidences against *The Book of Mormon* are also presented. Additionally, the presentation explains where, if not from Israel, American Indians originated.

The LDS also are allowed to respond in the video. Mormon President Gordon B. Hinckley dodges the evidence, saying documented proof “hasn’t been determined” and that it is “speculated.” Yet other Mormons disagree with Hinckley, calling his assessment “factually wrong.” They say if taken into “a court of law, it would be an open-and-shut case.”

A lot of crucial and excellent information is packed into this video. It is a valuable resource to show to honest Mormons, who will see the very foundation of their church crushed under the weight of the facts.

—MKG

**Editor’s Note:** The publications featured in PFO’s *Books in Review* section are available from **Personal Freedom Outreach** (P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, Missouri 63136). Please add \$2.00 to the price listed for shipping and handling. Due to occasional price changes by the publishers, the retail amounts listed are subject to change without notice. These publications are also available to those who help to financially support the work of PFO. Please see our funds appeal flyer for details.