

# American Union Newsletter

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## Western Field Conference Report

August 18-22, 2010

Leoni Meadows Christian Camp and Retreat Center  
Grizzly Flats, California

The beautiful trees and landscapes of the lower Sierra Nevada Mountains greeted us on Wednesday, August 18, as we approached Leoni Meadows Camp. For those who were visiting this camp for the first time, it was a special inspiration to view the Creator's handiwork in this beautiful setting.

The first meeting, on Wednesday evening, was opened by Elder Henry Dering, outgoing Western Field president, from Sacramento, California, as the congregation sang the theme song of the conference, "Nothing Is Impossible." The chorus of this song expresses firm trust in God:

*Nothing is impossible when you put your trust in God;  
Nothing is impossible when you're trusting in  
His Word.*

*Hearken to the voice of God to thee:  
'Is There anything too hard for Me?'*

*Then put your trust in God alone and rest upon  
His word;*

*For ev'ry thing, oh ev'rything, yes, ev'rything is  
possible with God!*

A cordial welcome was extended to all who were present, and the theme of the conference was introduced—"With God All Things Are Possible." Matthew 19:26.

Using the example found in Nehemiah chapters 1-4, Brother Dering described the additional challenges that Nehemiah now faced, beyond his already heavy personal responsibilities. After God impressed the king to let Nehemiah go to help the returned exiles in Jerusalem, to provide authorization for the work to be done, and to supply monetary and

material assistance, there were still a lack of leadership, lack of resources, lack of materials, and lack of vision to be dealt with. But there was a divine solution.

A parallel was drawn to the "broken walls" that everyone can face in his life: health problems, employment problems, rent or mortgage, other bills, or the suffering brought on by bad habits. It is human to think that there is no solution, but with God all things are possible. "Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." Mark 9:23.

The story was told of a community in the eastern U.S. where year after year grasshoppers invaded and destroyed all the crops. One year was particularly bad; there were so



many grasshopper eggs that it appeared that there would be millions of the devourers. The community leaders called for everyone to participate in a day of prayer and fasting, pleading with God to protect the crops. The next day was very warm, and the ground was covered with newly hatched grasshoppers. But then the weather turned very, very cold, and every grasshopper died—a direct answer to the prayer of faith. God has infinite resources to meet every difficulty.

There is another wall that needs to be rebuilt, as shown in Isaiah 58:12: “And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.” Everyone is called by God to help build the broken wall by honoring and sharing with others His holy Sabbath. And just as Nehemiah had a vision of what needed to be done and how to do it, so the leaders of God’s cause need to sound the trumpet of the third angel’s message. No one should feel that his efforts are too small or unimportant, even if there are those who ridicule and scorn, as did the enemies of Israel, Tobias and Sanballat.

The wall around Jerusalem was completed in just fifty-two days. How much time is there for the last work to be done—for the gospel to be preached in all the world? With seven billion people in the world today, the task seems impossible; but all who are united and willing to focus on the common goal of proclaiming the third angel’s message will see God working in amazing ways. And even in this conference, may there be vision, planning, and action.

#### Thursday, August 19

Thursday morning’s worship was led by Sister Linda Kolyn, from Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Referencing Revelation 3:14-22, she stressed that the Lord wants His people and leaders to be hot—on fire for God, working to find souls, and training up children. How does one stay hot? One will be greatly blessed and strengthened by studying the Holy Scriptures and the testimonies one hour every day. It is critically important to make the coming of the Lord our first priority—seeking first the kingdom of God. Those who do this can testify that by thus linking to God one accomplishes far more in a day than is normally the case and can more readily recognize opportunities to witness.

As we pray without ceasing and use our hands and feet, eyes, mouths, and ears for God, He will use us to repair walls—maybe even our own. In *Early Writings*, Sister Ellen G. White was given a view of heaven. She

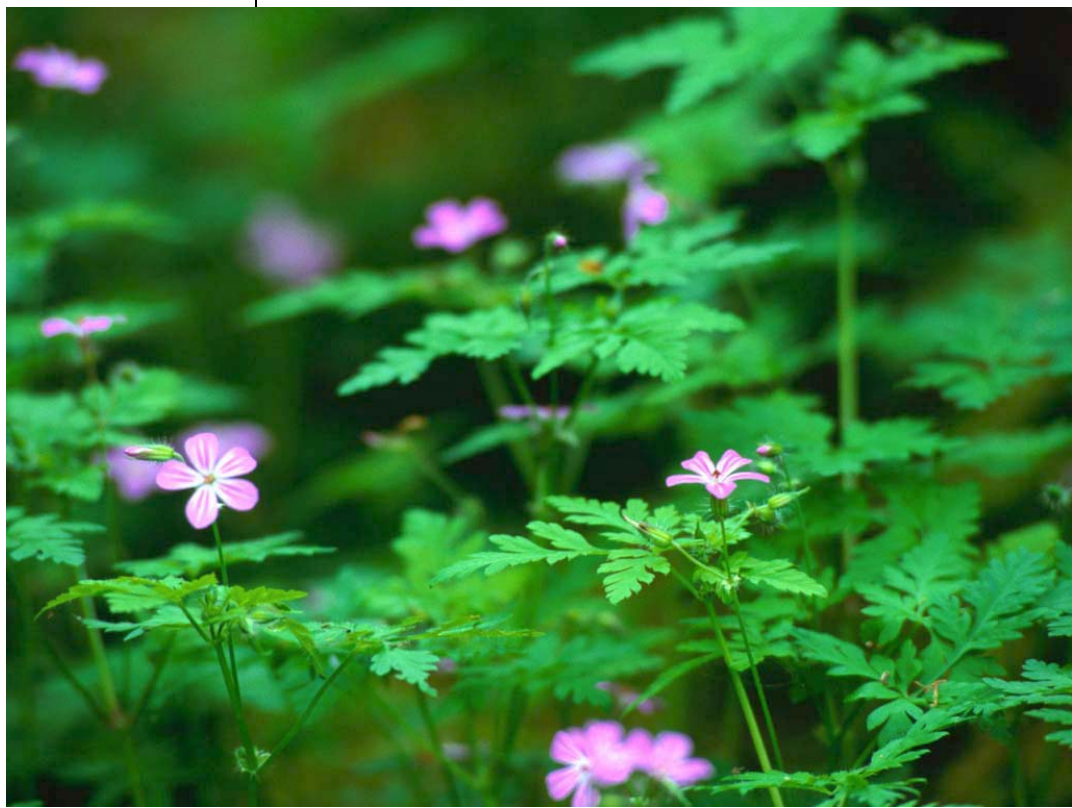
wanted to stay there and not return to earth; but she was told to go back and keep working as religious freedom, prosperity, and time allowed.

The message in verse 20 that Jesus is standing at the door and knocking relates to us. Everyone needs to study for him- and herself. The Bereans in Acts 17:10, 11 did this, searching the Scriptures daily to see if the preaching they heard was correct. The only way we can know that what is preached from the pulpit is correct is if we study God’s holy Word and pray for the Holy Spirit’s guidance. He will show us where to change and how to help others, thereby helping ourselves. Meanwhile, whenever we hear people complain about not feeling well, it is an opportunity to share with them the blessing of natural remedies provided by God, thus focusing their attention on Him. When we fulfill the purposes of our lives in this way, we will receive blessings that we cannot imagine.

#### Workshop 1—“What Nature Reveals about God”—

was presented by Brother Rudy Goni, from Denver, Colorado. When we are surrounded by nature, what is the first thing that comes to mind? We see the earth and the things on its surface, the sky, the planets, and the stars—all of which make up the universe—and can’t help asking, Who created them? What is their purpose? These questions apply to both animate and inanimate objects. By carefully observing nature, we learn about the Creator.

“And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good.” Genesis 1:31. What He made was beautiful and perfect, as the Architect Himself expressed it in this verse. Everything was made according to an original plan; it was well executed, with different parts working properly, permanently secure, and each according to its nature. Thus, birds fly, fish swim, and each animal,



plant, and person is given special characteristics and abilities to carry out the purpose of its creation.

As the painting of a famous artist can be recognized as his work, even though he does not sign it (we know who painted it from the pattern we see), so one recognizes God's signature—perfection (His pattern)—in the world around us. One sees symmetry, harmony, and balance. Nothing could be added or taken away to make a part of nature better. In fact, anything one would change would actually destroy it. There is system; every part of creation co-exists and supports other parts; everything works together and in harmony as a great whole.

However, when sin came, the ground was cursed; all nature began to degenerate, the greatest impact coming from the worldwide flood. All nature and man now live on ground that is diminished in capacity and sometimes poisoned. Because of this, a large part of the world's population tends to live in cities, away from nature, seeing little that is real. The result is that many people don't understand the Creator. Each of us needs a guide to explain why nature is the way it is now. That guide is God's sacred Word.

Despite the many years of degradation, some of the Creator's perfection is still visible around us. For example, salmon and birds have the same abilities as GPS devices. There are turtles in Indonesia who swim 13,000 miles to Oregon and then return to Indonesia without ever getting lost! Thus God put in nature things we can see: Power, grace, knowledge, wisdom, and glory.

"Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Romans 8:21. Our hope—for ourselves and for nature—is God's promise to recreate everything so that it is again "very good."

Sister Margie Seely, from Sacramento, California, presented **Workshop 2—"Why God Created Man."** Love needs a recipient; and God created everything out of love, with man as His crowning work. That love is both

unconditional and unending. Man rejected it in the fall; but instead of rejecting him, God poured even more of His love into redemption. "Men are so intent upon excluding God from the sovereignty of the universe that they degrade man and defraud him of the dignity of his origin. He who set the starry worlds on high and tinted with delicate skill the flowers of the field, who filled the earth and the heavens with the wonders of His power, when He came to crown His glorious work, to place one in the midst to stand as ruler of the fair earth, did not fail to create a being worthy of the hand that gave him life." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 45.

Out of love, God gave each person a choice—the freedom to receive His love or not. When Adam and Eve sinned, God did not come to them with criticism and

accusation. He explained to them the consequences of their actions, but He did not leave them. He still says to sinners, in essence, "I'm not happy with what you've done, but let's see what we can do to get you back."

The consequences of sin are death and intense, difficult work. But even the thorns and thistles were given as a blessing. Man's purpose is designed of God—to partner with Him in saving others from the destroyer, as one would save passengers threatened by a sinking ship. Bible writers and prominent missionaries have portrayed this in various ways. "The command is to go, but we have stayed." "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me." Isaiah 6:8. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the

fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." James 1:27.

We are asked simply to love; God's heart hurts for those who do not know love. Statistics of children in foster care, orphans, homeless adults and children, gang members, drug users, and people in prison are staggering. Many of these individuals were told that they were not loved, wanted, or needed, so too often they are empty, not knowing what love is. But God asks us to go to places where we can't even imagine going for the purpose of helping to restore His image in man. We're not here for some selfish reason or



pleasure; the greatest happiness comes from reflecting God's love. Let us seek the lost by looking outward.

The subject of **Workshop 3—"The Core of What the Bible Reveals about God"**—was summed up by Brother Robert Watts, from Sacramento, California, in the question, "What is the most essential part of what the Bible makes known about God?"

Two words were defined: *Core*, which means "the essential, innermost part of anything"; and *reveal*, meaning "to lay open to view, display, exhibit." It is like an archaeologist digging to find something that has been covered up and then disclosing it or making it known. The Bible is like a lens, which helps us see things; it makes the picture of God clear. If one uses just a part of a lens, it will reveal a complete image; but the more of a lens you use, the clearer and brighter the image becomes. Thus, God is everywhere in the Scriptures, and such verses as 1 John 4:8 ("God is love") and John 3:16 ("For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son") are classics. But we find God throughout the Scriptures.

Brother Rob had divided the Bible into six sections, and one section was given to each of six groups into which the workshop participants were divided. Each group searched for one or more core concepts about God in verses within its section of the Bible, including those that may not be so frequently quoted. One spokesperson for each group then presented the group's findings, as follows:

- *Epistles*: Colossians 2:13; 1 John 2:2; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Hebrews 13:8—God's forgiveness, atonement for the sins of the whole world, love, and immutability.
- *Pentateuch*: Genesis 6:13—the flood reveals God's patience and love for righteousness; His strange act in cleansing the world of sin will actually be an act of love.
- *Major and Minor Prophets*: Micah 7:18, 19; Revelation 22:12-14—God delights in mercy and subdues iniquities; He will come quickly and bless those who honor Him.
- *Gospels*: John 14:12-15—The core of who God is replaces the core of who we are, for He promises to fulfill our requests to be like Him and do His works.
- *Books of Wisdom*: In the book of Job, God is seen as King of kings; and common human views of Him are also portrayed. At the end of the book, God presents Himself as the Creator, One who cares and controls. Job also has his view of God changed.
- *History*: 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Judges 16:29-31—Hannah's prayer exalts God's holiness, truth, power, and justice; while Samson's prayer and God's response show that Heaven immediately answers the call for mercy.

The workshops continued after lunch with **Workshop 4—"How Creation (as Opposed to Evolution) Portrays Human Potential,"** presented by Elder Jerry Eaton, from

Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The example was given of Charles Darwin, who was ordained as an Anglican minister. It is said that when he was studying evolution, he became very ill; but when he returned to thoughts of faith, his health improved. His experience and the impact of his popular writings show what happens when one believes there is no God and no moral absolutes. In such a case, a person cannot rise above his own wishes and whims.

Evolution espouses humanism, which is defined as man's being the measure of all things. As the apostle Paul expressed it, "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." 2 Corinthians 10:12.

People frequently accept dogma (the conclusions of supposed authorities), without test and proof, generally because they do not want to study, finding it easier simply to accept what a commonly accepted "authority" may assert. For example, the facts of evolution are trivial at best, but the propaganda in its favor is overwhelming.

Evolution is actually a form of religion in which people who are considered wise and scientific create their own myth and ridicule anyone who dares not to believe it. 2 Peter 3:3-6 tells about those in the last days who are willingly ignorant of creation and the worldwide flood. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ sets one free to live up to his potential. Only with God can man measure nature or himself accurately and then fulfill his potential. By contrast, man loses his potential when he loses his hold on God.

**Workshop 5—"Walking through the Garden of God"**—was brought by Sister Wendy Eaton, from Toronto, Ontario, Canada. We are living in the time of the end. "For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Hebrews 10:37. Other Scriptures emphasize that by faith God will see His children through the final events in earth's history. Over and over we are told to "Get ready!" and this includes spiritual, emotional, intellectual, practical, and physical preparation. It is wise to consider now how we will live in the time presented in Revelation 13:17.

Sister Eaton reminded us of what is written in *Early Writings*, p. 56—that we should not store up food for the time of trouble but fully trust God to provide protection and sustenance. Meanwhile it is wise to educate ourselves about edible plants that grow plentifully in the wild.

If one is not sure if a plant is edible, he can take a small piece and rub it on his lip; if there is no reaction, he can eat a very small amount and pay attention to any reaction. But it's good to study ahead of time and have some basic familiarity with common plants. We were shown slides of a number of edible plants.

**Fruit trees** in the forest that have edible parts include Red Maple (seeds), Oak (acorns, but leaves and bark are toxic), Birch (sap for beverage, bark ground for flour), Pine (nuts, seeds, green pine needles for tea), Quaking Aspen (leaves, seed pods), and Palm (fruit, if any).

**Herbs** for tea or salad are generally well known, such as Peppermint, Catnip, Horsetail (or Shavegrass) (cooked), Stinging Nettle, and Clover.

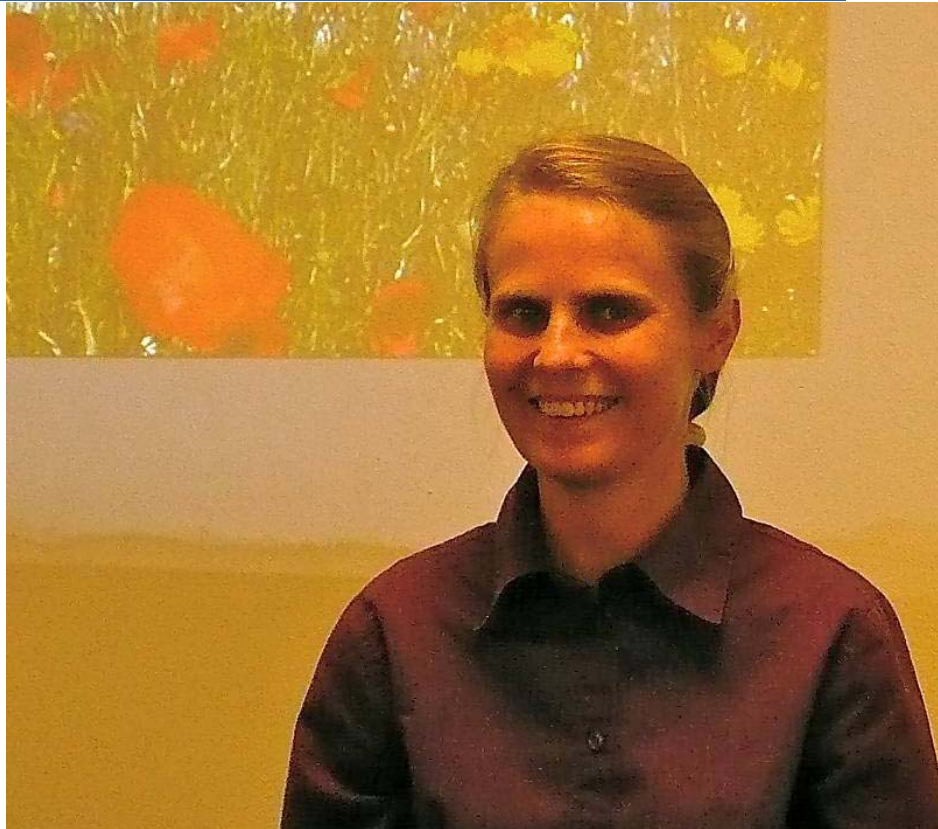
As for **Flowers**, or “weeds,” it is said that “most weeds in Southern California are edible.” You might be surprised at how many of these you know: Tiger Lily and all other lilies (every part is edible), Chickweed (stems, buds, flowers), Wild Carrot (or Queen Anne’s Lace, which tastes like carrots), Plantain (in salad and sandwiches), Mallow (leaves, seeds, flowers, stems, roots), Daisies (raw, young leaves; shoots, roots), Purslane (high in Omega 3), Dandelion (leaves, roots, buds), Cattails (tender underground shoots), Thistle (roots, immature flowers, stems, leaves), Burdock (where burrs come from—the roots, seeds, pith, and leaves are edible). Do NOT eat Buttercups.

And then there are **Berries**, which are high in antioxidants, such as wild Raspberries, Blackberries, Salmonberries (like Blackberries), Elderberries, and Evergreen Huckleberries. Do NOT eat Nightshade.

The counsel of Scripture is: “Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.” Amos 4:12.

Brother David Moreno presented **Workshop 6: “God’s View of the Universe and Man’s Place in That View.”** “What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?” Luke 15:4. We were treated to slides showing relative sizes of some individual stars and other objects in space. We had to marvel at the immensity of the universe, which is immeasurable by man—just as is God’s love for us. Planet Earth is the only one that has had sin come to it; and how thankful we should be that someone came looking for us, found us, and saved us, giving us the hope of eternal life!

It is presently calculated that there are more than 400 billion stars in the Milky Way Galaxy, of which our solar system is a miniscule part. One of the more astonishing stars is VY Canis Majoris, which has a diameter of 1,767,380,000 miles! We serve a living God who has no limit. By contrast with such a huge star, our sun’s diameter is 865,000 miles across, and the earth is only 7,926 miles in diameter. Yet the God of heaven sent His precious Son to this tiny planet to spend 33 years and show us His Father’s character of love. “... For we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.” 1 Corinthians 4:9.



The greatest interest of the universe and of Jesus Himself is in this earth; through His great love He overcame and succeeded in redeeming it and its inhabitants. “The soul that has given himself to Christ is more precious in His sight than the whole world.” —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 483.

The earth is spoken of as being circled with the atmosphere of grace. Without the physical atmosphere, we would stop breathing and die; in the same manner, we die spiritually without the atmosphere of grace. If we are not surrounded by God’s grace and love, we are vulnerable; that is why Satan does everything he can to get us to leave God’s grace and love.

But soon the experiment of sin will be over, and then this world will be recreated and once again “be the abode of holy, happy beings.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 67. This is our great hope! If we believe in Christ, have faith, and obey Him through His wonderful righteousness, we will be part of this world forever!

After dinner, Brother Oscar Valles, from Vista, California, spoke about “**The Impossible.**” “Ah Lord God! Behold, Thou hast made the heaven and the earth by Thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for Thee.” Jeremiah 32:17. Sometimes we think as did Peter, who asked Jesus, “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?” Matthew 19:27. Our thoughts are often similar to those of the rich young ruler: What lack I yet?

All things are possible with God, but where does our greatest interest lie? It is common to be most concerned

about our worldly interests. One thing is impossible for God, and that is to choose for us. Joshua pointed that out to Israel: "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Joshua 24:15.

Sometimes we have to make a quick decision, as did Daniel and Joseph. But what we do then is really the result of what we decide now. Everyone may place himself on God's side; nothing can cause a person to be untrue except his own choice. "What you need to understand is the true force of the will." –*Steps to Christ*, p. 47. We need to go to Jesus for power to change, and everything depends on the right action of our will, which it is our choice to yield to God. There is (1) our will, (2) God's will, and (3) Satan's will. The question is, Which do we want? It is not enough, for example, to keep the Sabbath just outwardly. God doesn't make deals with faith, and being convinced is not the same as being convicted. The Lord is doing amazing things with those who make their commitment to Him.

Often life is routine; we do the same things every day, like cattle. But we need to see the holiness and depth of Heaven's message; otherwise we will deny the power of it. This is why there are people who once walked in faith, looked like Christians, and even taught the Sabbath School Lesson but are now in the world. If we don't study under the Holy Spirit's guidance, we are really Satan's people, who choose to sin, for Satan mingles evil with good. In *Early Writings*, p. 37, a group of people were presented as wailing because they had given up the Sabbath and been found wanting. This happens when one thinks he is doing right but does not have God's Spirit; when tests come, it is impossible for a human being to stand by himself. When our will is yielded to God, we will make good decisions. We cannot play with temptation, for "every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." James 1:14, 15.

God leads us into His will, while discontent drives us out of His will. Do we know what His will is? If we love Him, we will automatically obey Him; we won't have to be told what to do. Let us choose with all our hearts to put our wills on God's side and meditate on how Jesus makes everything possible for us.

A half hour of praise was led by Brother Shawn Seely, from Sacramento, California, as those present selected and sang some of their favorite hymns.

### Friday, August 20

Morning worship was conducted by Elder Joel Barnedo, from Denver, Colorado, with a PowerPoint presentation called "The Twelve Commandments. It

contained beautiful pictures of children, each point being supported by a Bible verse, as follows:

1. Make up your mind to be happy. Learn to find pleasure in simple things. Habakkuk 3:17, 18.
2. Make the best of your circumstances. No one has everything, and everyone has something of sorrow intermingled with the gladness of life. The trick is to make the laughter outweigh the tears. 2 Corinthians 12:7.
3. Don't take yourself too seriously. Don't think that somehow you should be protected from misfortune that befalls other people. 2 Corinthians 12:10.
4. You can't please everybody. Don't let criticism worry you. 2 Corinthians 12:15.
5. Don't let your neighbor set your standards. Be yourself. 2 Corinthians 5:20.
6. Do the things you enjoy doing, but stay out of debt. Romans 13:8.
7. Never borrow trouble. Imaginary things are harder to bear than real ones. Matthew 6:27, 28, 34.
8. Since hatred poisons the soul, do not cherish jealousy. Avoid people who make you unhappy. Ephesians 4:31, 32.
9. Have many interests. If you can't travel, read about new places. Genesis 13:14, 15.
10. Don't hold postmortems. Don't spend your time brooding over sorrows or mistakes. Don't be one who never gets over things. Colossians 3:1, 2.
11. Do what you can for those less fortunate than yourself. James 2:2-6.
12. Keep busy at something. A busy person never has time to be unhappy. Nehemiah 4:6.

The Barnedo family sang a beautiful special song, "Here I Am, Send Me."

The day's workshops began with **Workshop 7—"How to Link with the Infinity of God"**—presented by Sister Raquel Orce, from Cedartown, Georgia. There were three very important turning points in the patriarch Jacob's life, and he gave special names to the places where these occurred. Similarly, every overcomer passes through special experiences as he gives up self and brings God into his life.

Before he received the vision of the ladder reaching from earth to heaven as the assurance of Jesus' care for him, Jacob felt like an outcast; he acknowledged his wrong course and felt his great need of help; with weeping and deep humiliation, he confessed his sin; all confidence in self was gone. Prior to this time, he had been in a religious family; but because he did not have a deep relationship with God, this was actually his first personal meeting with Him. Through the dream, he was shown as much of the plan of redemption as was essential for him at that time. He became personally acquainted with Heaven. He set up a memorial, calling the place **Bethel**, meaning "house of God,"

worshipped in that holy place, and committed himself to God. He was convinced that the Lord was with him.

In all our lives, we have been guided by God—not by chance. We are what we are only through His mercy.

Twenty years later, God came to Jacob and told him to go back to the land of his fathers, assuring him that His holy presence would be with him. Angels met him on his way, even as he pleaded for God to save him from his brother's wrath. The patriarch named the place where he saw the angels **Mahanaim**, meaning "two hosts, or camps." As it was with him, so with us; when we repent of and confess what we have done wrong, the Lord sends us special help. And remember, we continue to carry with us as a heavy burden everything that we do not confess and, as far as possible, make right in our lives.

When the patriarch heard that his brother, Esau, was coming with 400 armed men, Jacob pleaded with God, "Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau." Genesis 32:11. Jacob did everything he could to protect his household and meet his brother in peace, knowing that it was God alone who would give protection. Jacob remembered Heaven's promises, and his whole heart went out in entreaty for divine mercy. Wanting to be alone with God, his only hope, and knowing that He alone could soften Esau's heart, Jacob poured out his heart in confession and prayer. His struggle with the Angel constituted the "pouring out" of his soul to God, which is the meaning of **Jabbok**, the brook near which this experience occurred.

He persevered in faith, confessed his unworthiness, and trusted God's faithfulness. We need to understand that there are only two options; either we are with God, or we are not. Jacob needed to understand the fullness of his sin in obtaining the birthright by fraud—and that God would have worked things out in His own time and way. Likewise each of us needs to learn these lessons of honesty and trust in God. Just as Jesus changed Jacob's name to signify that he had overcome, so God's people will go through a Jabbok experience and receive a new name.

Elder Larry Watts presented **Workshop 8—"What Will Happen Soon to Give a Revelation of God to All Mankind?"** "But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." Numbers 14:21. See also Isaiah 6:3; 11:9. God's glory is His character, and His people will reflect to the whole world that character before Jesus comes. Through the Spirit of prophecy, we learn of events to occur just ahead: the four winds held until God's people are sealed, the loud cry, the church revived for missionary zeal, a national Sunday law that will spread to the world, movements for peace, individuals tested, the church tested, the latter rain, the final message to the world, numbering of the 144,000, and earthly systems committing the sin against the Holy Spirit, leading to the

death decree against Sabbath keepers, close of probation, and the falling of the seven plagues. Before probation closes and the seven plagues fall, God will be fully revealed in His people.

Through the grace of Christ alone, physical, mental, and spiritual life will be restored in those who seek first His kingdom. They will know and worship God, who is fully revealed in His sacred Word. His character is totally different from the objects of worship upheld by the religions of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet listed in Revelation 16:13.

The final revelation of God to the world will be given by those who have the religion of the pure woman of Revelation 12:1, 17, having passed through seven steps:

- Revelation of Jesus—God's love in action
- Reception—"O sinner man" (owning one's sin)
- Repentance—"Deliver me"
- Confession—"I don't have righteousness"
- Humility—"I cannot"
- Faith—"God can"
- Obedience—"God doing/His love in me" (revelation of Jesus)

When each of us yields to God as an instrument for Him to use, our obedience is a revelation of Him to others—to the world. The question is, "Does God have me?"

**Workshop 9—"What Is Special about the Relationship between God and His Children?"**—was given by Brother Joel Barnedo. He spoke about the five questions asked by news reporters and how they translate into our witness to others. Those questions are How? What? Why? When? and Who? Examining each of these questions in relation to righteousness reveals what may actually be shortcomings in our witness. When we become aware of them, we can ask God to change the way we are.

We want to bring people to church, and generally we present the various parts of Scripture and Christianity. The "how" is the external things—what is right, what is wrong, and how things came to be as they currently are.

The "what" is the facts. We need to know the facts of Scripture and prophecy, but just knowing them is not righteousness.

Knowing "why" things happened in the Bible and history provides a background of understanding; but if there is no love in presenting such knowledge, the people will go away.

And then many people talk about "when"—what history and prophecy show about things occurring in the past and when certain things will occur in the future. But, again, this cannot produce righteousness.

Salvation is not a theory but a personal experience. What really matters is "who"! We know the definitions of righteousness—doing right, conformity to God's law, Christ

in us, love. But the very best definition of righteousness is Jesus.

If Christ is in you and you study His holy Word, you will bow down and confess who you are and what you do. Jesus said to the Pharisees of His day: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." Matthew 23:15. The religious leaders of His day were stricter than Jesus was, but they were not righteous. There is no righteousness that we can attain to without Jesus.

So, righteousness is a Person; without Him there is no hope of righteousness. Mankind plus Jesus equals righteousness. Technically, one might live according to the Bible and Testimonies and still not have Jesus; there is no salvation in this. We can even say that a person can see the law and admire it, but that is worthless if Jesus is not in it. We have no righteousness of our own, but we are worth everything in the eyes of God, which Jesus proved by dying on the cross.

"And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." John 17:3. So, salvation is a Person, and righteousness is a Person. By knowing Him, we will be changed into His image.

The evening service, presented by Elder Henry Dering, was titled "**God Specializes in the Impossible.**" After giving a list of things in the world that had been considered impossible of accomplishment but were indeed done, as well as of famous people who had once been considered incapable of amounting to anything, Brother Dering gave examples from the Scriptures of some clearly "impossible" events. Consider the Israelites crossing the Red Sea on dry land, with the waters miraculously held back; Daniel's three friends divinely preserved in King Nebuchadnezzar's furnace; David slaying the giant Goliath; and Jesus feeding more than 10,000 people with five rolls and two fish.

In Matthew 14:28-31 is the story of Jesus' walking on the water when the disciples were caught in a storm on the sea. The story of Peter's request that he be permitted to walk on the water with Jesus is one of both belief and unbelief. First the disciples were frightened by the storm and by Jesus' appearance. Then Peter's impulsive request to walk on the water was granted by the Saviour, only to be followed by his risk of drowning when the waves came between him and Jesus and he lost sight of the Master.

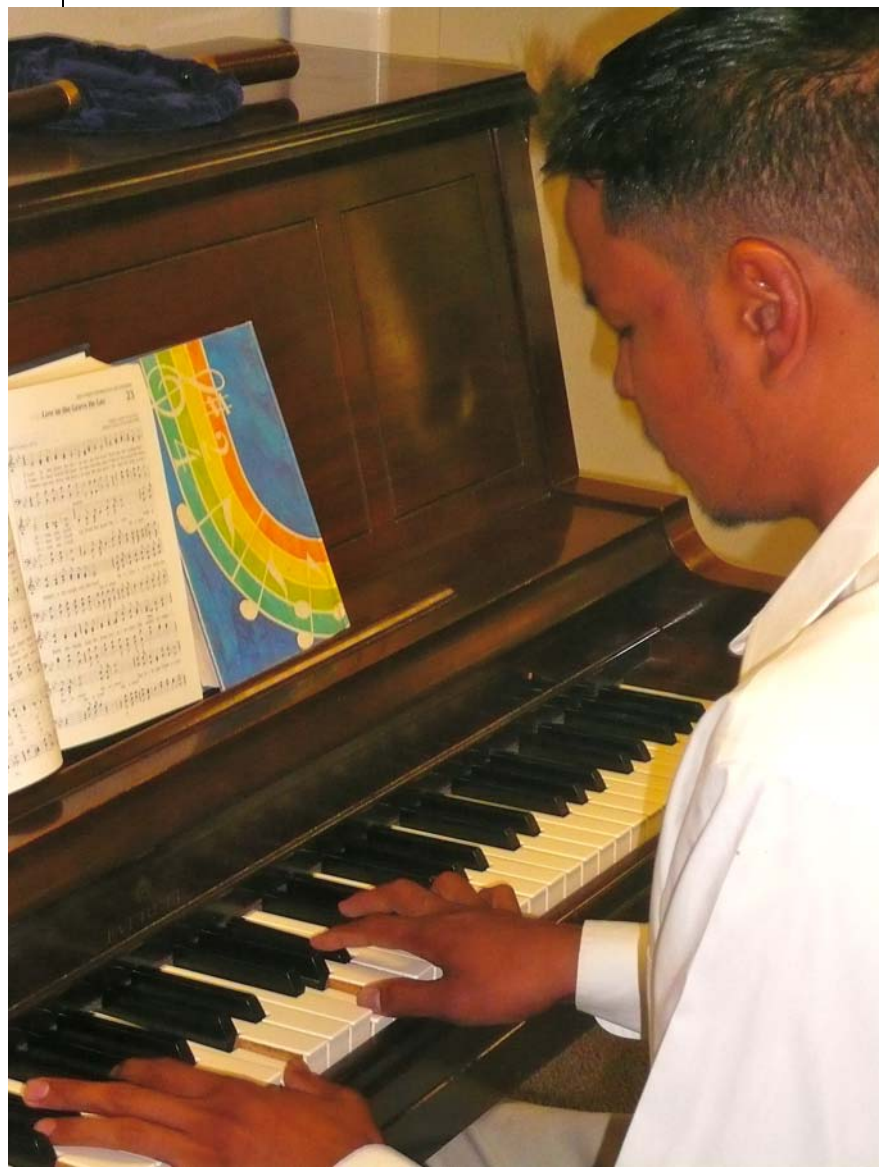
The Lord's rebuke to Peter, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" provides a key to every child of God who seeks to enter the kingdom of God. Whenever our minds drift from connection with Heaven (no matter what is drawing our attention, but especially

oneself), we will sink. Said another way, if we don't accept the grace of Jesus, we will not receive the gift of salvation. But focusing on Jesus permits one to stand when every earthly support is removed; He provides not just support but also power—a more-than-human solution.

When Peter cried out to Jesus, the Saviour was immediately at his side and gave him His hand. But spiritual problems may seem more impossible than what Peter faced. Then everyone who calls on Jesus will immediately hear the words, "I forgive you. Go back, and I'll solve your problem." Jesus' hands were nailed to the cross for each person in the world. Accept His sacrifice for you, and reach for His extended hand, saying, "I want to dedicate my life to You and be with You for eternity." Jesus loves you.

### Sabbath, August 21

For the morning worship, Brother Pedro Uriostegue, from Riverside, California, titled his presentation "**What the Lord Has Done in My Life**" and shared experiences made at his workplace. He began with Revelation 3:19: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent," and also read 1 Peter 4:12-14: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you,





as though some strange thing happened unto you:..." The Lord is glorified when His children accept with patience the trials that come to them.

Brother Pedro has worked for a bakery for many years and has been threatened with termination a number of times because of his faithful observance of God's holy day. Time after time, whenever a new manager came on staff, the person would try to set up the schedule so Brother Pedro would have to work on Friday night or Sabbath. One manager who gave him a particularly hard time was a Jew!

It is often a great temptation for a person to think that he or she cannot avoid working on the Sabbath day because he needs to provide food for his family; it is a matter of simple economics and survival. But Brother Pedro sees this very differently: "The Lord never leaves us. If I had listened to the managers, I wouldn't be at the company today. If I had been unfaithful, they would have fired me." He let the managers and even the owner of the company know, "I'll do anything except what is contrary to God's Word." Today, every person who opposed God's way is no longer at the company where Brother Pedro works!

Another experience was made when the Riverside church needed a place to worship; God made it possible for the congregation to have its own building. Brother Pedro's conclusion was: "When it looks like the Lord has abandoned us, that is when He's really working with us."

During the **Sabbath school**, several people shared experiences. Sister Sandy Elias, from Huntington Park, California, told of the people who enjoyed the cooking class the church held on a Sunday morning. Sister Evelyn Holmstroem, of San Jose, California, quoted, "See thou a fault within thy brother? Breathe it not unto another." Elder Tzvetan Petkov reported that forty children from the Cedartown community attended the church-sponsored vacation Bible school and their parents attended the Sabbath service at the end. Sister Alice Sandoval told of her and her husband's move to Roswell, New Mexico, and asked for prayer for their mission to reach souls in that dangerous place. After Elders Jerry Eaton and Oscar Valles sang a scripture song of Psalm 25:1-3, 7, Brother Eaton gave

greetings from Canada and told how blessed the backpack trip to the mountains was just before the conference. Elder Larry Watts related an incident from his recent trip to South Korea in which the sister who was translating for him had trouble understanding the vastness of the universe (a recent estimate is that there are more than a trillion stars in the Milky Way, and God knows them all by name) and then was astonished when she finally grasped how awesome God is.

For the Sabbath service, Elder Tzvetan Petkov, First Vice President of the General Conference in Cedartown, Georgia, spoke on the conference theme, "**With God All Things Are Possible.**" He brought greetings from the General Conference and told of his upcoming trip to missionary schools in Mexico, Venezuela, Argentina, Colombia, Peru, and Brazil. May God bless his efforts.

In Luke 1:37, the angel told Mary concerning the birth of Jesus, "For with God nothing shall be impossible." In Mark 10:27, when the disciples expressed astonishment when He told them that it is extremely difficult for a rich man to enter the heavenly kingdom, He told them, "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible." And the apostle Paul echoed the same concept: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

A child once listened to his father preach a sermon about God being able to do everything, and the boy believed it with all his heart. He went out to his parents' car and asked God to move it. When the car did not move, his confidence was shaken. Why didn't it move? He was frustrated that God didn't answer his request.

We have the privilege and joy of preaching the gospel message, but many face experiences similar to that of the little boy and ask questions such as, "Why doesn't it work?" "What is the problem?" "Is it God who doesn't work?" "Is it I?" "Is the church wrong?" "Is the doctrine wrong?"

In the Scriptures, Moses made a similar experience. Exodus 2:11-14 tells what happened when he thought he should stand up for a Hebrew who was being beaten by an Egyptian overseer. Moses may have already dreamt of



liberating the Hebrews and defending his people. Then the next day, when he saw two Hebrews fighting and he questioned the perpetrator, “Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?” Moses must have been very disappointed that the Hebrews didn’t look at him as their potential saviour. He had to flee for his life.

Why hadn’t his reasoning worked? Because he wanted to do things **for** God, **for** the church—but not **with** God, **with** the church.

“With” God nothing is impossible. Moses had fallen into the same error committed by his fathers (consider Abraham, Jacob, and others)—taking into his own hands the work God had promised to do. He was working **for**—but not **with**—God. He was alone in his ego, with his personal intention to do good. If we do things **for** God, He is not **with** us, and we will be frustrated. If we work **for** the church, but not **with** the church, the result will be the same.

Moses’ frustration was so deep that forty years later, when God called him to service, he said, “No!” God asked him to do the work seven times; and Moses said, “No!” seven times.

Everything is possible **with** God, but we need to work **with** Him. In the case of Moses, God told him ahead of time everything he was to do; so Moses knew what to do. And he understood that God would do all the rest. At the Red Sea, He told Moses, “But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out

thine hand over the sea, and divide it:...” Exodus 14:16. God didn’t really need Moses; but He asks for a little participation from us so we learn to work **with** Him. Because we are going to be with Him for eternity, we need to learn to work with Him now. So, now Moses wasn’t working alone; he was working **with** God.

This is the same principle as that expressed in John 15:4. “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.” There is no other way; we need to be in Jesus and allow Him to be in us. No one is expected to be a superman or superwoman—only obedient.

In Genesis 15:5, 6, the Lord talked with Abraham and promised him many children, “And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness.”

Sometimes we read something and believe it, but still things don’t work as we expect. We ask ourselves, Is something wrong with me and my life? The reality is that many times things don’t go as we think they should, but we need to be honest with God and ourselves and face reality. If we don’t, then reality will eventually face us. For example, how many marriages don’t work the way they should? Perhaps someone is looking for a life partner and finds no one. What about when missionaries work hard but see no results?

That’s how it was with Abraham. He accepted the promise of a son without question, but sometimes the problem has nothing to do with our faith. Time passed. “Abraham had accepted without question the promise of a son, but he did not wait for God to fulfill His word in His own time and way.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 146.

Our imaginations are human and often egotistical. We not only believe in God but also have our own expectations; the problem is in our concept of how God works. “Give me patience—NOW!” So, everything is possible with God in **His** time and in **His** way. How God does miracles is His business. We cannot dictate to Him. Remember the patriarch Job’s friends; they defended God in a human way, and that constituted sin!

In Genesis 16:1-3 is the story of Sarai, who thought maybe God wanted to work things out in a different way. Perhaps it’s the same for us; we dream of miracles but not in God’s way. Sometimes our efforts are blessed by God; and sometimes, not.

Brother Petkov presented one more example, that of the apostle Paul, who was very zealous in persecuting the church. If we try to do things **for**, but not **with**, God, we can make serious mistakes. Before Christ appeared to



him, Paul was sincere and full of religious zeal; and he wanted to do something for God. But God stopped him.

And God will appear to you, too—perhaps by sending a brother or a sister to you, or maybe a book. He will make you a sharp instrument to do His will. Paul was sent to a specific place—God’s church, of which He is the head. He has one organized church and many faithful people in all the other churches. He will send you to work with His church; in fact, it is impossible to work with Christ without working with His church.

Wait for His guidance. “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength;...” Isaiah 40:31. There are no limits to God’s work; we can walk, run, or fly—as the Lord desires. “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed: for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness.” Isaiah 41:10.

So, remember: We don’t need to be special; we just need to be obedient. God’s strength is revealed in weakness. Let’s be weak in our ego; weak in considering ourselves. God will be with us forever.

After lunch, we gathered for the presentation of the Western Field officers, who had been elected earlier in the week by the delegates from the churches of the Field. Elder Henry Dering read 1 Corinthians 12:27, 28: “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.” Following are the new officers:

<b>President:</b>	<b>Joel Barnedo</b>
<b>Vice President:</b>	<b>Oscar Valles</b>
<b>Treasurer:</b>	<b>Jim Demarest</b>
<b>Secretary:</b>	<b>Sandy Elias</b>
<b>Youth Leader:</b>	<b>Christian Nelson</b>
<b>Missionary Leader:</b>	<b>Delmy Pleitez</b>

Elder Joel Barnedo thanked the delegates for their confidence and requested the support of the members. King Solomon prayed, “Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people,...” 1 Kings 3:9. Brother Barnedo stated that he wants to work not for, but with, the Lord and reminded those present that winning souls does not belong just to the ministers. He requested prayers and suggestions. “Send your ideas to the Western Field team.

“In your local church, look for honest, spiritual young people. We would like to have ordained elders in each church to conduct the Lord’s Supper and visit the members. Let us protect and defend the teachings of the Lord Jesus. We need more prayer in local churches. In addition,

seminars for the treasurers will be conducted by Brother Jim Demarest.

“We want to build up the youth work and missionary work and also revive giving so people do not become poor.”

Under the direction of Sister Geanina Watts, the **children’s and youth program** began with songs presented by the children who had attended the Children’s Conference coordinated by Sisters Ernestine Schendel and Anne Petrovich. Instrumental music was played on the piano by several children. Bible verses were read, and music was sung. Testimonies were given that touched our hearts. Sister Sharon Eaton told how God worked miraculously to draw her to Himself. And Brother and Sister David and Ruth Moreno related how Heaven sustained Sister Ruth during a very difficult childbirth and then spared their newborn baby’s life when she became dehydrated. After a violin and guitar trio and a quartet singing “I Love You, Lord,” Sister Geanina encouraged the adults to take time on a consistent basis to get closer to the young people and really listen to and communicate with them. “If the young people don’t come to you, consider why.”

After the special conference offering was gathered, the young people who had participated in the youth Sabbath school class sang a song titled “Forever.”

After dinner, Elder Oscar Valles gave the **Sabbath closing service**, using Exodus 20:8: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,” emphasizing holiness. What is holiness? It comes from God alone; and once God transforms a person, he has absolutely no desire to return to what he was before.

To be holy means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We can say that we violate the Sabbath when we hold resentment, or if we have desires contrary to God’s character, will, and way. “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” James 4:7. If we truly follow Jesus, the devil cannot touch us. But if we take our eyes off Jesus, it won’t work. Holiness is living as Jesus did when He was on earth.

And the next verse in James says: “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.” In Ephesians 4:27, the apostle counseled, “Neither give place to the devil.” Who gives the devil space? We do that. By contrast, “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” Ephesians 4:7, 8. God can take our sinful nature away from us, and then everything looks brighter. Look beyond yourself, for God is able to forgive you this very moment.

Friday is a special day for taking an assessment of our actions and asking for forgiveness—before the holy Sabbath hours begin. And how can we be righteous (holy) even on this earth? “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who

knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Corinthians 5:21. He lived our life for us; His righteousness is given to us. However, we need to remember that His righteousness covers no known sin but cleanses us of all defilement. And what is our part in this? “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” 2 Corinthians 7:1.

God’s grace has given us this time to put on Christ and practice His obedience. Brother Valles wished all the conference participants God’s protection, Christ in their minds, and the desire to strive for the same thing.

### Sunday, August 22

For morning worship, Sister Barbara Watts, from Denver, Colorado, spoke about **“The God We Serve.”** As mentioned in the workshop of Elder Larry Watts, Revelation 16:13, 14 presents “three unclean spirits like frogs” coming “out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.” This appears in the description of the sixth plague. To understand what is going on in the world around us, let us consider how these religions see God—or the gods they serve.

The religion of the **dragon** (paganism) usually has many gods that are depicted as vengeful, requiring that sacrifices and rituals be performed to avoid curses and destruction. This is actually a picture of Satan himself.

The religion of the **beast** (Catholicism) sees God as a being who needs to be paid in some way by the transgressor.

The religion of the **false prophet** (false Protestantism) presents a God who wants only for one to believe in Him and who is not concerned about who one is or what he becomes.

Such views of God leave a person’s character unchanged and unprepared to live in a perfect, holy world.

In contrast to these beliefs is the religion of the pure woman of Revelation 12:1, which sees God as presented in the Holy Scriptures. He is awesome, loving, merciful, pure, perfect, and holy. Sin makes everyone miserable and cannot exist in His presence, so He has done and is doing

everything to remove sin completely from everyone who connects with Him and asks Him to do this work. He is personally interested in and fully acquainted with every single person; by abiding in each one, He is transforming him or her into His image. “Jesus proceeded to show His hearers what it means to keep the commandments of God—that it is a reproduction in themselves of the character of Christ.” —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 55.

Remember, God does nothing without the individual’s permission and cooperation. He is in the process of making up His kingdom, and only those who cherish the holy principles of that kingdom (see Matthew 7-9) will be there. They consider the things of God and Jesus Himself as the pearl of great price, and the treasure hid in the field; and they regard everything else as worthless by comparison.

But while God is making up His holy kingdom, Satan is also preparing for something, as shown in Revelation 16:14. Through false religious systems, he is leading the kings of the earth to amass weapons to use against Jesus at His coming, described as “the battle of that great day of God Almighty.”

Those who look with hope and longing for Jesus’ coming will separate from the controlling systems of this world. They are pleading now for God to make them holy as He is holy (Leviticus 11:44, 45) and perfect as He is perfect (Matthew 5:48) through the Holy Spirit living in them,

imparting to them the divine nature, Christ’s righteousness.

Elder Henry Dering officially closed the conference after several people read Bible verses that were of special significance to them. With the final song, “God Be with You Till We Meet Again,” still sounding in our minds, we knelt in closing prayer as Elder Tzvetan Petkov requested God’s holy presence to go with each one who had come to this blessed conference.

We petition the God of heaven to give His special blessing to the conference presenters, the children’s conference coordinators, the musicians, those who served behind the scenes, the Western Field officers, those who attended the conference, and also those who read this summary of the meetings—all for His glory!

—Barbara Watts, Denver, Colorado

