



INSIDE



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Augmented reality

In need of
'REAL CHANGE'

Legislative special session to determine state's fiscal future

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The start of a second special legislative session Sept. 8 gives Alabama lawmakers one more chance to pass a budget before the new fiscal year begins Oct. 1.

"The start of Fiscal Year 2016 is quickly approaching, and there is still no General Fund budget in place for state agencies to operate," Gov. Robert Bentley said in a Sept. 1 press release. "There is still time remaining to pass a budget that does not drastically cut state services which will impact Alabamians. I look forward to working with lawmakers over the next few weeks to bring about real change in the way we fund state government moving forward."

Bentley called the second special session to focus on the budget, specifically budget reforms and increases in growth revenue for the General Fund budget, according to a press release issued by the governor's office Sept. 3.

The governor called for legislators to reform the budget process by transferring use tax revenue from the Education Trust Fund (ETF) to the General Fund, un-earmarking certain state taxes and amending the ETF Rolling Reserve Act. The Rolling Reserve Act, passed in 2011, caps the amount of money that can be allocated to education in a given year and requires that available funds above the cap be placed in reserve as a guard against proration during weak economic periods.

Bentley also called for legislators to increase revenue by amending the Business Privilege Tax, increasing the cigarette tax, amending the individual income tax deduction for FICA and by passing "any other revenue measures that provide revenue for the General Fund."

The "any other revenue measures" option is a deviation from Bentley's "no gambling bills" outline for the first special session.

Bentley said he has met with House and Senate members to "discuss options and ideas that would

prevent devastating cuts to state services."

The General Fund budget has been the focus of intense debate and scrutiny since early 2015. In February, Bentley proposed a \$700 million tax increase he said was needed to address a shortfall of \$700 million in the budget. In an earlier interview with *The Alabama Baptist*, Bentley said the current budget crisis has been years in the making.

Intense debate

"One of the problems we've dealt with for years is the way we budget in the state. Alabama is 1 of only 2 states that has two budgets like we do. The education budget does well when the economy picks up and begins to prosper. However, the General Fund is made up of about 32 small taxes that never really grow. Because of that, we are having a problem right now," he said.

According to the Alabama Department of Finance website, the Alabama State General Fund gets

revenue from more than 40 sources, including the insurance company premium tax, interest on the Alabama Trust Fund and state deposits, cigarette tax, ad valorem tax and Alabama Alcoholic Beverage Control Board profits. Revenues in the General Fund are projected to fall \$250 million or more short of the current spending level in the next fiscal year. Bentley has said the state also needs an additional \$155 million for Medicaid and the Department of Corrections.

Bentley said the state government has done "everything we could possibly do to make government more efficient," but the cuts are not enough.

"We need to raise more revenue. It's hard for a conservative republican to say this, but the only way to raise revenue is through fair taxes," Bentley said. "I want us to solve this the right way."

Bentley's original plan included approximately \$541 million in new revenue, including an increase in (See 'All,' page 10)



See details of the state services in jeopardy on pages 11-13.

COMMENT

Augmented
reality

Bringing Home the Missionaries

The news that the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) will bring home between 600 and 800 missionaries produced a variety of emotions among concerned Baptists.

Shock at the unanticipated announcement might have been the first response but that was quickly followed by concern for families that will be displaced. Confusion was another reaction as people asked how IMB got itself into this financial bind. Some reacted angrily because of the impact the decision will have on family and friends. Others thought about their giving or their lack of giving.

Because IMB spends about 85 percent of its budget on personnel-related expenses, fixing the financial problem falls most heavily on families who have dedicated themselves to serving overseas. IMB assured that no pressure will be applied to any missionary family to return home or staff members to retire but the situation creates its own pressure as self-sacrificing people ponder whether they should “take one for the team” and abandon their sense of calling so others might stay and serve.

Thankfully IMB is not talking about bringing home 600–800 missionary families. They are talking about people, officials said, so a husband and wife count as two people. A single missionary counts as one.

IMB’s announcement created a new round of uncertainty and soul-searching for missionaries across the globe. Alabama Baptists will want to lift up these faithful servants during the coming weeks as they seek God’s will for their future.

Surprise timing

To those who have followed the news from IMB, the announcement was more surprise at the timing than shock at the content. IMB has been drawing down its missions force through attrition for the last few years. Presently there are about 4,800 missionaries down from a high of 5,600. The announced target is about 4,200 overseas personnel. IMB also has about 450 staff in its Richmond, Virginia, headquarters who are impacted by the drawdown decision.

What surprised many was IMB President David Platt’s admission that “for the sake of short-term financial responsibility and long-term organization stability we must act now.”

In the 1990s, IMB began reaching into its reserves to send more missionaries because of the theological conclusion that this was the last generation of missionaries and it would be sinful to have financial reserves when the Lord returned.

It was not long before IMB’s budget for missionary support surpassed its income through the Cooperative Program (CP), Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (LMCO) for International Missions and other regular channels. IMB de-



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

decided to prop up its personnel cost by spending unrestricted reserves and using proceeds from the sale of property IMB owned around the world.

Financially the opening decade of this century was a heady time for Southern Baptists. CP receipts grew from \$178.3 million in 2000 to a high of \$198.8 million. Cumulatively LMCO receipts grew by almost 45 percent over receipts from the 1990s — from almost \$900 million to \$1.34 billion.

Unfortunately no one foresaw the impact a sluggish economy would have on the years ahead. In 2009, SBC figures indicate Southern Baptists gave a total of \$11.9 billion to their churches. In 2014 giving to the churches had declined to \$11.15 billion. That is a drop of almost \$800 million. Churches in turn gave less to missions causes through CP — \$520.3 million in 2008–09 to \$478.7 million in 2013–14.

The result was fewer dollars for SBC causes — \$194.3 million in 2009 and \$180.9 in 2014 — even though the percentage of CP receipts going to SBC causes increased.

LMCO also was hurt by the economic downturn. After a record-setting offering of \$150.4 million in 2007 it was another six years (2013) before receipts reached that level again. At the same time IMB challenged Southern Baptists to give more, setting a goal of \$175 million each year of the current decade. Against a cumulative goal of \$875 million for the first half of the decade, Southern Baptists gave \$748.8 million or \$126.2 million below the goal.

\$200 million property sales

IMB made up the differences in part by spending reserves, a practice previously reported by *The Alabama Baptist*. The missions agency also continued to sell property. Officials report almost \$200 million worth of property sales used to support the operations budget.

In 2014 the entire LMCO goal of \$175 million was built into the operating budget though officials knew only a miracle from God would cause receipts to jump \$21 million in one year. When Southern Baptists gave \$153 million the

shortfall was covered by spending more reserves and property sales.

Now contingency reserves equal about four months operating expenses and are dropping every day. IMB policies call for contingency reserves to be “up to six months operating expenses.” Officials believe the four-month level is dangerously low.

The news is not all bad. IMB is not about to go broke. In fact, despite budgeting reserves for operations, total assets of the organization have increased since 2010. The audit shows in 2010 IMB had \$252.8 million in net assets. The 2014 audit shows net assets at \$259.9 million. About half of this amount is held in trusts for IMB by organizations like The Baptist Foundation of Alabama. IMB has access to the earnings but not the corpuses.

Declining contingency reserves

The problem is that contingency reserves available for budget support have declined from \$145.4 million in 2010 to \$132.3 million at the end of July 2015. Property sales options also have declined. The plan is to solve the problem by bringing home missionaries, cutting staff and scaling back appointments. Officials say about 600 new missionaries are needed annually to stay even because of normal retirements/resignations and the completion of short-term personnel positions (two- to three-year assignments).

IMB plans to appoint about 300 people this year and next. The slowdown in appointments would reach the target level by the end of 2016 but Platt contends IMB cannot wait that long. He wants the missionary force reduced right away so career missionaries and staff members nearing retirement eligibility will have about six weeks to decide to stay or come home.

With LMCO season approaching, this development will likely result in an abnormally high offering for 2015. That is what happened after a missionary appointment slowdown in 2003. Unfortunately experience teaches emotionally based giving is hard to maintain.

The good news is that IMB trustees are working with Platt to address the problem. The bad news is that IMB trustees worked with leadership to develop the problem. But this is not a time for blame. It is a time for prayer. Pray for the missionaries and staff members whose lives will be changed. Pray for wisdom for IMB leadership as they seek “financial responsibility” and “organizational stability.”

It also is a time to pray about our financial stewardship and the role of our churches in missions and ministry beyond our local churches through CP — Southern Baptists’ primary means of financing missions and ministries.

Perhaps in God’s sovereignty this time of trouble will become a time of blessing. 🙏



"If ye continue in My word, then ... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."
John 8:31-32

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Protected property

State loses lawsuit against Poarch Band of Creek Indians, cannot regulate casinos

Many gambling proponents were hopeful the lawsuit brought by Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange against the Poarch Band of Creek Indians (PCI) would settle the legality issue of PCI's slot machines once and for all. But the latest decision released Sept. 3 only made it clear that the state of Alabama cannot regulate PCI gambling businesses.

The state's appeal in *Alabama v. PCI Gaming Authority* asked the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals to decide whether casinos operated by PCI in Wetumpka, Montgomery and Atmore are in fact operating on federal trust land.

The case also asked the court to interpret whether the state has authority on tribal lands to enforce a 2014 Alabama Supreme Court ruling which found that electronic bingo machines do not meet the traditional definition of bingo games and therefore are illegal under Alabama law.

"From the beginning it has been my goal to settle the question of the legality of gambling at Indian-run casinos in Alabama once and for all," Strange said in a press release following the ruling. "The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has upheld the district court's opinion that the United States is the only government that can enforce state and federal gambling laws on the PCI's lands."

Will not appeal

"While I do not agree with the appeals court's decision, it provides certainty and guidance to state officials where there was none before," Strange said. "The appeals court's decision makes it clear that the only way for the State of Alabama to regulate the gambling conducted on the PCI's lands is to enter into a compact with the PCI. That is a



Wind Creek Casino in Atmore

Photos by Jennifer Davis Rash

decision for the governor and Legislature, not me. After thoroughly reviewing the decision, I do not intend to petition for review in the United States Supreme Court."

The court did not rule on the argument related to whether PCI is operating on federal trust land, stating that would need to be filed in a separate claim. Strange had not addressed that part of the suit at press time.

Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program, is urging Alabama Baptists to continue the fight against gambling despite the latest setback.

The week of Sept. 20-27 has been designated Nationwide Week of Prayer to Stop Predatory Gambling in America. For resources or more information, visit tinyurl.com/o6vh37p. (Jennifer Davis Rash)



One of many different games labeled as electronic bingo



Photo by Neisha Roberts

Brock School of Business dedicates Cooney Hall

During a dedication ceremony Sept. 4, Samford University in Birmingham named its recently completed Brock School of Business building Cooney Hall after Samford alumnus Gary Cooney, vice chairman of McGriff, Seibels and Williams, Inc. Cooney Hall is the result of 250 alumni and sponsors raising approximately \$25 million dollars, \$12.5 million of which was pledged by Cooney in April 2013. The new building will include a portfolio management room, two computer teaching labs, break-out rooms connected to many of the classrooms and a community resource forum able to host up to 400 guests. It also will contain facilities for students to launch their own businesses. (TAB)

FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN ATHLETES

PLATFORM

for athletes

Fellowship of Christian Athletes celebrates 60 years of reaching students for Christ

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

For so many students, playing sports is what gets them through the homework, tests and day-to-day routine of middle school and high school. A 2014 study by the University of Kansas in Lawrence found that athletes had higher percentages of days of school attended, graduation rates and assessment scores as well as lower dropout rates than nonathletes.

Because athletics can have a significant impact on academic retention and success, some organizations such as Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) have recognized it as a missions field and have come alongside athletic programs to reach students for Christ.

For 60 years FCA has sought to be “the Church in action,” said Ken Burnett, area director for Northeast Alabama FCA.

FCA began in 1954 as an intense volunteer movement, according to Alabama FCA state director John Gibbons. Students would form an interdenominational Christian group, or “huddle,” and an FCA

volunteer would help provide leadership and organization for the huddle. Since then FCA has grown from that localized volunteer movement to having more than 12,000 huddles in 47 countries. During the 2014–15 school year, Alabama FCA ministered to more than 50,000 athletes and 3,200 coaches through 70 special events, summer camps, campus huddle groups and 80 coaches’ Bible studies.

Burnett said, “Nine out of 10 Americans watch or participate in athletics every week. It’s a great platform in our country.”

Walking testimony

Wayne Dickens is a walking testimony to the great platform of athletics. A self-proclaimed “sports guy,” Dickens was a defensive tackle for Auburn University from 2001 to 2005 when he attended an FCA college event at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega.

“That’s where I met the Lord,” Dickens said, and after playing for the Tennessee Titans in 2006 he came back to the plains as the area director of East Alabama FCA.

Because of its role in his conversion, Dickens sees FCA as a missionary branch of the Church.

“Coaches and athletes are the most influential people in our society,” he said, emphasizing the importance of pouring into coaches, teachers and athletic directors specifically because they are the ones who have the students’ attention each day.

“We’re really blessed to have some coaches (and teachers and athletic directors) who are really invested in developing men and women and not just trying to win games. And you always want to be investing in the people who are going to be investing in others.”

In the same way church partnership is vital because churches can nurture and encourage students in their walk with Christ past game days and athletic seasons.

Gibbons said, “We’re here to be an arm of the Church so they can reach out and get into the schools. Our desire is to see the local church embrace a local huddle for discipleship.”

Embracing the mission

Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile, is one church that has embraced the mission of FCA as it houses the office of Dennis Hayford, area director for South Alabama FCA. Hayford used to be on staff at Cot-

tage Hill Baptist until beginning his role with FCA.

Cottage Hill executive pastor Mike Breland works with Hayford and serves on an advisory board for South Alabama FCA.

Breland said the non-denominational aspect of FCA is important for the success of the program.

“FCA is not neutral — it’s distinctly Christian — but I think that it’s more widely accepted because it’s more well-known across the country,” he said.

Denominational ties aside, the mission of FCA boils down to a foundation of relationships, Breland said.

North Alabama FCA’s Burnett agreed.

“What we’ve found is that there are great church kids in school but they don’t have a clue how to lead and mentor,” Burnett said.

To remedy that, North Alabama FCA developed SALT, a spiritual “boot camp” and summer internship program for high school students that teaches them “to be leaders where they’re at,” Burnett said. “The key is equipping the student to lead and equipping the coaches to lead, creating a circle of accountability.”

In its fifth year, the internship program has impacted more than 130 students.

“We’re trying to teach them that they’re able to be missionaries at home (where they live). It takes being intentional, but it’s been really rewarding.” ❧



Mitchell Dean, area representative for East Alabama Fellowship of Christian Athletes, speaks to students at the annual 7 ON 7 Tournament in Opelika.



Photo courtesy of East Alabama FCA

FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN ATHLETES

FFRF attacks Auburn's FCA director, team chaplain

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

Bearing the weight and responsibilities of three positions — Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) director, team chaplain and state director for Urban Ministries for FCA — Chette Williams has spent the past 16 years caring for Auburn University athletes as a father-figure, confidant and friend, being a former Auburn football player himself.

But according to a letter sent Aug. 18 to Auburn President Jay Gogue, the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) says having a team chaplain leads to failure to “properly protect ... student athletes’ rights of conscience and poses a high degree of risk of discrimination” for those who don’t want to participate or hear what Williams has to say.

FFRF, based in Madison, Wisconsin, claims it operates to “promote the constitutional separation between state and church” and accuses Auburn of giving Williams “special privileges and unrestricted access because he is a Christian clergyman.”

Not just privileges

It is true, Williams is a Christian. And it is true, he does go to practices, travels with the football team, holds weekly FCA meetings on Monday nights, teaches devotions and meets individually with players. But those are things he wants to do; they aren’t just “special privileges.”

“My hope and dream is that every one of these kids, coaches and all who are involved in athletics will come to Christ,” Williams told *The*

Alabama Baptist in 1999 when he came on staff at Auburn.

He earned his master of divinity degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and was ordained to preach in 1988. He later served as co-pastor of New Song Baptist Church, Mobile, and pastor of New Covenant Baptist Church, New Orleans.

Office questioned

Besides being football team chaplain, Williams serves as FCA director, a position he’s held since 1999 when then-Coach Tommy Tuberville helped initiate Williams’ position with FCA.

Williams is paid by FCA and works in an office within the athletic department’s student development center. The FFRF letter accused the university of giving Williams an office inside the university’s Jordan-Hare Stadium.

“It makes no difference if the chaplain is unofficial, not school-sponsored or a volunteer,” the letter stated. “Chaplaincy is given access to the team as a means for coaches to impose religion, usually Christianity, on their players.”

But according to Auburn players, Williams is a welcomed addition to the team and campus.

Former defensive back Rodney Crayton told *The Alabama Baptist* in a previous interview, “(Williams) can relate to what we’re going through. Even the really bad guys respect Chette. They act differently around him.”

At press time, no other letters were filed against Auburn. ☞



WILLIAMS

“My hope and dream is that every one of these kids, coaches and all who are involved in athletics will come to Christ.”

Chette Williams

Fellowship of Christian Athletes director, team chaplain and state director for Urban Ministries for FCA



Photos courtesy of Charlene Cleveland



Tallasahatchie Baptist dedicates historical markers


Tallasahatchie Baptist Church, Alpine, dedicated two new historical markers, one for the church and one for the nearby Tallasahatchie Cemetery, during its homecoming celebration July 26. The church was formed April 27, 1833, and the ‘meeting house’ was completed in 1837. Tallasahatchie Baptist was a founding member of the Coosa River Baptist Association and the mother church to seven churches, including First Baptist Church, Sylacauga; Winterboro Baptist Church, Alpine; and Sycamore Baptist Church. The Tallasahatchie Cemetery holds more than 1,000 graves, some dating as far back as 1840. (TAB)

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Member of Alberta Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa



Across ALABAMA'S Associations

To submit news items, email news@thealabamabaptist.org or call 205-870-4720, ext. 100, at least three weeks prior to the event.

ALABAMA-CRENSHAW

▶ **Wesley Hatcher Sr.** is the new pastor of **Brantley Church**. His first day was Sept. 6. He previously served as pastor of three churches in the Mobile/Pensacola area. He and his wife, Cynthia, have three children and three grandchildren.

AUTAUGA

▶ **White Pond Church, Prattville**, will celebrate homecoming Sept. 20, 9:45 a.m. Lamar Lyon will speak and Calvary's Call will provide special music. Lunch will follow in the fellowship hall. Donnie Burns is pastor.

BIBB

▶ **Mount Carmel Church, West Blocton**, will host "Beautiful For Me" women's retreat Sept. 19, 8 a.m.–noon, followed by a free lunch. Speakers will include Robin Tiggs, Daphne Brooks and Dean Hiott. All women are welcome. For more information call Women on Mission director Donna Ellis at 205-938-1374. Robert Smith is pastor.

BLOUNT

▶ **Pleasant View Missionary Church, Holly Pond**, will host

it's third Sunday night singing Sept. 20, 6 p.m., with Sonlife Quartet, of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Randy Burtram is pastor. For more information call 256-796-5986 or 256-590-4468.

FRANKLIN

▶ **Jonathan Hill** is the new music minister for **First Church, Red Bay**. His first day

was Sept. 6. Hill earned a bachelor's and master's degree in music education from Samford University in Birmingham. He is married to Elizabeth. Bill Harper is pastor.



HILL

CALHOUN

▶ **Antioch Church, Bynum**, will host revival services Sept. 13–16 with South African evangelist Cecil Peasley. Sept. 13 services will be at 6 p.m. and Sept. 14–16 services will be at 7 nightly. Barton Owens is pastor.

COOSA RIVER

▶ **Mount Sharon Church,**

Childersburg, will celebrate homecoming Sept. 27, 10:30 a.m. with the theme "Celebrating 150 Years of God's Faithfulness." A covered-dish lunch will follow. Mike Johnson is pastor.

DEKALB

▶ **First Church, Crossville**, will host a ladies event with guest speaker Vanessa Crosson, author of "Among the Myrtle Trees" on Sept. 26, 10 a.m.–noon. Lunch will be provided. Chris Guinn is pastor.

GENEVA

▶ **New Hinson Church, Slocomb**, will host revival Sept. 20–23. Services will be held Sept. 20, 6 p.m. and Sept. 21–23, 7 p.m. Guest speaker is Daniel Wilson. Bryan Klobe is pastor.

MADISON

▶ **Murphy Hill Church, Toney**, will host a fall gospel singing Sept. 20, 6 p.m., with The Kelly's Quartet of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee. For more information call 256-828-3171 or 256-693-7381. Mike McFarlen is pastor.

MORGAN

▶ **Clint Kimmel** is the new minister of music for **Central Church, Decatur**. His first day is Sept. 20.

He earned a bachelor's degree from Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and a master's degree from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. He previously served as the pastor of music and worship for First Church, Glendale, California. Rob Jackson is pastor.



KIMMEL

MONTGOMERY

▶ **Vaughn Forest Church, Montgomery**, will host "Your Divine Design" women's conference Sept. 19, 9 a.m.–2 p.m. Rochelle Frazier, author of "The Sweeteas" children's series, will speak. Jaime and Ryan Bell will lead worship. To purchase tickets email vfg2wm@gmail.com or stop by the women's ministry table. ▶ **Scott Weatherford** has resigned as lead pastor of **Vaughn Forest Church, Montgomery**. He will serve as transitional pastor while a new lead pastor is sought. ☮

ALABAMA UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

Former minister named USAF Outstanding Airman

Each year the United States Air Force (USAF) recognizes 12 enlisted personnel for their superior leadership, job performance and personal achievements. This summer Alabama native Mason Meherg, former youth pastor at Harmony Grove Baptist Church, Winfield, was honored as Outstanding Airman of the Year.

For Meherg, an E-4 senior airman, it was a humbling experience. "To be surrounded by great, hard-working peers and leadership that will take the time to nominate me for such an honor is overwhelming."

Meherg joined the USAF in 2012 after graduating from Winfield City High School in 2010. He earned an associate's degree from the Community College of the Air Force and is working toward a bachelor's degree through Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. He is stationed at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri.

In addition to being named Outstanding Airman of the Year for the entire USAF, Meherg also has been named an outstanding airman for several divisions in 2014, including the 509th Bomb Wing, the 509th Comptroller Squadron and the Air Force Strike Command. He and his wife, Hope, have two children. Meherg is the son of Tim Meherg, pastor of First Baptist Church, Reform. (Maggie Walsh)



MEHERG

FBC North Mobile changes name to match mission

"Our name is our message." That's the new saying around Redemption Church — formerly First Baptist Church, North Mobile, in Saraland. The new name, which was unanimously decided on by a team of lay leaders, will officially launch Sept. 13.

Brad Hobbs, campus pastor who will help plant and launch a second location called Redemption Church West Mobile Campus in the coming months, said Pastor Ed Litton began praying about what was next for the Mobile Baptist Association church in February and asked members to do the same.

"We began to try to discover how to align our priorities as a church to focus on being very intentional in disciple making and very intentional in helping plant churches not just in Mobile but nationally and internationally," Hobbs said.

A name change, Hobbs said, was in order so that "the name of our people would also be their message. ... Not that we are First Baptist but that we are first God's redeemed. That our people would be about God's redemptive work in places they live and go to school and work."

Litton shared the new name with the congregation Aug. 30.

"We believe the overarching theme of God's story is the redemption of every life for his glory," Litton wrote in a press release. "We exist to see lives redeemed by the love of God and we will do what it takes to live out that mission." (Neisha Roberts)

Herring retires from Baptist Christian educators group

After 14 years as executive director of the Baptist Association of Christian Educators, Jerri Herring has retired.

Widely known as a church consultant, Herring is the author of four books on church growth and Sunday School leadership as well as a contributor to many other books and articles.

Herring has held multiple leadership roles in the state, including serving as minister to children at Dauphin Way Baptist Church, Mobile; minister to children at Morningview Baptist Church, Montgomery; and director of church development at Montgomery Baptist Association. She also has held ministry positions in Tennessee and Georgia and was a church growth consultant at LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville. (TAB)

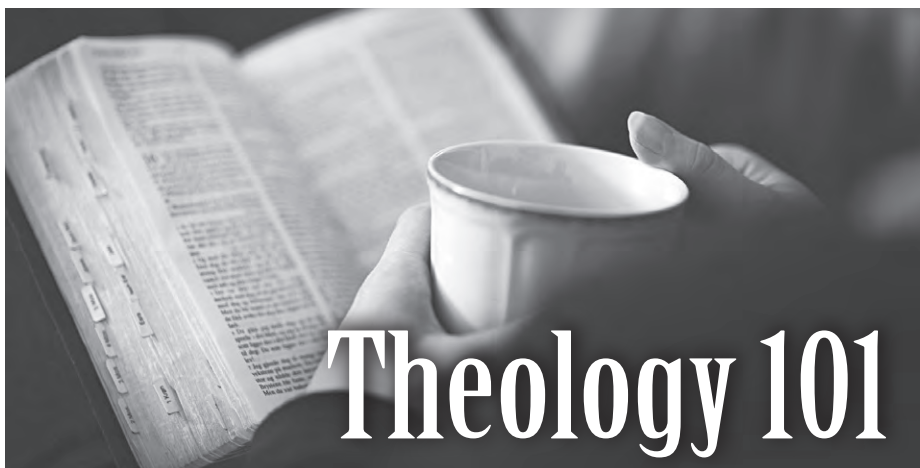


HERRING

REFLECTIONS

"THE LORD WAS EXTRA GOOD TO YOU!"





Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The Word of God Across the Ages

The Engraved Word

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
Special to The Alabama Baptist

The second book of the Bible fast-forwards us from creation to the Exodus. God used Moses to lead His chosen people out of bondage. In the course of traversing the wilderness the people found themselves near Mount Sinai.

God summoned Moses into the mount. After speaking to Moses about many details of the emerging national and religious life of His chosen people, God etched the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone. Exodus 31:18 describes the moment: "And He gave Moses, when He had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone written with the finger of God." Later the two tablets are further described in Exodus 32:16: "The tablets were the work of God and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets."

Ten Commandments

That engraved Word of God forbade the people to adopt other gods or to make a graven image of their God. Those commandments in rapid order forbade taking God's name in vain while commanding them to keep the Sabbath holy, as well as declaring that they should honor their parents and refrain from murder, adultery, stealing and bearing false witness. The final word eliminated a covetous spirit (Ex. 20). In short, when we think of God's Engraved Word, we are thinking about the Ten Commandments.

We have a common way of expressing a sure and abiding truth — we say it is etched in stone. God's sure and abiding covenant word to Israel was indeed etched in stone. When Moses returned to the camp from Mount Sinai he found that in his absence the people had already engaged in breaking the first two of the Ten Commandments. They had collected trinkets of precious metals, melted the metal and fashioned images of imaginary gods. Moses' reaction was dramatic and drastic. He threw the two tablets to the ground where they were as broken

as the opening commandments about "other gods" and "graven images." Even so, God gave His people another chance. After instructing Moses to hew out two new stone tablets, God again engraved His Ten Commandments (Ex. 34:1).

Instrument of revelation

This Engraved Word was an instrument of revelation. In it God set before His people His standard of perfection. The Engraved Word also was an instrument of condemnation. Against that standard, every generation found themselves coming up short. "Whatsoever the law says, it says to those who are under the law that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19). Romans 4:15 asserts that the law pronounces divine wrath upon the guilty: "The law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression." Divine wrath upon transgressors amounts to a sentence of death. Paul's experience with the Commandments is found in Romans 7:11: "For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me."

Serving as a kind of mirror in which people saw themselves falling short of God's standard of perfection, the Engraved Word was preparatory for the sending of His Son. Despair over the inability to live up to God's standard serves to drive sinners to the Savior, in whom forgiveness is found and sinners are made right in God's sight. The Law of God that no one could live up to served as a schoolmaster or tutor to bring people to Christ (Gal. 3:24). 📖

Jerry Batson, retired associate dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and professor at several schools of religion, is pastor of First Baptist Church, McCalla.



Augmented reality

Have you tried it yet?

Follow these instructions for augmented reality

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- 5** Hold your device over a page or image in *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB) marked as augmented reality and watch the paper come to life (pages 1, 2, 5, 7, 8 and 9 this week).
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- 7** Each week when TAB arrives, open the app and hold your device over the augmented reality articles and find extra nuggets of information provided by our staff, columnists and guests. 📖

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Photo by Bryan Gill

As part of your subscription to *The Alabama Baptist*, you will receive a complimentary eight- to 10-minute lecture taught by Samford University's Ministry Training Institute each week. Use your Aurasma app to watch the second of an eight-part series on part of the book of Revelation by placing your mobile device over this photo. App instructions noted above.



Augmented reality

Tallassee's Rock Springs celebrates centennial

With the theme "Remembering our past, trusting God for our future," Rock Springs Baptist Church, Tallassee, celebrated its centennial July 26 with the help of former and current members and descendants of charter members.

The 10:30 a.m. service was emceed by Pastor Dale Barnes, who introduced Elmore Baptist Association Director of Missions Jim Jackson as the featured speaker and each of the musical guests. Kenneth Loomis, worship minister at Heritage Baptist Church, Montgomery, led music for the service.

Special presentations were made by Calvin Milford, Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative; Tallassee Mayor Bobby Payne; church clerk Cornelia Davis; and Rock Springs Baptist Woman's Missionary Union.

In honor of the church's 100 years of ministry, Jan Barnes wrote a poem titled "One Hundred Years" and Connie Davis composed an anniversary song.

The more than 200 participants enjoyed lunch outside under a tent and each family in attendance received a cookbook with recipes from former and current members as well as other items.

Cornelia Davis said, "God blessed that day for us. ... [He] accomplished something we could not have done on our own." (TAB)

Salem Macon Baptist marks 175 years

Salem Macon Baptist Church, Notasulga, in Tuskegee-Lee Baptist Association celebrated its 175th anniversary July 19 with about 250 members, family, friends and former members and staff.

Church member Ann Owsley said people came from across the state to participate in the celebration — some even traveling from Texas, Georgia and Washington state. Former pastor John Bush and family members of former pastors O.C. Bryant, Charles Kerby and Olney Moody

also participated in the service. Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the church with a plaque.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, was the guest speaker and shared a message titled "Facing the Future." A covered-dish lunch followed.

Pastor Michael Stephens told *The Tallassee Tribune* that the day was "a great day in the Lord" with "great worship, great fellowship and great food." (TAB)

Center West commemorates 100 years

The centennial celebration of Center West Missionary Baptist Church, Delta, was a time of reminiscing and re-connecting, according to Cathy Harrelson, wife of Pastor Randy Harrelson.

The July 11 service featured about eight former pastors and former members who shared their memories of Center West Missionary Baptist. The speakers were alternated with singing by Redemption Song, a southern gospel group from Clay County. Certificates commemorating the church's years of ministry were presented by Clay Baptist Association and Sonja Adams, Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative.

Following the 10 a.m. service, participants enjoyed a finger food reception and were able to view the various historic items placed around the church, such as a picture from the church's first baptism in 1915 and a slideshow presentation in the sanctuary. (Maggie Walsh)

Olive Branch looks forward to 100 more years

The centennial celebration of Olive Branch Baptist Church, Ashland, in Carey Baptist Association, got Pastor Wayne Adams "looking forward to another 100 years."

About 130 participants received centennial Bibles provided by the church following the morning service in which southern gospel group Redemption Song per-

formed and Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative Tom Allen presented a plaque. Also during the July 19 service, a history of the church was read. Overall the service was a great time of celebration and sharing, Adams said. (TAB)

Bethel North Baptist celebrates 175 years

The 175th anniversary of Bethel North Baptist Church, Lineville, had the church "completely overflowing with out-of-towners," said anniversary committee member Martha Harris.

In the 10:30 a.m. service, representatives from Clay Baptist Association and the Alabama Baptist Historic Commission presented plaques to the church. Witness 4 Him, a southern gospel group, performed special music and Pastor Wayne Stevens and former pastor Kenneth Forsyth each spoke.

Participants received a CD with more than 800 pictures of the church and former members through the years and were able to enjoy a slideshow with similar pictures during the June 14 service. A barbecue lunch concluded the celebration. (Maggie Walsh)

Lineville's Mount Olive marks 150 years

July 26 marked the exact anniversary of Mount Olive Baptist Church, Lineville, as it was founded that same day in 1865.

To celebrate its 150 years of ministry, Mount Olive Baptist had 59 lineal descendants of charter members in the crowd of 140 to participate in its morning service. Southern gospel group Redemption Song performed and Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative Sonja Adams presented a plaque to the Clay Baptist Association church.

Participants also were able to view pictures of the church's past, according to Pastor L.C. Harris, who is a sixth generation charter member of Mount Olive Baptist. Lunch concluded the celebration. (TAB)

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A Certain Trumpet

Augmented reality

Sermons by Alabama Baptists

Psalm 23 series

Psalm 23:2-3 – The Greatness of the Good Shepherd

The 23rd psalm is one of the most encouraging and comforting passages in the Bible. It is probably the most memorized passage in the Word of God. It has been a source of strength and comfort for some 3,000 years. J. Wilbur Chapman said, "It is as new and fresh today as if it had come to us this morning."

The psalm begins, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." He provides all that we need in this present life and in the life to come. Nothing gives you assurance and sets you free from fear any more than knowing the Good Shepherd is constantly caring for you and is working on your behalf.

As we read this psalm our minds can't help but focus on Jesus Christ, who boldly said, "I am the Good Shepherd" (John 10:11). He is the revelation of the shepherd heart of God and now as resurrected, reigning Lord, He is with us as the "Great Shepherd of the sheep."

Let's look closely at verses two and three. In these verses we see the greatness of the Good Shepherd and that He provides, restores and guides.

He provides for us (v. 2)

The shepherd provides what his sheep need every day. Green pastures and quiet waters are necessities. Also they need guidance and protection. The sheep are totally dependent on someone to care for them.

Unlike many animals, sheep can't make it on their own. They can't fight with their hoofs or teeth. They can't run very easily, or dig holes, or climb trees to escape their predators. They need someone to care for them, just as we do.

David saw that his relationship with his flock was like the Lord's relationship with him. The presence of the shepherd gives the sheep confidence. Likewise the presence of the Lord with us gives security and confidence.

Consider all the wonderful things the Lord has provided for us — eternal salvation (John 3:16), peace that guards our heart through the storms of life (John 14:27; Phil. 4:7) and ultimately an eternal home in heaven (John 14:3).

The Lord also gives us strength so we can follow Him and serve Him. He provides answers to the problems we face. But we must look to Him, trust Him and rest on His promises. The Bible says, "Every good

By Herb Thomas

Herb Thomas serves as pastor of Circlewood Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa. He is a graduate of Walker College in Jasper and Luther Rice Seminary in Lithonia, Georgia. He and his wife, Virginia, have been married 56 years and have two children and six grandchildren.



gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). William Evans observed, "It is generally recognized as being a very difficult thing to get God's people to seek seasons of quiet and periods of retirement for communion with God and quiet soul nurture."

He restores us (v. 3a)

In verse three the psalmist writes, "He restores my soul." That is, the Lord will pick us up and keep us going.

Often a sheep would roll over into a hollow in the ground. He is unable to get up. He is called a "downcast sheep." Downcast is being in a condition in which you can't roll back onto your feet. So the shepherd will gently take the sheep and lift it up. That is what the Lord does for us when we are downcast.

As David wrote this magnificent psalm he could look back and remember all the times he had been on his back, unable to move because he was paralyzed by the failure of his life. Each time the Lord restored him. The Lord wants to get us on our feet, get us going again and keep us going.

Have you ever been downcast? I mean really discouraged. Most likely you have. Discouragement affects everyone. There are many valleys in life — sickness, failure, loneliness, financial setbacks, marital problems. We all go through a valley at some time in life.

I have met many downcast people during my years of pastoring. Many of them needed to hear a word from the Lord. So when I read Psalm 23 they begin to realize God is present to lift them up.

As I write these words I am reminded of the various valleys I have been through. In just a few weeks I will complete 50 years of preaching and pastoring three Southern Baptist

churches. This has been a joyful journey that God has blessed tremendously. Yet there have been times of discouragement and valleys to walk through. But I can say with confidence and praise to God, the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, has been with me and guided me through these valleys. And He will do the same for everyone who will trust Him and follow Him obediently.

The Good Shepherd restores that which was lost. Perhaps you have lost the joy of your salvation, the excitement of serving the Lord. The Lord can restore joy to your life.

When David fell into sin he cried out to God in repentance. He asked God to forgive him, to wash him from his sin (Psalm 51:1-3). He asked God to make him hear joy and gladness. In Psalm 32 we read that the Lord forgave David and blessed him. He restores joy to everyone who returns to Him and confesses their sin.

When walking through a valley remember that God is all-sufficient (vv. 1-3), He is ever-present (v. 4) and He can satisfy completely (vv. 5-6).

He guides us (v. 3b)

"He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." The shepherd would lead his sheep to the right place by the right route. He knew where the green pastures were located and how to get there. He would go before the flock, check out the pathway, locate the best places and lead them to safety.

The Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, will lead us in the right path. We can depend on the Lord to guide us in the right way. Our task is to surrender every decision to Him. Listen to the Word of God: "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:6). "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way" (Ps. 37:23). "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go" (Ps. 32:8). "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go" (Isa. 48:17).

These promises are for those who can say, "The Lord is my Shepherd." Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd? If not, call upon Him today. He is ready and willing to forgive your sin and give you peace. 🙏

in Loving Memory
of Alabama Baptist leaders

Robert "Bobby" Smith

Former Alabama pastor Smith dies

Former Alabama Baptist pastor Robert "Bobby" Smith died July 13. He was 85.

A graduate of the Billy Graham School of Evangelism, Smith served as a pastor for 63 years

at churches including Spring Bank Baptist Church, Chatom; Chapel Hill Baptist Church, Millry; Good Springs Baptist



SMITH

Church, Jackson; Bethel Baptist Church, Coffeeville; and First Baptist Church, Vincent. He also served as interim pastor of several churches. Smith served as chaplain for the Chatom Police Department, owned Smith Ambulance Service and was Washington County coroner for 16 years. He was named United Way's Humanitarian of the Year in 2008 and inducted into the Washington County Hall of Fame in 2010.

He is survived by his wife of 60 years, Betty; two daughters; three grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren. (Maggie Walsh)

Jeffrey Wayne Ingram

FBC Fairhope minister Ingram dies

Jeffrey Wayne Ingram, associate pastor and senior adult minister of First Baptist Church, Fairhope, died Aug. 26. He was 58. Ingram earned a bachelor's degree from

Auburn University; a master's degree from the University of Mississippi in Oxford; and a master of divinity degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Ingram was in the process of earning his doctoral degree from New Orleans Seminary at the time of his death.



INGRAM

He is survived by his wife, Jean, three children and five grandchildren. (Hannah Muñoz)

"And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?" 1 Cor. 14:8

Want to know GOD?

By Matt Lotspeich
Student pastor, FBC Jasper

While I was studying at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, I went on a missions trip to Nigeria. The people of Nigeria were very welcoming to us as well as being welcoming to God's gracious gospel. They had many physical needs that went unmet every day. Because of that, they could see very clearly they were not self-sufficient physically or spiritually.

Here in Alabama, however, we work very hard to be self-sufficient and not need anyone's help. But the fact of the matter is we need more than help when it comes to receiving genuine salvation. We need someone to earn it for us. That someone is Jesus. The truth is that sinners like you and me have only one way to gain salvation, and that is through Jesus Christ. In Mark 1:15, Jesus says, "Repent and believe in the gospel." We must turn away from our sin and trust Christ alone to save us. Therefore we must repent and believe, turn and trust.

One of the men I met in Nigeria was already a Christian when we arrived. His life had been radically transformed by the gracious gospel of Jesus Christ. He wasn't a Christian for cultural reasons or even because he agreed with my morality. He was a Christian because he understood that Jesus is better than anything he or I could obtain on this earth. This brother in Christ walked from Cameroon to Nigeria for the expressed purpose of learning how to serve his community through his local church.

Friend, when you repent of your sin, Jesus does not remodel you; He remakes you. When you trust Christ alone for salvation, your new love for Him will most assuredly spill over to your community. Will you choose this day to by faith turn away from your sin and turn to Christ alone to save you from the consequences of your sin and bring you into a relationship with Himself? 🙏

All options for increasing revenue being considered

(continued from page 10)
the state sales tax on auto sales and an increase in cigarette and tobacco taxes.

Legislators were cold to Bentley's proposals, however, and the 2015 legislative session ended in June without a General Fund budget.

The first special session ended the same way. Proposals to borrow money from ETF and to expand gambling in the state were discussed, but neither idea got any traction. In the closing days of the regular session, the Legislature did pass a \$1.6 billion budget that called for an 11 percent reduction in funding for state agencies, but the governor vetoed that plan. The House voted to override the veto, but the Senate had already adjourned and could not override it.

Sen. Clyde Chambliss, R-Prattville, said his constituents are in favor of adequate funding.

"They are telling me overwhelmingly to fix the budget even if it takes a little pain on my part."

In an Aug. 26 interview with radio host Dan Morris, Chambliss proposed his Plan 2018, which he called an effort to stabilize the budget. His plan includes adding taxes to cigarettes and sodas

and removing taxes on raw meat, fruits and vegetables.

Another key component of Chambliss' plan would divert some revenue from ETF to the General Fund to provide a steady source of revenue to the General Fund. Chambliss said rural hospitals are in jeopardy and the state will have fewer troopers on the road if state agencies are not adequately funded. Medicaid needs to be addressed as well, he said.

Sen. Del Marsh, R-Anniston, proposed an expansion of gam-

bling in the state as a way of raising revenue but those proposals never came up for a vote. Marsh has said he won't propose any type of gambling bill in the second special session.

Two other legislators have said they will introduce lottery bills. Sen. Paul Sanford, R-Huntsville, is proposing a statewide referendum on the lottery. Alabama House minority leader Craig Ford,

D-Gadsden, said he would "immediately introduce an education lottery" in the second special session.

In a statement posted to Facebook, Ford said the lottery would not impact the current budget crisis but would provide long-term revenue to avoid future budget

crises. Ford said the state could see revenue from his proposal by 2017.

In an interview with radio host Dale Jackson on Aug. 28, the governor said House members have been working on a budget that "would probably be a workable budget." He also said he did not expect a government shutdown.

However, the governor made it clear that without additional revenue, cuts are inevitable, and they will be painful to the citizens of Alabama.

'We've done quick fixes'

"Cuts mean closing down parks. It means taking troopers off the road. It means less immunizations. It means less inspection of your restaurants. It means hospitals across the state are going to close, especially the rural hospitals, if Medicaid is not funded," Bentley said. "We've done quick fixes for 12 years. It's time we get some backbone and try to fix this problem and quit having to do that." 🙏

To find the contact information for your state senator or representative, visit <http://capwiz.com/state-al/home/>.

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Gulfcrest Baptist Church near Citronelle, Alabama, is seeking an SBC-trained, bivocational pastor. Salary consistent with the State Board of Missions salary study. Send resumés to: gulfcrestbaptistchurch@yahoo.com.

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Mount Philadelphia Baptist Church, Cordova, Alabama, is seeking a Spirit-filled, bivocational, strong in Southern Missionary Baptist doctrine pastor. Send resumés to: Mount Philadelphia Baptist Church, P.O. Box 13, Cordova, AL 35550.

SONG LEADER

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MINISTER OF MUSIC

Bellevue Baptist Church, Gadsden, accepting resumés for minister of music. Email resumés and hyperlinks to YouTube sites with samples to: secretarybellevue@gmail.com, or mail resumés and DVDs to: 150 Nocalula

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MINISTER OF MUSIC

Rangeline Baptist Church of Demopolis, Alabama, is seeking a part-time minister of music. We enjoy a blended mix of worship music. Mail resumé to: Rangeline Baptist Church, ATTN: Music Committee, 5805 County Rd. 19, Linden, AL 36748.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC

Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church in Homewood is seeking a part-time music minister. Send resumés to: RABC, ATTN: Personnel Committee, 309 Raleigh Ave., Homewood, AL 35209 or jeantowry@rabc.org.

MINISTER OF STUDENTS, SINGLES & THEIR FAMILIES

Covenant Baptist Church, Collierville, Tennessee, seeks a full-time minister of students, singles and their families to provide leadership in developing and directing ministry to youth grades 7-12, college students, singles and their families. Send resumés no later than Oct. 31 to: Personnel Committee, Covenant Baptist Church, P.O. Box 1165, Collierville, TN 38027-1165, or to: drsam@mybcc.org.

YOUTH PASTOR

Church seeking a called bivocational youth pastor. Send resumé

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MINISTER OF CHILDREN & THEIR FAMILIES

Covenant Baptist Church, Collierville, Tennessee, seeks a full-time minister of children and their families to provide leadership in developing and directing ministry to preschoolers and children from birth through twelve years old and their families. Send resumés no later than Oct. 31 to: Personnel Committee, Covenant Baptist Church, P.O. Box 1165, Collierville, TN 38027-1165, or to: drsam@mybcc.org.

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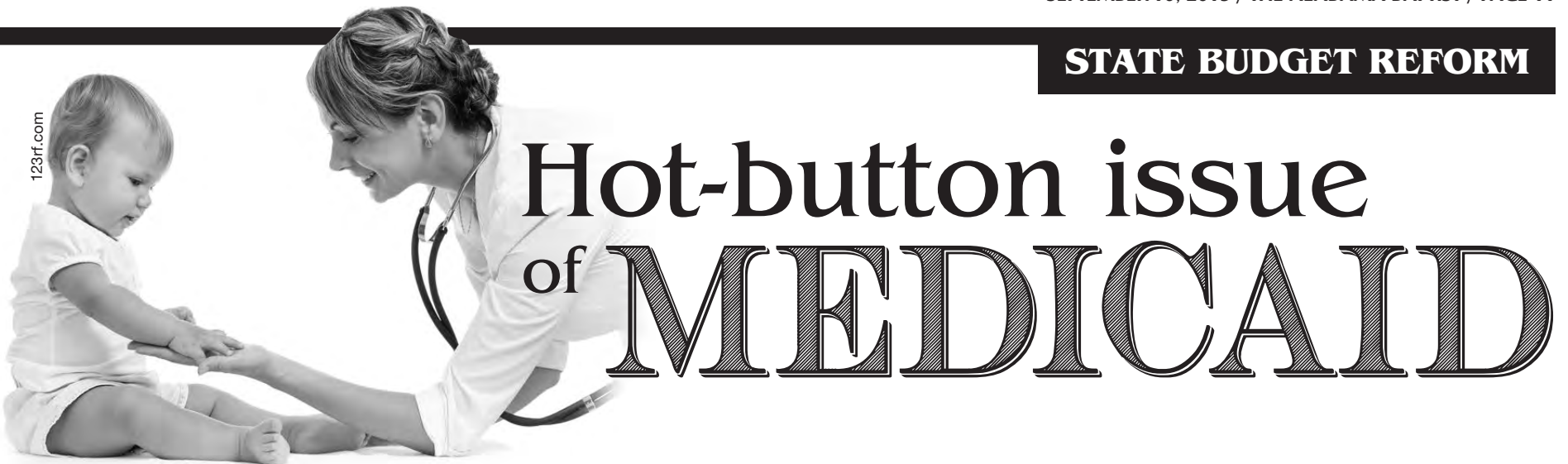
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Hot-button issue of **MEDICAID**

Cuts to Medicaid would result in reduced care for poor children, elderly

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Health care continues to be a hot-button issue in Alabama, and perhaps no single topic gets more attention than Medicaid.

Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) provide free or low-cost health coverage to more than a million people each year in Alabama, a quarter of the state's population. More than half of all children in Alabama are eligible for Medicaid.

Medicaid eligibility is based on several factors, but the program serves low-income people, families and children, pregnant women, the elderly and people with disabilities. Both Medicaid and CHIP are run jointly by federal and state governments, a fact that continues to cause friction in cash-strapped Alabama. According to the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama, total spending on Medicaid in Alabama is expected to reach \$6.1 billion in 2015, with about 30 percent of funding coming from state sources and 70 percent from the federal government.

Derailing efforts

The budget passed by the Alabama Legislature during the regular session called for a 5 percent cut in funding to Alabama's Medicaid program. According to a statement on the Alabama Medicaid Agency's website, that reduction in funding would "derail the agency's planned transformation efforts" and "potentially lead to deep cuts and a program that is simply not vi-

able." Gov. Robert Bentley vetoed that budget, calling it "unworkable."

During the first special legislative session, Rep. Steve Clouse, R-Ozark, proposed a \$156 million cut in funding for the state Medicaid program after the budget committee rejected a cigarette tax that would have allowed for level funding of Medicaid. None of the governor's other revenue proposals were included in the House budget, and the session ended without passage of a General Fund budget.

In a series of tweets Aug. 19, Bentley expressed his concerns about cuts to Medicaid. He said he would not support a budget that cuts Medicaid and that cuts would negatively affect rural communities and nursing homes in Alabama.

"What would you do if a loved one had to be removed from a nursing home (because) of cuts? It's possible," the governor tweeted. "Medicaid is an important component of health. Our rural hospitals, physicians (and) nursing homes depend on Medicaid. Our citizens deserve better than to have their rural hospital(s) close."

Officials with the Alabama Medicaid Transition Task Force have implemented several reforms in the past three years to make Medicaid run more efficiently both financially and operationally. In May, Dr.

Don Williamson, director of the Alabama Department of Public Health and chair of the task force, said without adequate state funding the efforts made to improve Medicaid in the state could not be maintained.

Williamson said cuts would force the elimination of optional programs such as adult eye-glasses, outpatient dialysis, hospice and orthotics. The state also would have to reduce payments to providers and move to a more restrictive pharmacy benefits program, he said.

"Clearly these types of cuts would jeopardize the viability of the Alabama Medicaid program," Williamson said. "At a minimum, they would dramatically limit access for recipients, especially in rural areas and would likely result in physicians leaving the state."

In the agency's annual report for fiscal year 2012, acting commissioner Stephanie

Azar cited a 2012 economic impact study that "found that every dollar the state invested in Medicaid in 2010 generated a return of \$8 to the state. Overall nearly \$9 billion in monetary impact was attributed to Medicaid." The study referenced was conducted by Auburn Montgomery Center for Government. The study also noted that Alabama Medicaid was responsible for approximately 147,000 jobs created or supported and for \$592 million in taxes generated in 2010.

Significant impact

Beyond jobs, however, the impact of Medicaid on Alabama's youngest citizens is significant, said Michael J. Ramsey, a pediatrician in Dothan and president of the Alabama Chapter-American Academy of Pediatrics.

In a letter to the editor of the *Dothan Eagle* in May, Ramsey called Medicaid "one of the pillars of pediatric health care."

"The average pediatric practice in Alabama has 30 percent of its patients covered by Medicaid. Pediatric subspecialists are disproportionately paid with Medicaid dollars. Without a healthy, vibrant Medicaid system, there is no way to provide a sustainable infrastructure for pediatric care for any child, regardless of insurance," he said.

"With its proposed budget cuts for nearly every government agency, the Alabama Legislature is playing a very dangerous game with the health and well-being of the children of Alabama." ■

"With its proposed budget cuts for nearly every government agency, the Alabama Legislature is playing a very dangerous game with the health and well-being of the children of Alabama."

Michael J. Ramsey
pediatrician, president of the
Alabama Chapter-American
Academy of Pediatrics

Prison reform may stall without additional revenue

Prison reform efforts in Alabama may stall if the Legislature fails to find additional revenue for the state's General Fund during the second special session that began Sept. 8.

In May, Gov. Robert Bentley signed into law Senate Bill 67, legislation intended to reduce the prison population in Alabama and save millions in related costs.

The bill is projected to cost the state \$23 million to \$26

million per year to implement, and legislators at the time said funding would be available. That promise now seems to be in doubt.

Saving in future costs

At the signing, Bentley praised the bill that will cut the state's prison population by more than 4,200 people, provide supervision for 3,000 former inmates and save more than \$380 million in future costs.

In testimony before the U.S.

House Committee Oversight and Government Reform on July 14, Bentley touted the state's prison reform efforts, saying Alabama has made "significant progress" to improve its criminal justice system.

He also noted in written testimony that "the success of the prison reform bill hinges upon adequate funding, which is a matter that the state Legislature must address in an upcoming special session."

During that session, the Leg-

islature failed to pass a General Fund budget, raising concerns about whether the state will be able to implement the reforms. Instead of adding the money needed by the Department of Corrections (DOC), budget proposals have called for cuts of 5 percent to the DOC.

Youth offenders

In addition the governor's office said the stripped-down budget could hurt youth offenders. The Department of Youth Ser-

vices, which operates several juvenile correctional facilities in the state, could see layoffs of personnel and closure of detention facilities.

The result would be fewer options to keep young people out of detention facilities and an increase in juvenile commitments, as well as an increase in the juvenile commitment backlog in communities, according to the governor. (Carrie Brown McWhorter)

STATE BUDGET REFORM

Affecting 'ALABAMA the Beautiful'

Budget cuts could lead to state parks closing, more illegal dumps

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADC-NR) covers a lot of ground throughout the state — literally.

The department oversees 22 state parks, several freshwater reservoirs, saltwater fishing, state forestlands and enforcement of hunting rules in all 67 counties in Alabama. Annually thousands of Alabama residents and visitors from all over the world take advantage of the bountiful natural resources that “Alabama the Beautiful” has to offer. Most of the activities, including resort hotels and conference facilities, are revenue generating.

That revenue has been attractive to legislators in the past — so attractive in fact that they have transferred money from ADCNR into the General Fund to counter the overall revenue shortfall the state has experienced in the last few years.

Would be ‘devastating’

In addition to cuts in state allocations to ADCNR, transfers from the ADCNR account into the General Fund have been proposed once again for the 2015–16 budget, a decision which Alabama State Parks Director Greg Lein said would be “devastating to the state park program.”

Lein said the department rarely has more than \$2 million in cash reserves during any given month. Those reserves are built up during the busier summer season.

“Early on when we were contemplating an \$11.4 million transfer, our strategy was that if that could be deferred until late in 2016, we would be able to receive our normal funds, might have a good summer, go through our peak season. We might be able to, through a lot of efficiencies, respond to that,” Lein said in an Aug. 28 interview with Don Dailey, host of Alabama Public Television’s “Capitol Journal.”

However, the budget that passed the Legislature in June, which the governor vetoed, called for quarterly transfers from the ADCNR account. That proposal changed the analysis, Lein said.

“If these quarterly transfers are passed, there’s a very real chance of overdrawing the cash balance of our funds. If that happens, we can’t pay bills, can’t make payroll and can’t honor our federal commitments,” he said.

A statement on the state parks’ website updated Aug. 12 said that since 2012, \$27 million has been transferred from ADCNR programs, including the state parks division. That money has gone into the General Fund and then to some other agency, according to the statement.



Cheaha State Park

en.wikipedia.org

These transfers have affected programs throughout the division and go beyond a state parks issue, Lein said. They also could affect federal grants and funds that are already in use in the state, he said.

‘Legal stipulations’

“These funds have legal stipulations that they can only be used for these programs. The repayment of those funds will be on the State of Alabama,” Lein said.

Lein said a collapse in the state park system will harm local governments and related outdoor

businesses that benefit from the estimated \$2–3 billion annual economic engine that is outdoor recreation in the state.

The proposed cuts could have a negative impact on agriculture in the state as well. According to the governor’s office, drastic funding reductions to the Department of Agriculture and Industries could result in the closure of two diagnostic labs that

test for deadly livestock diseases and the closure of the seed lab, which will risk the purity and integrity of products for farmers.

The Environment Management Agency also would see cuts in staff and services. The governor’s office suggested that counties would have to deal with an increase in abandoned waste landfills, tire dump sites and other illegal dumps. ☞

**COMING
NEXT WEEK...**

Articles providing information about Alabama’s current tax situation and how cuts to the General Fund budget will affect the state’s Department of Mental Health will be in the Sept. 17 issue of The Alabama Baptist.



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Proposed budget cuts would affect public safety

If proposed cuts to the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA) are enacted, drivers throughout the state will especially feel the effects, according to agency head Spencer Collier.

"During the 2015 regular and first special sessions, the Legislature proposed General Fund budget cuts ranging from 22 percent to 47 percent cut from ALEA's fiscal year 2015 appropriation. Should the Legislature pass devastating budget cuts, it will be necessary for the licensing division to close driver license district and field offices statewide," said Collier, Alabama Secretary of Law Enforcement, in an Aug. 28 statement on the agency's website.

ALEA is working to increase efficiency in its driver's licensing process through technology like online license renewals and equipment upgrades, Collier said. However, the agency currently operates with an \$8.2 million deficit.

Without level funding, which means no increase and no decrease in the agency's budget, Collier said it will be necessary to close offices throughout the state. The result of those closings will be longer waits and longer drives to regional offices that provide services.

Affecting rural areas

If the ALEA budget is cut, Collier said the first phase of closures would begin Oct. 1 and would affect field offices in rural areas. These offices operate on a part-time basis,

opening for one or two days each week for limited hours primarily to give driver's tests.

On Jan. 1, 2016, a second phase of cuts would mean the closing of all district offices, leaving 12 offices open statewide.

Collier said the result of the second phase of closings would be that most citizens would have to drive more than an hour to access services and the wait times at those offices, which already average 1.5 hours, would increase.

Final phase

The third and final phase of the ALEA plan would move all operations to offices in Huntsville, Birmingham, Montgomery and Mobile on March 1, 2016, increasing drive and wait times even more, he said.

In addition to cuts in driver's license services, Gov. Robert Bentley said on his website that severe budget cuts also would result in layoffs among the ranks of state troopers, special agents and personnel at state-run youth detention facilities. In addition, the Agriculture and Rural Crime Unit would be shut down, as would 13 state trooper posts, the Huntsville Morgue and some youth facilities.

Public safety is a core mission of state government, Collier said, adding that the budget crisis will negatively impact government services and impact all residents of Alabama. (Carrie Brown McWhorter)

Efforts to boost state's economic development could be scaled back

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

A projected revenue shortfall of \$250 million or more in Alabama's General Fund budget is evidence of Alabama's need for economic development. Significant budget cuts to the agencies tasked with improving the business environment in the state could lead to even greater future economic weakness, according to Jim Byard Jr., director of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA).

The Alabama Department of Commerce and ADECA both stand to lose ground in their efforts to bring businesses and industries to the state. For example the commerce department would have to scale back its outreach efforts. In an Aug. 24 tweet, Gov. Robert Bentley said "jobs are important to our citizens. Budget cuts to (the) Department of Commerce could hurt project recruitment efforts."

ADECA could see even greater cuts, according to information provided by the governor's office.

The Alabama Rural Development Office, the Small Business Office and the Appalachian Regional Commission all could be eliminated. Perhaps more important is the loss of state funds used to get federal matching funds for the Community Development Block Grant and Community Service Block Grant programs.

Byard said that in actual dollars, the projected budget cut for ADECA is around \$5 million. Even that loss will have "huge consequences" for communities around the state, he said.

"That \$5 million allows ADECA to secure hundreds of millions of federal dollars that local governments use to pay for their community's high-priority projects," Byard said.

Byard said the grant programs offer a "great return on investment" for Alabama's 460 municipi-

palities and 67 counties. By allocating a small portion of the General Fund budget to ADECA, the state secures hundreds of millions of federal dollars that local governments use to pay for their community's high priority projects.

"These grants allow local leaders to move forward on projects that boost local economies and improve the lives of residents," he said.

Through the Community Development Block Grant program, local governments receive \$24 million in federal funds for every \$1 million in state funds, Byard said. As a result, a cut of \$5 million potentially translates into a loss of \$120 million in federal funds for those projects.

Result in unmet needs

Byard said ADECA funds water and sewer improvements, recreation projects and disaster recovery assistance. Without ADECA resources many community needs would be unmet, he said.

"These grants also mean more local jobs and more paychecks that help the overall community to prosper," he said.

The Alabama Department of Labor will see the results of budget cuts as well, specifically in the area of mine safety. Projected cuts include layoffs, reduced mine safety inspections and the elimination of the training contract with Beville State College for mine rescue teams.

Alabama ranks 13th among U.S. states for coal production, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. In 2013, the last year for which statistics are available, Alabama had eight underground coal mines and 31 surface coal mines. Approximately 4,200 miners work in the industry in Alabama.

The governor's office also said that up to 11 National Guard armories around the state could close because the state would no longer pay their electric bills. ☞

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For September 13

Explore the Bible By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

MADE IN HIS IMAGE Genesis 2:4-9, 15-18

God created man in His image. The “imago Dei” is God’s investment in humanity of God-like glory and moral capacity to reign and rule the earth as His representatives. Human beings created in the image of God have the ability and desire to seek God and understand Him. Humans have been granted dominion to reign and rule the earth. When we rule in ways that are pleasing to the Lord there is “shalom” (peace and harmony). Human beings created in God’s image are to be treated with dignity and respect. The implication of the imago Dei is that there is an intrinsic human dignity that places us above everything else in the created order.

Man Formed (4-7)

In Genesis 2, Moses is retelling the story of creation with an emphasis on day six and the creation of humanity. These verses highlight how the Lord God personally created the earth and the heavens. The word translated “Lord” is God’s personal name, “Yahweh.” Out of deep reverence for the name Yahweh, Jews substituted the Hebrew word for Lord. The precedent for translating this as “Lord” and not “Yahweh” is found in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament).

The primary action in these verses is God forming man. The verb “formed” conveys the picture of a potter fashioning clay into a particular shape. Human beings are not accidents. We are creatures made in the image of God as a part of God’s beautiful design. God creates human beings in His image for His glory (Ps. 139:13-16).

God formed man and then breathed life — physical, mental and spiritual — into the one created to bear His image. The man became a living creature. The same term is used in Genesis 1:20, 24 to denote

sea and land creatures. Although human beings have much in common with other living beings, God gives them alone a royal and priestly status and declares them alone to be “in His own image.”

A Place to Call Home (8-9)

God provided a suitable environment for the man by planting a garden in Eden. The name Eden conveyed the sense of luxury, pleasure and delight. The land of Eden probably denotes a region much greater than the garden itself. The earliest translation into Greek used the word “paradise.” The abundance of the garden is described by the observation that it contained every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. Two trees are selected for special mention: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A Warning Issued (15-17)

God placed Adam in the garden to work it and keep it. This command came before Adam sinned; therefore, work did not come about as a result of sin. Productive work is part of God’s good plan for man in creation.

God graciously permitted Adam to eat from every tree of the garden except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Here we see God’s holiness, goodness, justice and grace on display. God has authority to define what is right and wrong, good and evil, based upon His pure and holy character. God makes it clear to man that he will be judged based upon his obedience to the command. God’s grace is evident for He does not hide His law. God tells the man the way to life and exhorts him to walk in it.

A Need Addressed (18)

God responded to Adam’s need for a life companion by making a helper fit for him. For God’s beautiful design to come to fruition Adam had to have a helper. Genesis 2:18-25 describes how God created woman and made marriage between one man and one woman. 📖

Bible Studies for Life By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Religion, Samford University

GOD’S PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE 1 John 5:6-13

Our familiarity with the life and teachings of Jesus can easily obscure the fact that Jesus’ earthly ministry was so remarkably brief. While the Gospels themselves do not specify the exact length of Jesus’ ministry, the references to three Passover celebrations in John’s Gospel (John 2:13; 6:4; 12:1) and the weight of Church tradition suggest He spent just two to three years with His disciples.

Though His sojourn with the disciples may have been brief, the process of reflecting on Jesus’ ministry and coming to appreciate who He was in an ultimate sense would continue for decades and even centuries beyond the resurrection. The pages of the New Testament bear witness to the challenges early Christians faced as they sought to reconcile fully both Jesus’ humanity and divinity. Two groups whose beliefs would ultimately fall outside the understanding of Jesus presented in the New Testament were known as the Ebionites and the Docetists.

The Ebionites formed a segment of early Jewish Christianity. For the Ebionites the humanity of Jesus presented no problem at all; the Messiah was supposed to be a man. But because of their rich monotheistic heritage in Judaism the Ebionites struggled with the notion that Jesus could truly be divine. Jesus as God seemed to them too much like polytheism. The Docetists who emerged from Hellenistic Christianity suffered just the opposite problem. While they embraced the notion that Jesus was divine, the very negative view of the physical body they had inherited from the Greek philosophers made it difficult for them to accept the idea that Jesus was truly human. One of the great purposes of 1 John was to challenge both of these notions.

Jesus is God’s Son. (6-9)

In rejecting the humanity of Jesus some Docetists went so far as to claim that Jesus and the Christ were two different beings. Jesus, they suggested, was indeed human but He was not the Christ. The Christ was the deity who inhabited Jesus upon His baptism and because God could not suffer, departed from Him before He experienced the cross. John argues forcefully against this idea. In 1 John 5:1, he maintains, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” When he continues in verse 5, he insists that Jesus Christ is One who came by water, referring to His baptism, and blood, referring to His death on the cross. The same person declared to be God’s beloved Son at His baptism is the One who suffered through crucifixion.

Life is found in Jesus. (10-11)

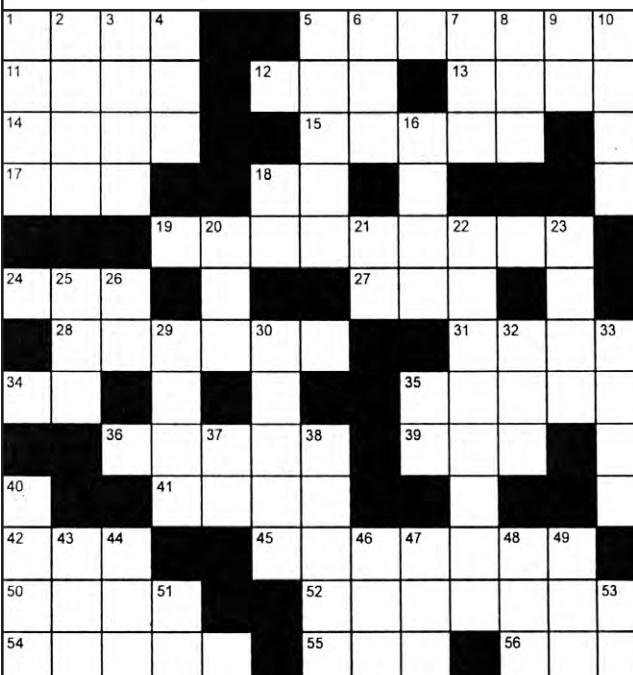
Just as important for John is the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. In years past Israel’s kings had often been declared to be sons of God (Ps. 2:7). In the New Testament this notion was extended to all of God’s people (Rom. 8:14, 19; Gal. 3:26). And yet there is a sense in which Jesus is viewed as uniquely the Son of God. Here John insists that Jesus possesses a Sonship that outstrips the too low view of Jesus held by some in His community.

We experience life when we believe in Jesus. (12-13)

The schism that had affected the community to which 1 John was addressed (1 John 2:19) had apparently taken its toll on the faithful. It is doubtless for this reason that John concludes his message with a note of confidence and hope for God’s people: “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” John insists that as believers embrace the Son of God they receive the new eternal life that comes from God. 📖

Christian Crossword

By Amy Rognlie Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- Matthew, Mark, Luke, ____.
- Yet will I leave a ____ (Ezek. 6:8)
- Jesus cried, “____, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” (Mark 15:34)
- Sun. (Spanish)
- Ancient South American Indians.
- Jesus ... touched him, saying, I ____ (Matt. 8:3)
- ____ yourselves unto God. (Rom. 6:13)
- Jacob ____ pottage. (Gen. 25:29)
- Mom.
- Ye say that I cast out devils through ____ (Luke 11:18)
- Under oaks and poplars and ____ s. (Hos. 4:13)
- North northeast. (abbr.)
- Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but ____ (Gen. 32:28)
- But ____ found grace in the eyes of the Lord. (Gen. 6:8)
- Maine. (abbr.)

Down

- Sharpen every man his ____ (1 Sam. 13:20)
- ____ thy wife shall bear thee a son. (Gen. 17:19)
- Give ____ to my words, O Lord. (Ps. 5:1)
- Texas city: El ____.
- Choose.
- Joseph took them both, ____ ... and Manasseh. (Gen. 48:13)
- Butter substitute.
- I beseech ____ (Phil. 4:2)
- No scrip, no bread, no ____ (Mark 6:8)
- A time to rend, and a time to ____ (Eccles. 3:7)
- Cow noise.
- The child did minister unto the Lord before ____ (1 Sam. 2:11)
- Same as 4 down.
- With; as well as.
- North Carolina. (abbr.)
- Weed.
- Thou hast been in ____ the garden of God. (Ezek. 28:13)
- Myself.
- Period of time.
- Zinc. (abbr.)
- ____ the king of Syria was sick. (2 Kings 8:7)
- The ____ out of the wood doth waste it. (Ps. 80:13)
- A faithful witness will not ____ (Prov. 14:5)
- Master of science. (abbr.)
- They that sow in tears shall ____ in joy. (Ps. 126:5)
- To obliterate.
- All that handle the ____ (Ezek. 27:29)
- ____ me, O Lord. (Jer. 17:14)
- Southeast. (abbr.)
- Egyptian sun god.
- [Love] always protects, always trusts, always ____ (1 Cor. 13:7)



WHAT ARE YOU READING?



Alabama Baptists share about what they are currently reading

Carrie Brown McWhorter

Member of Beulah Baptist Church, Muscadine
 “Somewhere Safe with Somebody God” by Jan Karon

I love all the Mitford books and this one was truly a pleasure. Father Tim’s love and kindness toward the people he encounters each day is always inspiring, of course. But I think in this one, we see some familiar challenges that readers can relate to as well. For example he realizes after much prayer and consideration that even though it would be comfortable and familiar in many ways to return as pastor of Lord’s Chapel, God is not calling him to do that. The way the church leaders in the novel accept his “no” is how we in the church also should respond to a prayerfully considered “no” by our fellow servant leaders. Father Tim’s constant struggle to eat nutritiously is humorous but thought provoking as well, especially in our Southern culture where delicious-but-not-necessarily-nutritious comfort food is a staple in times of celebration and sorrow. There were so many other aspects of the book I loved but too many to detail. I am excited that Karon’s next Mitford novel comes out in a couple of weeks. I can’t wait to read it as well.

Ritchie Emerson

Pastor of New Hope No. 2 Baptist Church, Haleyville
 “Forward: 7 Distinguishing Marks for Future Leaders” by Ronnie Floyd

It’s about taking leadership to new heights and (how to) position yourself as a leader to accomplish more than you ever thought possible. This book is seven great chapters in leading people to a closer walk with God.

Julia Ford

Member of Macedonia Baptist Church, Gadsden
 “Both Feet In: A Journey to Surrender, Sacrifice and Service” by Marion “Bud” Fray with Kim P. Davis

This is a great book about missionaries. Just like the title says, this book and our faith is a journey to surrender, sacrifice and service. I learned that God is there, we just need to trust Him more, pray more and do more. 🙏

Tell us what you are reading, a quick summary of what it is about and your response to it so far. Email news@thealabamabaptist.org or send us a message on Facebook. You also may mail your information to 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209.



Photos courtesy of Merge PR

‘Timeless truths’

Wilson connects audiences to freedom, forgiveness in Christ

By Leann Callaway
 Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

With his new album “That Was Then, This is Now,” singer/songwriter Josh Wilson marvels at the intricate details that God has orchestrated throughout his musical journey.

The theme of this project serves as a powerful reminder that people should not be defined, limited or held back by their past circumstances or struggles. Through these songs, Wilson emphasizes personal messages of forgiveness and freedom in Christ.

“The theme of the album is who we are in Christ,” Wilson said. “The title track is a declaration of the freedom we have because of what Jesus has done. The bridge of the song references 1 John 1:9, ‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us from our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ I hope people have a renewed sense of forgiveness and freedom that is offered through Christ.”

The album placed in the Top 5 on the Billboard Top Christian Albums chart and garnered Wilson’s first-ever debut on the Billboard Top 200 chart. Adding to his recent success, the debut radio single and title track from the project continues to gain momentum on the radio charts.

Before Wilson received his first guitar, he made a promise to his father that he would use the instrument for God. He honored that commitment and began leading worship for his youth group. After high school, he attended Belmont University in Nashville where he won the Christian Music Showcase during his junior year.

Following graduation from Belmont in 2006, Wilson signed with Sparrow Records and released his major label debut, “Trying to Fit the Ocean in a Cup,” in 2008. The album was met with critical acclaim and hailed as the “future of Christian pop.”

In 2012, Wilson won the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers Christian Songwriter of the Year.

With his rapid success, Wilson notes the importance of being a good steward with his musical talents.

“I think there is confidence in knowing this is my calling, but there’s also humility in knowing that my talents are on loan,” he said. “I am stewarding this gift of music and I feel a renewed sense of purpose.”

“My wife always reminds me that life is too short to be too cool. I love that quote, because sometimes I tend to take myself too seriously and need to remember there’s no reason to be too cool. I love Job

37:14 which says, ‘Stop and consider the wondrous works of God.’

“I wrote the song ‘Blown Away’ about slowing down to consider what God is doing in our everyday life. The song talks about being blown away by God’s extraordinary grace every day and stopping to be amazed.”

During his concerts, Wilson showcases his musical talents while playing more than 20 instruments, including banjo, mandolin, ukulele, glockenspiel, guitar and piano.

Recognized for his unique ability to take ordinary life experiences and turn them into soul-stirring lyrics, his songs often take listeners on a musical journey of reflection and God’s redemption.

‘God uses the right song’

“I’ve heard from many people who felt that certain songs were written specifically for them,” Wilson said. “I do believe that God uses the right song at the right time to reach people. I received a message from someone who was planning to drive off a bridge and take their life. When my song ‘Before the Morning’ came on the radio, they realized that there was still hope and they weren’t too far gone to give their life to Jesus. They turned their car around and surrendered completely to Christ.

“That’s an encouragement to me, because I’m not doing anything new with my songwriting. I’m just expressing timeless truths that are all found in Scripture.” 🙏



Grab your cross

New Orleans Zephyrs player gives God everything

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

During the 2009 SEC Baseball Tournament a future first-round draft pick was ready to quit.

An All-American third baseman at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Zack Cox was a day away from striking baseball out of his life.

However, a testimony by five-time Major League All-Star Travis Fryman made him re-think his decision.

"He came in and he started telling his testimony about his faith and how he came to Christ. When he said, 'I realized I had given my life to Christ when I was young but I had never given God my career,' chills went up and down my body," Cox said.

"I could feel God telling me, 'Hey, you have never given Me your career' so I ... gave my career to Christ. The next day I felt joy and peace playing baseball whereas before I only felt fear and anxiety."

In 2010, Cox, then a sophomore at Arkansas, had a banner year. His 102 hits, including 75 singles, were both school single-season records. He hit nine home runs and had 48 RBIs.

The Razorbacks advanced to the NCAA Super Regionals. Cox was a team captain. A communications major, Cox was named *ESPN The Magazine's* Academic All-District 6 first team. He was a first-team All-American.

Cox was drafted in the first round by the St. Louis Cardinals in the 2010 Major League Baseball Draft. As the 25th overall selection, Cox was the fourth highest pick in school history and sixth Arkansas player drafted in the first round.

Left-handed hitter

Cox played for four St. Louis minor league teams before being traded to the Miami Marlins in 2012. Cox is finishing the 2015 season with the New Orleans Zephyrs, his third time there since 2013.

He was promoted to the Triple-A Pacific Coast League team in August after playing 103 games with the Jacksonville Suns in the Double-A Southern League.

Before his trade, Cox, a left-handed hitter, was third in the Southern League with a batting average of .321. He was named to the South Division All-

Star team. This season Cox, in his third stint with the Suns, scored 47 runs, had 105 hits including 19 doubles, a triple, four home runs and 27 RBIs.

"In baseball there is so much failure and I think in that failure you can show how you deal with adversity. You deal with tough times with the face of Christ, with the way He would have. Sometimes it is really hard. Sometimes I am not very good at it. I do my best," said Cox, 26.

"You have to wake up every day and grab your cross. You've got to stay in the Bible. You have got to talk to God. You have to pray and have got to have fellowship with Him."

Overcoming worry, fear and anxiety have been done through prayer, Bible reading, worship, time with Christians and staying strong spiritually.

Cox began cultivating his faith at age 8. Raised by Christian parents Jim and Sandra Cox, he became a Christian and was baptized at Campbellsville Baptist Church in Kentucky.

"Later on in life I went through the struggles that most people do. When you are 8 years old, you don't really know what to expect," Cox said.

During the off-season, Cox works with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (see story, pages 4-5) huddle group and baseball team at Rogers High School in Arkansas where he and his wife, Tiffany, live. They attend Fellowship Bible Church there.

"When you give your life to God, you have to give Him everything. It is not just giving Him one part. You can't keep one part — it's everything.

"When you are a Christian, you are not of the world. You are wanting to do things for Christ. It is denying myself and following Jesus. It is just simply turning away from what my natural body wants which is sin."

That teammates see Christ in Cox is a goal along with sharing the Great Commission.

"I am obviously not perfect but I think the best way to share Christ is to live your life in such a way that you are a fragrant aroma to those around you and they want to know what is different about you. It opens up a chance to share your faith."

Jacksonville center fielder Kenny Wilson said that Cox is a "huge Christian. He is a Christ follower. Every time we run a Bible study, he is always bringing good information to the table. The way he gets the Word out is pretty special." ❧



Zack Cox

Photo by Parker Waters

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Somali Christians flee Islamic extremists

HARGEISA, Somaliland — Desperate to avoid arrest in Somaliland for leaving Islam, one Christian fled to Ethiopia while another in Somalia escaped kidnappers after losing fingers for his faith.

Sharif (last name withheld for security reasons) said he had to leave his wife and four children behind in order to sneak out of Somaliland, an autonomous region of Somali, after Islamic extremists discovered he had converted to Christianity.

Another former Muslim recently escaped from insurgents of the Islamic extremist group Al Shabaab in Baidoa, Somalia. After kidnapping the Christian, the Islamic extremists chopped off four fingers on his right hand while interrogating him about his faith, he said by phone from an undisclosed location.

Non-Somalis may practice any faith in Somaliland, but conversion from Islam is forbidden for nationals, said a church leader in Hargeisa. The constitution of Somaliland enshrines Islam as the state religion and forbids the propagation of any faith other than Islam. (MS)

Christian in Egypt kept in prison on false charges

CAIRO, Egypt — An Egyptian Christian who was arrested in August for alleged evangelizing of Muslims in suburban Cairo could be held indefinitely in prison on a false accusation of blasphemy, his attorney said. Medhat Ishak, a 35-year-old Christian from Ebid village in Minya Governorate, was arrested Aug. 7 while handing out Bibles to Muslims outside a mall and accused of evangelism. Although the charge was for "defamation of a revealed religion," Ishak was held for 15 days, a detention that was extended an extra 15 days Aug. 24, according to Ishak's attorney, Rafik Rafaat.

Rafaat said there is no such criminal charge as "evangelism" under Egyptian law, and that handing out Bibles or even promoting Christianity does not constitute "defaming a revealed religion." (MS)

Pakistani Christian killed, wife shot by Muslim relatives

NARANG MANDI, Pakistan — Islamist groups are threatening the family and attorney of a young Christian man shot to death by Muslim in-laws who also wounded his wife over her decision to marry him and leave Islam, according to attorney Aneeqa Maria of The Voice Society, a human rights agency in Pakistan. Aleem Masih, 28, married Nadia, 23, in 2014 after she accepted Christ and the couple fled to Narang Mandi, about 40 miles away from Lahore, after receiving threats from Nadia's family, Maria said.

On July 30 eyewitnesses said Nadia's father and brothers abducted the couple. The men beat the couple and shot Masih three times and Nadia twice. Masih died from his wounds, but Nadia was taken to a nearby hospital. Her brothers and father confessed to the crimes, but at press time they had not been taken into custody although a case was registered against them. (MS)

Pastor attacked, beaten by Hausa youth in Nigeria

SAMINAKA, Nigeria — Like the Muslim Fulani herdsmen, who attack with sophisticated weapons against largely unarmed Christian farmers, the Hausa people of northern Nigeria are predominately Muslim and antagonistic toward Christians.

A pastor was attacked while visiting Kaduna state April 13 by Muslim Hausa youth apparently upset by elections at that time, and they made their anti-Christian sentiments known.

"They called me an infidel and attacked me," said Pastor Emmanuel Danjuma of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Yobe State.

Danjuma said the local Hausa Muslims clubbed and stabbed him several times in Saminaka as they rampaged through the town attacking non-Hausas presumed to have voted against their wishes. (MS)