

would be on the horizon would be real, concrete, and objective events (Matthew 24).

Murray demonstrates a disregard for truth and accuracy and takes advantage of the ignorance and gullibility of his television flock. He has based his interpretation of Bible prophecy on an erroneous date. Murray says the Mount St. Helens' eruption occurred on Pentecost Sunday in 1980. It did not. The volcano's primary eruptions began May 18, a week before Pentecost, which was celebrated on May 25, 1980. But Murray doesn't let historical fact stand in the way of his interpretation. This sort of implausible hermeneutic may titillate an audience, but does nothing to honor God by rightly dividing the word of truth.

Murray repeatedly calls those who challenge his Bible interpretations "Bible-thumpers," "numbskulls," and "yo-yos." However, it is Murray who would be more rightly regarded with such scorn. Despite his efforts to establish himself as an extraordinary Bible teacher, careful examination of his ideas shows him a confused teacher to be avoided.

—MKG

JESUS SAVES, YES JESUS SAVES

Christians have long sung of the saving power of Jesus. As they sing, they express the power of Christ to save one from spiritual death. Recently, however, Dallas Cowboy's cornerback turned CBS sports analyst Deion Sanders gave new meaning to the popular hymn. Apparently Jesus is now saving from more than just the consequences of sin. He saved Sanders \$2,765 off a \$4,265 auto repair bill.

In 2001, Sanders had work done on his 1961 Lincoln Continental convertible. Since that time, auto repair shop owner Phil Compton, along with his attorney, Ed Edson, have been trying to collect on the bill for the repair work. According to an *Associated Press* report, "The owner of the repair shop said Sanders wanted to pay only \$1,500 of the \$4,265.57 bill, saying that Jesus had informed him that was all he needed to pay."

Compton serviced the vintage automobile and returned it to Sanders' home in Plano, Texas, in November 2001. Pilar Sanders, former wife of the sportscaster, took the keys and repair bill from Compton and retreated into the locked house while bodyguards and housekeepers moved other vehicles around the automobile to prevent it from being returned to the repair shop. "When Sanders drove up, he refused to pay the invoice amount, handing Compton a \$1,500 check and saying, 'Praise Jesus ... I follow what in my heart I'm told to pay,'" the *AP* reported.

Compton filed suit in March 2002 in an attempt to collect the outstanding balance. During the July 14, 2003, trial, held in Texas State District court, Judge Joe Cox ruled in favor of Sanders. Testimony was given during the trial which stated that Compton had been told that there was a \$1,500 ceiling on the cost of repairs.

Sanders told the *AP* that "I'm not hurting for money. And let's be honest. A \$4,000 bill, I could have written a check a long time ago. But it's the principle. I'm tired of getting ripped off."

—MKG

LIFESTYLES OF THE RICH AND SHAMELESS

Two local business-related publications last summer disclosed the successes of their respective hometown televangelists. The *St. Louis Business Journal* examined the "evangelism empire" of Joyce Meyer, while the *San Antonio Express-News* revealed the spectacular income of John Hagee. Each report revealed an opulent kingdom that is amassing millions of dollars through donations and the sale of books, tapes, and other materials.

The St. Louis publication sought, but was refused, an interview with either Meyer or her husband, Dave. The newspaper also noted that an "exact revenue figure for the ministry wasn't available." Joyce Meyer Ministries is not a member of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, an organization that oversees and sanctions the financial activities of evangelical ministries. The ECFA regularly receives inquiries concerning Meyer and her ministry.

Despite these obstacles, the June 20-26, 2003, issue of the *St. Louis Business Journal* divulged prominent items in the inventory of Joyce Meyer Ministries, including an annual income estimated at \$57 million, a \$19-million headquarters, Meyer's personal silver Lexus SC 430 sports car, and an eight-bedroom, seven-bath, 7,000-square-foot home valued at more than \$500,000.

The *Business Journal* also said that within her office complex, the "hallway leading to the television studio features larger-than-life murals of Meyer in various speaking poses." Critics of Meyer long have noted her unabashed vanity. The *Orlando Sentinel* has stated that Meyer has had "plastic surgery," which the newspaper reported "Meyer readily admits." She wears tailored suits and lavish jewelry. Likewise, photographs of Meyer fill her Web site and magazine publications. As one approaches the guardhouse at the front entrance to her ministry's headquarters, a large portrait of the Meyers looms behind the guard.

While the *St. Louis Business Journal* reported on Meyer, the June 20 edition of the *San Antonio Express-News* revealed John Hagee's exorbitant income. The newspaper revealed that for the year 2001, "Hagee's total compensa-

tion package amounted to more than \$1.25 million." This amount, critics charge, is "too high" and made him one of the highest, if not the highest, paid non-profit director for the San Antonio area. Also, "Hagee's compensation was among the highest packages for television evangelists in 2001, according to IRS 990 filings," the *Express-News* further stated. The \$1.25-million figure reflected \$540,000 in compensation from Global Evangelism Television (the television unit of Hagee's ministry), \$300,000 for serving as president of Cornerstone Church, and \$410,000 in benefits from GETV, including contributions to his retirement package.

Hagee's retirement package, known as "The John Hagee Rabbi Trust," includes "a \$2.1 million 7,696-acre ranch outside Bracketville, with five lodges, including a 'main lodge' and a gun locker. It also includes a manager's house, a smokehouse, a skeet range and three barns," the newspaper disclosed.

Hagee and his wife, Diana, own a six-bedroom, 5,275-square-foot home. The house, said to be "in one of San Antonio's most exclusive gated communities," is valued at nearly \$700,000.

Televangelists like Hagee and Meyer have long tried to justify their lavish and unrestrained lifestyles by claiming those in the secular business sector easily demand such financial compensation. They also tend to excuse their living in extreme wealth by wrongly claiming that critics say Christians should live in extreme poverty. There is, however, middle ground and Scripture clearly establishes the character for those devoting their lives to ministry. It is one of virtue, reputation, moderation, and balance (1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1).

Those who hunger for earthly palatial mansions, private jets, and costly sports cars, would do well to attempt to satisfy their insatiable desires in the secular world rather than bring scorn onto the Gospel. The Gospel of Christ is one of self-denial and self-sacrifice, not an abundance of possessions (Luke 12:13-21).

—MKG

GARNER TED ARMSTRONG DIES

Garner Ted Armstrong, disgraced televangelist and son of the late Herbert W. Armstrong, died Sept. 15, 2003. Armstrong died from complications of pneumonia and had been hospitalized for several weeks. He was 73.

In 1978, Armstrong was excommunicated from the Worldwide Church of God, the sect founded by his father. He earned all his degrees — a bachelor's, master's, and doctorate — from the Worldwide Church of God's Ambassador College in Pasadena, Calif. Until his ouster, Armstrong was vice president of both the church and its college, and was the movement's primary spokesman.

Following excommunication from his father's church, Armstrong established his own ministry, the Church of God International, based in Tyler, Texas. In 1995, Armstrong resigned as church president and board chairman amid charges of sexual assault. He continued with the church's television broadcasts until removed by church leaders in 1997.

Armstrong continued his media presence through the Garner Ted Armstrong Evangelical Association and, in 1998, established the Intercontinental Church of God.

Despite his expulsion from the Worldwide Church of God, the younger Armstrong remained true to the many unbiblical and heretical teachings taught by his father. These included a defective view of the nature of God, conditionalism, Sabbath worship, festival keeping, and British Israelism.

Claims of Armstrong's viewing audience for his broadcasts varied from 5 million to 20 million. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, "his splinter churches amassed only about 5,000 members, compared with an estimated 80,000 for his father's Worldwide Church of God."

—MKG

CODE TWO FOR DROSNIN

Perhaps former *Wall Street Journal* reporter Michael Drosnin thinks the old saying, "One good turn deserves another" should be revised to say, "One bad book deserves another." At least that's how Drosnin's *Bible Code II* is being received. The book, released in December 2002, is the sequel to his 1997 best-seller, *The Bible Code*.

Drosnin claims "a Bible beneath the Bible," and that by skipping across an equal number of characters or spaces, one can form new words revealing the hidden messages or codes of the Bible. Drosnin's technique of equidistant letter sequencing (ELS) has been debunked by most countercult groups and secular investigators (see further, *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 1998, pp. 4, 9-13). This kind of "letter play" can be done with any secular book. How exact could all of this be anyway, because Drosnin uses a particular Hebrew Bible that is not the same as other Hebrew Bibles? It is much like our choice of modern translations, which may be the same in substance, but not necessarily in style or word order.

Because of the popularity of Drosnin's contrived methods and ominous predictions, the practice of finding coded messages within Scripture has been successful grist for other dabblers in biblical prophecy, including Paul Crouch, Grant Jeffrey, and Hal Lindsey.

In *Bible Code II*, Drosnin says he has uncovered a prophecy that speaks of an atomic holocaust in 2006. His earlier volume designated 1996 (the Hebrew year 5756) as being "encoded" for an "atomic holocaust."