



- - BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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May 3, 1985

85-56

Flooding Hits Kenya; Baptists Give Aid

NAIROBI, Kenya (BP)—Baptists in Kenya are handing out seed and blankets to flood victims only a three-hour drive from an area where they're still providing drought relief.

Recent flooding in the Kisumu district of Kenya left 4,000 families homeless, including 483 families from 15 Baptist churches in the Kano plains, according to a Baptist relief team that surveyed the area.

Baptist pastor Vincent Ayieko, one of those who lost everything in the flood, didn't let that deter him from having baptism for his young church on the same site where the waters overflowed and took all his belongings.

Ayieko, his wife and two children were left without even a pair of shoes. Missionary Dan Bradley of Mississippi, who works with churches in the area, helped the pastor get clothing for his family to wear that Sunday.

At least three Baptist churches were damaged or destroyed by the flooding. Members could find no trace, not even the corrugated tin roof, of Nyawalo Baptist Church. Half of the Mariwa Baptist Church was washed away, and the Mitando Baptist Church building was left leaning to the ground, unusable.

Government officials told the relief team that two rivers overflowed, flooding 4,000 acres of cotton fields between them. A broken irrigation canal washed away an entire village, and flood waters washed away a school where a survey team found 50 or 60 people sitting dejectedly on the ground.

Officials warned people to wait at least a month before returning to their homes because of the dual threat of malaria and poisonous snakes.

The government asked Baptists to provide blankets for their own church members, help distribute American grain already available and provide seed. The government would provide drugs, Catholics were providing clothing and other groups would provide blankets for their own members. Al Cummins, human needs coordinator for the Baptist Mission of Kenya, used \$5,000 in relief funds to buy 1,300 blankets.

Because the rainy season was already well underway and all crops were destroyed, the district commissioner asked Baptists to provide sorghum seed, the only crop which would have time to mature before the end of the growing season.

The team found they didn't have to explain who Baptists were or convince officials of their sincere desire to help. The district commissioner had seen a recent television newscast in which the nation's president, Daniel arap Moi, visited the Nakuru Baptist Church when team member Arthur Kinyanjui was preaching. Another district officer had heard a sermon by Kinyanjui on the radio the morning before their visit.

Cummins; Kinyanjui, newly elected moderator of the Baptist Convention of Kenya; Bradley, and several local pastors made up the relief survey team.

The relief team is investigating reports of flooding in other areas of Kenya to see if Baptists can help there also.

HMB Commissions
74 Missionaries

ATLANTA (BP)—Seventy-four newly commissioned home missionaries were told they needed an uncommon commitment, unique cooperation and an unusual power source to accomplish Bold Mission Thrust, the common purpose of the 14.3-million member Southern Baptist denomination.

Gerald B. Palmer, Southern Baptist Home Mission Board vice-president of missions, said the missionaries, serving 25 states, were by-products and representatives of the 36,000 diverse Southern Baptist churches.

"These strange people called Southern Baptists, with all their diversity, come together with their unity of purpose," to do missions in a unique experiment in cooperation, Palmer said.

Roswell Baptist Church hosted the commissioning service for the missionaries representing 20 states and Cuba.

There were eight missionaries from Georgia; seven from Texas and Arkansas; six from Alabama; five from North Carolina; four from Florida, Mississippi, Tennessee and Missouri; two from Kentucky, Hawaii, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Maryland, Cuba and South Carolina, and one each from Louisiana, New Mexico, Connecticut, New Hampshire and Michigan.

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Graham, Others Urge
Evangelism, Revival

By Leisa A. Hammett

Baptist Press
5/3/85

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)—Evangelist Billy Graham told a group at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center he hopes Southern Baptists will not be known for their divisions and their splits but for their vision in evangelism, revival and renewal.

Graham made the remark during a message to the National Prayer for Spiritual Awakening Conference sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Southern Baptist Convention President Charles Stanley was scheduled to speak to the conference but, at the last minute, was unable to come. His cancellation allowed conference planners to add Graham to the program, something the Southern Baptist evangelist and the Home Mission Board had been trying to work out for two years. Graham lives in Montreat, N.C., near the Ridgecrest conference center.

Officials at First Baptist Church, Atlanta, where Stanley is pastor, said Stanley was unable to attend because of personal and church business and because he was in the process of making appointments for the SBC committee on committees.

In a plea for Southern Baptists to be leaders in evangelism, Graham said other denominations are watching and listening to what is happening in the Southern Baptist Convention. "What happens to Southern Baptists is very important, in my judgement, for the future of all denominations," he added.

He urged Baptists not to forfeit their leadership role in evangelism by putting their priorities on denominational struggles.

Graham also urged Southern Baptists to learn from parachurch organizations and cooperate with others in their evangelistic efforts. "We've seen many parachurch organizations spring up to teach us in the denomination something about evangelism and revival," Graham said.

Other speakers during the three-day national conference repeatedly stressed that revival can occur in America again, but not until Christians quit trying to produce their own revival, and let God bring revival. They urged Baptists to realize the difference between man-made revival and true revival, which comes when God works in the church and produces "spiritual awakening" to speak to the secular world.

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"One of the greatest hindrances to revival," said J. Edwin Orr, president of Los Angeles-based Oxford Association for Research in Revival, "is the misuse of the word revival.

"For some churches, it does not matter if revival comes or not—they call it revival anyway. Everytime the word is misused, we delay the coming of true revival," said Orr.

Humility and prayer, said Glenn Sheppard, HMB special assistant for spiritual awakening, are prerequisites of revival. "It will do little good for us to pray if we don't have humility," he pointed out.

Sheppard said instead of creating more evangelistic programs and equipping methods, Southern Baptists need to turn to God as their power source. "We've built million dollar steeples and five million dollar sanctuaries that stand almost as mortuaries.

"We've held up our idols and we are the cult of numerology. We've been too ignorant of God to know that if the truth is lived and preached throughout our lives, people would flood our churches," he continued.

Other speakers who called for a dependence of God instead of self-center, man-made plans included Robert Hamblin, HMB evangelism vice-president; Jack Taylor, revivalist, Fort Worth, Texas, and Stephen Olford, Encounter Ministries President, Wheaton, Ill.

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Nigerian Pastor Killed In Religious Rioting

Baptist Press
5/3/85

GOMBE, Nigeria (BP)—Nigerian Baptist pastor J.A. Awodiran and his church's custodian were killed and Awodiran's wife was injured in religious rioting that left more than 100 dead in Gombe, Nigeria, the last weekend in April.

Wiley and Geneva Faw from Kentucky and North Carolina, the only Southern Baptist missionaries in Gombe, opened their home to people fleeing the fighting over the weekend. But May 1 they called their daughter, Mira Reeves, in Lafayette, Ala., to say they were in nearby Jos for a few days' rest. They said Gombe had calmed and activities were returning to normal when they left.

Reeves said Awodiran, a long-time family friend, was already pastor of First Baptist Church, Gombe, when her family moved there in 1970. He had eight or nine children and was pastor of a rapidly growing church that averaged about 800 in attendance each Sunday, she said. The church is building a new auditorium to seat 1,500.

Mary Ellen Yancey, Southern Baptist missionary who just arrived in the States from Nigeria, reported the Awodirans and the church custodian were caught in the fighting when they stopped their car at a roadblock.

Reports in Nigerian newspapers indicated about 150 died in the rioting. Shooting broke out April 26 when police tried to arrest Yusufu Adamu, the Gombe leader of the banned Maitatsine Islamic sect. Since 1980, northern Nigeria has suffered several outbreaks of violence related to the Maitatsine sect.

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Brotherhood Trustees Approve Budget, Pray For SBC

Baptist Press
5/3/85

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)—Trustees of the Brotherhood Commission approved a 1985-86 budget of \$2,858,568 and prayed for the meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas this summer after hearing Commission President James H. Smith express concern the SBC has reached the point where "the good guys are fighting the good guys."

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Meeting at the Woman's Missionary Union headquarters building in Birmingham, Ala., April 25-27, Brotherhood Commission trustees heard Smith say, "It used to be that the good guys only fought the bad guys, but satan is driving a wedge between us that is causing us to fight among ourselves.

"This division is threatening to prevent us from carrying out Bold Mission Thrust, and only the leadership of the Holy Spirit and humble hearts of Christian men and women can bring about the healing our convention so desperately needs," he continued before leading the group in prayer.

The bulk of the budget, \$1,077,965, will be spent on Brotherhood program services. Support services will utilize \$679,623; administrative services is set for \$653,668 and business services is budgeted for \$435,822.

Income for funding the agency's budget includes \$888,500 from the Cooperative Program and \$1,872,000 from sales of Brotherhood periodicals and merchandise.

Trustees authorized expenditures in 1984-85 of \$35,000 for new shrink wrap equipment for improving shipping and mailing facilities and \$39,649 for video equipment.

The Brotherhood Commission staff unveiled two new departments in program services. The children and youth department will be directed by Russell Griffin who has been Pioneer Royal Ambassador director at the agency since November 1981. The adult department will be led by Douglas Beggs, Baptist Men's Director for the past three years.

Crusader and Pioneer Royal Ambassadors and High School Baptist Young Men will be in the children and youth department. Collegiate Baptist Young Men, Career Baptist Young Men, Baptist Men and Senior Baptist Men will make up the adult department.

Kenneth Rains, former director of Royal Ambassadors for the Tennessee Baptist Convention, assumed leadership of Pioneer RAs and High School Baptist Young Men May 1. Cameron Byler, Brotherhood Director for the Alaska Baptist Convention, will become director of Baptist Men and Senior Baptist Men May 15.

In other staff changes, Mike Davis, a 15-year employee at the Brotherhood Commission, moves from the post of marketing services director to director of audio-visual resources May 1. Replacing him will be Richard Jensen, a Baptist layman and marketing and public relations consultant from Greenville, S.C.

Also on May 1, merchandise services and periodical services will be combined into customer services, and the shipping and mailing responsibilities will be transferred from support services to business services.

In additional business, trustees received an evaluation of Brotherhood periodicals which was conducted by the journalism faculty of Memphis State University. The study affirmed the professional quality of the Commission's periodicals and the achievement of each publication's goals and objectives.

Trustees also reviewed the Fellowship of Baptist Men, national and regional Brotherhood skills conferences, Pioneer States Assistance for Brotherhood work, plans for Brotherhood weeks at Ridgecrest and Glorieta and a new video tape about involving men and boys in missions through Brotherhood entitled "Head First."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Brotherhood Commission

1200 Hear Rogers
Pressler In Knoxville

By Al Shackelford

Baptist Press
5/3/85

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—More than 1,200 Tennessee Baptists attended a "Confronting the Issues" rally at Bell Avenue Baptist Church April 29 and heard two "conservative" leaders declare, "We do have a problem."

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The purpose of the meeting, according to Thomas Gatton, pastor of Knoxville's Second Baptist Church, was to present "the other side of the story. We are here primarily because of the concerted effort on the part of some to overthrow Charles Stanley as president of the Southern Baptist Convention," he explained.

Speakers at the rally, which lasted more than three hours, were Adrian Rogers, pastor of Memphis' Bellevue Baptist Church, and Paul Pressler, appeals court judge from Houston, Texas. After Rogers and Pressler spoke, they answered questions from the audience.

"The 'liberals' talk about a group that is going to take over the Southern Baptist Convention," Rogers observed. "The takeover took place in the late 1950s and 1960s, and we didn't realize it."

Rogers referred to those who accuse the 'conservatives' of trying to force their theology on others. "I believe in soul competency, in freedom of religion, and in the priesthood of the believer with all my heart. When you tell me that I have to pay the freight (for 'liberal' professors) or else I'm a bad guy, you are forcing your theology on me," he added.

Pressler said Southern Baptists have an obligation to their institutions. "I believe we have an obligation to fund them, to pray for them and to encourage students to go there, but more than this I believe we have an obligation to make sure that they are all God intended them to be and that they adhere to the principles upon which they were founded and to the teaching that motivated their creation," he said.

Both Pressler and Rogers quoted extensively from writings of Southern Baptist professors, such as Glenn Hinson and James L. Blevins both of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; and Temp Sparkman of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Also cited were John Claypool, a former pastor who has lectured at SBC seminaries, and Robert Bratcher, who has been a visiting professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Rogers read several quotations from articles by Roy L. Honeycutt, president of Southern seminary, which are printed in volumes 1 and 3 of the Broadman Bible Commentary, published in 1970 by the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Rogers said these quotations indicate Honeycutt does not accept the Bible's teachings on the plague that killed the first-born in Egypt; Moses' burning bush; the existence of the tabernacle before Shechem; Elisha's raising of the Shunammite woman's son from the dead, and the floating ax head.

"This is not just A professor, not just A seminary; this THE president of THE mother seminary of Southern Baptists," Rogers said.

Rogers said, "The issue is not over interpretation, but over integrity--whether or not the Bible is trustworthy."

Pressler said the problems are of such consequence and significance that something has to be done. "We are not talking about an interpretation of Scripture, but what Scripture is," he stated.

He defined a "theological liberal" as "one who believes the original texts of Scripture do or could make mistakes or errors." Then he defined a "theological conservative" as "one who believes the original texts of Scripture are exactly what God intended them to be and are God-breathed and accurate in every verse."

Pressler said, "Using this, 95 percent of Southern Baptists are 'theologically conservative.'" He said when these problems are brought to the leaders, "they have unleashed vilification attacks on those of us in the 'conservative' movement" and have tried to divert attention by making non-issues as issues."

Both Pressler and Rogers said withholding Cooperative Program funds is not the answer to the problem, but supported working within the system.

"I believe that when we have the right trustees and the right leadership, we will have the right professors," Rogers said, emphasizing he did not want a "meat ax" approach.

"The system is a good system," Rogers continued. "When they see the standard, some professors will leave, and by attrition, others will move out. We need a lot of love and a lot of patience," he noted.

"I can be patient if I see Southern Baptists headed in the right direction," Rogers said. There was a 'liberal' drift, but we have stopped it. We need to be patient; keep on praying and keep on working."

Pressler said the "conservatives" have learned how the system operates and "the Southern Baptist Convention will never again be the same, because the vast majority of Southern Baptist know now how to express their desires and their wills within the system."

Pressler believes Charles Stanley will be reelected to a second one-year term as president of the SBC. "After seven successive elections, our agencies will recognize the necessity of being responsive to their constituency. I believe they will be responsive," he added.

Both Rogers and Pressler agreed all things in the Southern Baptist Convention are not bad.

"We have so much that's good, so many godly teachers, so many wonderful convention leaders and so many wonderful missionaries," Rogers stated.

Pressler echoed the thought. "There are so many good things, but when they claim nothing is wrong, they destroy their creditability."

Rogers said he is not an "independent fundamentalist," but that he is a "fundamentalist" who believes in the fundamentals of Baptist faith. "I make no apology for believing in the blood atonement, the virgin birth, the full deity of Christ and the resurrection and visible blessed return of our dear Saviour."

Then he added, "If you mean of 'fundamentalist' someone with a mean spirit, I don't want that. I don't want any on our side to have a mean, cantankerous spirit."

Rogers said he believes in cooperation, "but I don't believe we can jettison our faith."

The Memphis pastor said he believes in the Southern Baptist program, "but when the programs are more important than the Word of God, we've got problems. One can make all kinds of statements negating the Word of God and nothing is in the press about it—but you touch the program and WHAM!"

An offering was taken to pay expenses for the rally. J.C. Parrott, pastor of Black Oak Heights Baptist Church, Knoxville, said any funds above the cost of the rally will be used to pay the travel to the Dallas SBC of pastors of small churches.

Lloyd Bardowell, pastor of the host church, said the offering and other gifts were about \$700 more than expenses. He said the pastors who sponsored the rally would decide how the overage would be used. He said it could be used for pastors' expenses to Dallas, but this had not been decided.

The rally closed with a plea for attendance at the June 11-13 convention.

Pressler stated, "Only those who will be in Dallas will vote. We must see Southern Baptist grassroots in Dallas. You are not faithful to what you believe, unless you are in Dallas."

Other Knoxville pastors participating in the program were James Stroud of Third Creek Baptist Church, David Butler of Sevier Heights Baptist Church, and Guy Milam of North Knoxville Baptist Church.

SOUTHERN BAPTIST WOMEN IN MINISTRY

June 8-9, 1985

Wilshire Baptist Church

and Adolphus Hotel

Dallas, Texas

Theme: "Voices of Hope from the Exile"

Saturday, June 8, 1985

Meet at Wilshire Baptist Church, 4316 Abrams Road, Dallas

9:30--Steering Committee

11:00--Pre-conference Fellowship and Lunch--Ashley Peak, Columbia, Mo., moderator

1:30--Worship and Theme Interpretations--Jane Medema, Christian educator/teacher, Deloris St.

Baptist Church, San Francisco; Addie Davis, retired pastor, Covington, Va.;

Marie Bean, chaplain, Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, N.C.

4:45--Business Meeting

6:00--Banquet--June McEwen, free-lance writer, Chattanooga, Tenn., moderator

7:30--In Concert--Ken Medema, San Francisco--Cynthia Clawson, Louisville, Ky.

9:30--Adjourn

Sunday, June 9, 1985

Meet at Adolphus Hotel, Dallas

8:30--Bible Study--Carolyn Blevins, professor of religion, Carson-Newman College, Jefferson City, Tenn., Bible teacher

9:30--Morning Worship--Nancy Ellett, associate pastor, Royal Lane Baptist Church, Dallas, worship leader; Molly Marshall-Green, assistant professor of theology, Southern Baptist Theological, Louisville, Ky., preacher

(Before May 20, send pre-registration--\$5.00; lunch--\$3.75 per person and banquet--\$6.75 per person; advance fees to: Sandra Richardson, 1401 Asburton Road, Raleigh, N.C. 27607)

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Women In Ministry
Sets SBC MeetingBaptist Press
5/3/85

DALLAS (BP)--Southern Baptist Women In Ministry will hold its annual meeting June 8-9 at Wilshire Baptist Church and the Adolphus Hotel in Dallas.

The meeting precedes the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, Jun 11-13 at the Dallas Convention Center.

The all-day session at Wilshire church on Saturday June 8 will feature worship and interpretations of the 1985 theme ("Voices of Home from the Exile") led by Jane Medema from San Francisco, Addie Davis from Covington, Va., and Marie Bean from Mars Hill, N.C., at 1:30 p.m. and a concert by Ken Medema and Cynthia Clawson at 7:30 p.m.

Sunday the meeting shifts to the Adolphus Hotel for a bible study at 8:30 a.m. lead by Carolyn Blevins, professor of religion at Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn., followed by a worship service lead by Nancy Ellett, associate pastor of Royal Lane Baptist Church in Dallas and Molly Marshall-Green, assistant professor of theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Pre-registration (before May 20) for the meeting is \$5, the cost of the Saturday lunch is \$3.75 and the Saturday banquet is \$6.75 per person. Advance fees should be mailed to Sandra Richardson, 1401 Asburton Road, Raleigh, N.C., 27607.

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SOUTHERN BAPTIST RELIGIOUS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

June 9-10, 1985

Mariott Hotel, Market Square, Dallas

June 9, 1985Sunday Afternoon

1:00--Registration

2:30--Orientation of New Members--Dennis Parrott, minister of education and administration, Green Acres Baptist Church, Tyler, Texas

3:00--General Session

Welcome to the 30th Annual Meeting, Facing the Future with Hope, William M. Pinson Jr., executive director, Baptist General Convention of Texas, Dallas

--Vocational Groups

A Report on and Discussion of the Professional Life and Major Concerns of Persons Serving in:

-Childrens/Preschool Ministry, Joe Bevington, assistant professor of childhood education, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans

-Singles Ministry, Sandi Evans Rogers, minister of singles, Woodmont Baptist Church, Nashville, Tenn.

-Youth Ministry, Wesley Black, professor of youth education, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas

-Senior Adult Ministry, Horace Kerr, supervisor, senior/singles section, Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn.

-General Education/Administration, Will Beal/Study Group, consultant, church administration department, Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn.

-Association/State/SBC Ministry, Wendell Foss, director, Christian development department, Baptist General Convention of California, Fresno, California

-Teaching Ministry (Professors), Jack Terry, dean, School of Religious Education, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

5:00--Adjourn

Sunday Evening, June 9, 1985

7:00--General Session

Future Trends and Educational Ministry, James Williams, coordinator, associate to the president, Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn., Albert McClellan, Yankelovich research organization, retired program planning secretary, SBC Executive Committee, Nashville, Tenn.

8:30--Fellowship--30th Anniversary Celebration

Monday Morning, June 10, 1985

7:30--Continental Breakfast

Supporting Each Other: A Prayer and Fellowship Period

8:45--General Session

From Whence We Came, Bill Rogers, dean school of religious education, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.

General Status of the Profession, Study Committee

10:00--Break

10:30--Vocational Groups (Same Groups and Leaders as on Sunday)

What needs to be done to enhance our Ministry?

What do Southern Baptists need to hear/know/do?

12:00--Sandwich and Salad Buffet

Fellowship and Informal Discussions with Resource Persons

A Special Host at Every Table

Monday Afternoon, June 10, 1985

1:30--General Session

Working Together, Joe Stacker, secretary, church administration department, Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn.

Summary Reports from Vocational Groups

Determination of SBREA Strategy to Support Educational Ministry

3:00--Break

3:15--Business Session

4:15--Adjourn

Monday Evening, June 10, 1985

6:30--Banquet

- Entertainment, Michael Hawn, professor of church music, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.
- Distinguished Leader Awards
- President's Address, Bruce Powers, president of SBREA, professor of Christian education, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.
- Recognitions and Resolutions

Religious Education Association officers are: Bruce Powers, president, Wake Forest, N.C.; Merle Basden, vice-president, Fort Worth; Dan Watkins, eastern region director, Falls Church, Va.; Mike Collins, central region director, Columbus, Ohio; Dan Bolling, western region director, Mill Valley, Calif.; Joe Haynes, secretary-treasurer, Nashville, Tenn.; Betty Pittman, assistant secretary, Birmingham, Ala.

Religious Education Association
To Study Professional Concerns

Baptist Press
5/3/85

DALLAS (BP)--Seven "vocational groups" within the membership of the Southern Baptist Religious Education Association will receive special attention during the annual meeting of the SBREA, June 9-10 at the Mariott Hotel, Market Square in Dallas.

The groups meet each year prior to the annual Southern Baptist Convention. The 1985 meeting will be the 30th for the SBREA. Presentation of distinguished leader awards at the closing banquet the evening of June 10 will be another highlight.

The seven areas: childrens/preschool ministry, singles ministry, youth ministry, senior adult ministry, general education/administration, association/state/SBC ministry and teaching ministry (professors) will allow members to spend two 90-minute sessions (one Sunday afternoon and another Monday morning) with people with similar goals and situations to exchange ideas.

Each group will give a summary report to the entire body Monday afternoon.

Meeting times are 1-9 p.m. on Sunday, June 9 and 7:30 a.m. until approximately 9 p.m. on Monday, June 10. General sessions will consider "Future Trends and Educational Ministry," the "general status of the profession," and "working together."

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✓ Honeycutt Says Attacks
'Distortion, Misrepresentation'

By Michael Duduit

Baptist Press
5/3/85

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--"I am committed to the inspiration and authority of the Bible as the Word of God, I believe in biblical miracles, and I resent the efforts by some to distort my writings and portray me as a 'liberal,'" said Roy. L. Honeycutt, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Despite his personal commitment to the "inspiration and the unique authority of the Scripture as God's Word," Honeycutt says members of a "Fundamentalist political faction" within the Southern Baptist Convention are distorting and misrepresenting his writings.

"In recent weeks three former presidents of the SBC--Adrian Rogers, Bailey Smith and James T. Draper Jr.--appeared as guests on an independent religious television program, the '700 Club,' to attack SBC seminaries," Honeycutt said. "They distorted what I have written by quoting passages out of context, citing only a single part of a commentary and misrepresenting by interpretation of the Old Testament."

Other representatives of this "Fundamentalist political faction" have joined in the attack, including the current president of the SBC, he added.

"Charles Stanley, in a recent public address statement in Texas, misrepresented my theological position. More recently, Paige Patterson also joined the group by misquoting my comments on Old Testament passages," according to Honeycutt. "By innuendo and misrepresentation my commitment to the inspiration and authority of the Bible has been questioned by the mass assault of every convention president elected since 1979."

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An example of this distortion has been related to his writings on Elisha and the lost ax head in II Kings, Honeycutt said. In his commentary in the Broadman Bible Commentary series, he explains he sought a "literal reading" which let the text "state its own message."

Honeycutt says, "Based solely on the text, which is our only source, one knows Elisha cut a tree, cast it into the water. There is no question about the possibility the ax head could have floated quite apart from the direction of the prophet; not if one believes, as I do, in the unlimited sovereignty of God over the whole of His creation.

"Yet the Bible offers no concrete suggestion for specific use of the tree (the Hebrew translated "stick" in verse 6 is 'ets, a word used 150 times for a standing tree, though it also can mean a piece of wood). Nor does Scripture clarify the precise intention of 'float' (the Hebrew word tsuph which is used only two other times in the Old Testament, each meaning to float or overflow). The narrative remains historical without clarifying specific details."

Honeycutt says commentaries are written to examine passages from many perspectives, "yet always are limiting one's conclusion to the biblical narrative." In Volume 3 of the commentary, Honeycutt first quoted John Gray "as an illustrator of those who believe Elisha recovered the ax head by casting the pole into the water and raising the ax head. Having commented on Gray's suggestion, I then registered my strong belief that the miracle stories should be interpreted as they stand in the present text of the Bible."

Honeycutt believes strongly in the historicity of the biblical incident, but insists the Bible does not explain exactly how the event took place. "There is no question about the historicity of the prophet's action. He raised the ax head. But based on the information provided by the Bible, it is impossible to verify precisely how this occurred. The narrative remains the same as an historical story which recounts the heroic exploits of the prophet."

Some of the attacks against him have centered on distortion of the technical terminology he used in the commentary, Honeycutt asserts. "Just as reference to the 'saga of the American West' does not question the historicity of particular events, neither does the technical use of 'saga' question the historicity of biblical narratives. Rather, it is used to describe the extensive collection of miracle narratives which focus on the unusual power of God flowing through the prophet Elisha."

Honeycutt resents such misrepresentations because they call into question his firm commitment to Scripture.

"Seeking to understand the biblical text, one does so with the sure conviction that 'all Scripture is inspired by God' (2 Timothy 3:16). Of the writer who left for us the biblical account of Elisha's raising of the ax head, one should remember that '...no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Peter 1:21).' It is on the authority of the inspired Word that we believe Elisha raised the ax head. Of this there is no question. Whatever one's conclusion about the 'how' of the biblical miracle, as I stated in the Broadman Commentary, 'the focus is the same: Elisha possessed such stupendous power that he caused a lost ax head to float (BBC, Vol. III).'"

He feels attacks on him as a "liberal" are politically motivated and without basis. He has signed "in good faith and without reservation" the governing doctrinal statement of two seminaries (the 1859 Abstract of Principles at Southern seminary and the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message Statement at Midwestern seminary), and has "unwavering commitment to the Bible as God's Word, and to its authority for all matters of faith and practice."

Until the last few weeks, Honeycutt said, his 22 years of writing had elicited only one critical letter, "a positive suggestion concerning the translation of a Hebrew word in Amos." Even during the current SBC crisis, he has not received any personal letters about his writings or requests for clarification of his interpretation of passages of Scripture.

Because he leads Southern Baptists' oldest seminary, Honeycutt wants to emphasize to Southern Baptists his commitment to the Bible as the word of God. "The Bible is indispensable, crucial for my faith. Three decades of teaching and writing have rested on the Bible as God's word," the seminary president says. "During those years, the inspiration and authority of the Bible have sustained my life. There is no substitute for its absolute authority."