www.ptm.org

PLAIN TRUTH.

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

New Birth Through the Resurrection

Greg Albrecht

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.—1 Peter 1:3-4



hat a fascinating passage! Four points to notice: 1) God is to be praised, for 2) in his great mercy, 3) he has given us

new birth through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and 4) he has given us an eternal inheritance of life, for it will never perish, spoil or fade.

We learn more about the depth

of meaning inherent within our new birth and our eternal inheritance from conversations Jesus had with Martha and with Nicodemus. Just before he resurrected Lazarus, Jesus explained the spiritual life that he gives to all who receive him.

Jesus said this to Martha, who was grieving the death of her brother Lazarus:

I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they died, and whoever lives by believing in me will never die... (John 11:25-26).

Earlier, Jesus told Nicodemus that he would never literally see, grasp or experience the "inheritance" about which Peter speaks (1 Peter 1:4) unless he was first born again.

MARCH 2024

Volume 89, Number 2

inside

What's in an Anniversary? 2

Prophecy Pays: The Gospel Frees **5**

Inside and Out 6

Sidewalk Wrinkles 7

More literally, "born again" is better understood as "born from above," as opposed to an earthly birth.

Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again (John 3:3).

New Spiritual Beginning

The Greek word Jesus used for "born" is *genno* or *gennao*—a word that is related to the word for the first book of the Bible—Genesis. Genesis means "beginning" or "bring into being." Many words in English begin with the letters "gen" and have to do with origins, creation, sexual relations, reproduction and heredity.

We think of *gen*eration, *gen*der, *gen*e, *gen*itals, *gen*etics and *gen*ealogy and of course the biblical book of *Gen*esis.

Jesus was speaking of a birth from above (not of or from this earth)—a new beginning—a **re**-*gen*eration.

We see that concept in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, which is the New Testament counterpoint to the first chapter of Genesis, in that it also discusses the beginnings of all things—the origin of the universe and life within it.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning (John 1:1-2).

In these two verses, the word "beginning" is mentioned twice, within the context of the Word, the Second Person of the Triune Godhead who came, in the flesh, to reveal the Father and the fullness of God.



What's in an Anniversary?

one day

Those that truly love have roots that grow towards each other underground. And when all the pretty blossoms have fallen from their branches, they find that they are one tree and not two.—Louis de Bernieres

"... a three-fold cord is not easily broken"—Ecclesiastes 4:12, KJV

Marriage is not just spiritual communion. It is also remembering to take out the trash.—Dr. Joyce Brothers

had the joyous opportunity last summer to join in with my brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, and their significant others, to celebrate two landmark events: my mother's 80th birthday and my parent's 60th wedding anniversary. The two events, held as one celebration during a family reunion in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, were moments in life we could not imagine missing. As family memories go, the moments were some of the very best.

To focus in on the anniversary event of my parent's celebration, I was truly struck by the duration of *sixty years*. *Sixty years* of marriage together! *Sixty years* is a number hard for me to fully imagine. That is two, full-term, 30-year-mortgages, paid off back-to-back! I readily admit that I feel both deeply blessed and truly amazed by the many ways in which my mother and father's relationship has stood the test of time. Their marriage is a rare relationship by today's standards.

Within our *Plain Truth Ministries* family, my parents have much in common with a number of our team

members as it pertains to wedding anniversaries celebrated. Among our team, we have one couple who will soon celebrate an anniversary of fifty-five years. Three more team members will celebrate forty-nine years, forty-one years, and thirtyseven years of marriage, respectively. And then there is me, the newlywed of our team, who has been married now for nearly one full year.

Needless to say, I respect and appreciate those I am privileged to work alongside each day. The wedding anniversaries they celebrate serve as an inspiration to me.

Most dictionaries define "anniversary" as the date an event took place, or an institution was formed, in a previous year in history. Celebrating anniversaries of all types (not just wedding anniversaries) is one of the activities that brings context to our lives. Whether nationally, in celebrating Martin Luther King Jr, for example, his life and work, or the Fourth of July and our national independence (in the U.S.), we mark time each year by putting a focus on such moments.

In a similar way, we give honor and respect to the loved ones in our lives by celebrating the anniversaries of their birth. And certainly, as Christ-followers, we honor, remember, and celebrate our Lord Jesus Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection through the deeply meaningful seasons of Christmas and Easter.

I believe it is the anniversaries we celebrate around our love relationships that bring us the greatest meaning in life. That was certainly true as we celebrated our parent's anniversary together, and will be true for my own one-year wedding anniversary celebration soon to come. As for my parents, so too for us, we give thanks for the imagery given to us in the book of Ecclesiastes. The imagery of the three-fold cord is a helpful one; with the couple and our Lord Jesus Christ intertwining as one, and serves as a poetic reminder that we are not alone. Our love relationship in, by and with Christ Jesus sets the context for our lives.

t'a time

As Christ-followers, we trust in the fact that Jesus' roots grow deeply into all aspects of our lives. We know from the **Gospel of John** that Jesus is the vine, and we are his branches. As such, we are one in him and with him. His love indwells us. The love relationship we share and enjoy with him, and the anniversaries we celebrate because of him, sustain us. We learn of his love for us, and for all people, through our marriage to him.

Although the *pretty blossoms* may indeed fall from the *branches* of our lives, to continue the analogy, as we age physically and suffer loss, Christ Jesus never leaves us nor forsakes us. He is the one constant and context in our lives and for our lives, yearafter-year. As we age spiritually and celebrate our anniversaries in him, he bears much good fruit in us, for his good pleasure.

Marriage is a spiritual communion. The wedding anniversaries we celebrate mark both time and the truth of that communion. Ultimately, we are the bride of Christ, one with him, and will share this love relationship with him for eternity. The beauty of that truth gives us much to celebrate each day of the year.

—Ed Dunn

Continued from page 1

And while all the intervening verses in this mind-staggering, divinely beautiful first chapter of the Gospel of John are powerful and profound and so worth pondering at great length, given our topic of new birth, regeneration and new life, we skip down to:

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children not born of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God... (John 1:12-13).

All who "receive" the Word of God, Jesus, God in the flesh—all who believe him, he GIVES the right to become children of God.

How does one become a child of God? 1) By receiving, trusting and believing in him. 2) NOT by human efforts—NOT by searching for God and then, once we find him, pleasing and appeasing him by our dogged determination and by qualifying for spiritual rebirth!

As children of God we are not born by *natural descent*—our spiritual regeneration is NOT by human biological means, logic, intuition, passion or effort. It is a birth from above, not from this earth.

Our spiritual rebirth is NOT BY OUR WILL NOR is it BY OUR DECISION, in terms of initiating activity that produces a birth.

And further ... *he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*... (1 Peter 1:3).

We are born anew by the power and the dynamic and the eternal reality of our risen Lord, who rebirths us by living his risen life within us—it is his life that gives us eternal life, both initially when we begin our spiritual life and at all subsequent times, as he eternally breathes the breath of life into us.

The Breath of Life

Back to Genesis, *the beginning*—the book of bringing into being. In



Genesis 2:7 we read that God formed a man from the dust of the ground and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life—and thus man became a living being. *The physical breath of life*.

One of the major lessons of our physical life and our spiritual life is that all life we have, all life we experience and all life we enjoy, is a gift. We have *derived life*—our physical life and our spiritual life is acquired, not earned—obtained as a gift, not produced by our effort divinely originated, not humanly conferred.

That said, one of the great contrasts with human birth and spiritual re-birth is that our spiritual birth is not of any natural means or descent or decision—as human beings do when they biologically become parents—at least one of them must be sexually active even if the other does not wish to have a child or even, in the case of rape, if the other party does not consent.

So human life does involve human action—but it is not the action of the one who is born. We often speak popularly of this dynamic by saying that we do not choose our parents—we do not choose *when* we come into the world or *where*.

We often speak of the "accident of birth" when we find ourselves in favorable or unfavorable human conditions and surroundings. Parents can only be parents because they themselves were given human life—and ultimately their physical life derives to and from God.

All life—physical and spiritual, is a gift of God. Just as we obviously cannot boast of who our parents were, or the exact place and time of our arrival on planet earth, so we cannot boast of any presumed part we play in our spiritual rebirth.

But God does not force us to be spiritually reborn—and this is yet another contrast with the two lives —the two births—the physical and the spiritual. John 1:12 says that children of God become children when they RECEIVE Jesus and BELIEVE on and in his name.

We have a part in this spiritual rebirth. It is derived entirely from God—we become his children by his power and his grace and his love but he does not force us to become his children. Our part in our spiritual rebirth is accepting God's love. We must *embrace his grace*, we must *consent to his love* and receive him—receiving him, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Back to the physical creation of humanity—in Genesis 2:7, God breathed the breath of life into the nostrils of man. Jesus spoke of the spiritual breath of life when he told his disciples of the coming of God the Holy Spirit (on the Day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2). After his resurrection Jesus, as one translation has it, "expelled a deep breath" saying to his disciples, "*Receive the Holy Spirit*" (John 20:22)—the spiritual breath of life.

Spiritual New Birth Received, Embraced... Not Forced

Jesus breathed on them and invited them to *"Receive the Holy Spirit."* Accept it, receive it—it is not forced! Jesus was breathing spiritual life on and into them just as God had breathed the breath of physical life into the first human.

We are, if we receive God the Holy Spirit, if we believe in God the Son, spiritually reborn children

of God. Our spiritual rebirth is from a divine source, from heaven, from above... not produced by human decision or sexual intercourse.

The New Testament uses many terms and definitions to speak of us as God's own precious children. Matthew, Mark and Luke speak of us as *the light of the world and the salt of the earth*.

These three Gospels records Jesus' invitation to us to *pick up our individual cross* and follow him. The Gospel of John explains we are *the children of God* and that we are *the fruit of the vine,* who is Jesus.

The book of Acts says we are *the people of the Way*. Romans says we are *joint heirs with Christ*, and in Corinthians we are *the temple of God—the dwelling place of God*. In Galatians we are *one in Christ, sons and daughters of God*.

In Ephesians and Philippians we are *citizens of heaven*. In 1 Peter 1:3-4 we are given *new spiritual birth and an eternal inheritance*.

Paul speaks of *the old man* who was the person before spiritual rebirth, and *the new man*, who is spiritually regenerated by the risen Lord. In Galatians 2:20, Paul tells us about his spiritual identity, and our own, the spiritual identity of all who follow Jesus, who receive him, who believe in and on him.

"I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Thanks be to God—praise be to God! He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, into an eternal inheritance!

Based on a true story, *Under Authority* is Kate Elliot's unusual account of what took place at Cross Independent Baptist Church in New England during her childhood and teen years. The pastor, Rhuttland Abbott—or the Reverend as people referred to him—believed he had been placed behind the pulpit directly by God.

To question him was to question God, resulting in swift church discipline. Those unwilling to comply with his self-imposed rules and regulations would face severe, cruel, and unreasonable penalties.Kate finally escapes this vindictive environment and builds a new life in a new city.

But after twenty years of running, she finds herself back in her hometown facing the ghosts of her past and the ongoing pain from harsh sermons, shocking incidents, and the fate of those who did not obey the Reverend—including several deaths.

Will Kate continue to run or will she find a way to overcome her fear and the far-reaching influence of the Reverend's authority?

Available on Amazon

UNDER AUTHORITY





Brad Jersak

The Story: A weary pastor hunches over his credit card statement. Small town, small congregation, small salary. The Lord may forgive his debts, but his bank surely won't. The bottom line is he's sinking deeper into the red each month, and the offering buckets portend famine. Bleak, he looks up at his family and sighs... "Well, time for a Sunday night series on Revelation. That should bring in something extra." The shame he feels is offset by their empty pantry.

BLOOD MOON WINDFALL

Another True Story: The excessively wealthy mega-church minister publishes yet another End Times prophecy book, this time focusing on the world-changing, apocalyptic events signaled by the series of forthcoming "Blood Moon" events in 2014 and 2015. The prophecies fail to be true. The day after the book is falsified, there is no retraction. Just a blowout sale that produces a windfall for the would-be prophet, who emerges unscathed from his fantasy forecasts.

PROPHECY PAYS

Whether it's a series of sermons, articles or books, the End Times prophecy industry is certainly marketable. Ministries that hold a newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other can proclaim, "This is that," and market their failed promises repeatedly. The truly predictable element seems to be the collective amnesia of their audience. In a generally cynical age, the credulity is stunning.

And our society's suggestibility to fraudulent claims is not restricted to Christian fortune-tellers. The hunger for someone—*anyone*—to provide a prognosis drives the market for pollsters, fund managers, sports betting, meteorologists, Tarot cards and "hype doomerism" (click-bait headlines predicting the date of no return).

Granted, the world appears to be unraveling before our eyes. And we should talk about why that is and what we can do. I'm not suggesting shoulder-shrugging fatalism or willful blindness to the crises we face. My point is that when a preacher misuses the Bible to fleece the sheep with "horror-scopes" of the coming apocalypse or the next election and leverages these for big bucks, they're a galaxy away from the gospel.

THE GOSPEL FREES

The WHY question is fairly simple. Humanity lives under a great shadow of fear—especially fear of the future, fear of calamity, fear of death. Our anxiety about the unknown pleads for peace. But I maintain that the peace we need never comes from knowing some secret about the future that would fulfill our lust for certitude. The true peace we crave only comes from hearing and receiving the good news that we are held by Infinite Love.

Faith is not certitude in a prophetic prognosis. Faith is confidence in our Beloved that comes through the heart awakened by Love.

I started with stories about ministries and money. Ministries like PTM have chosen to resist the temptation and opt out of the guaranteed income of prophecy proceeds.

We believe that only the "perfect love [of Jesus Christ] drives out fear," so we're investing all our resources in that gospel message. I'll end with a bit of a bold ask. Would you help us help others with the real help of the Good News of Grace? \Box

In addition to his valued work on PTM's team, Brad Jersak is the Principal of St. Stephen's University, NB and author of numerous books, including the More Christlike series, available at ptm.org/books.

Inside and Out

Christian (*Christ-one*) should be a person that others might observe and refer to as "beautiful inside and out" or "kind inside and out" or "gentle inside and out." The idiom "inside and out" first became common in English in the nineteenth century. The idiom "inside and out" is particularly pertinent to describing a *Christ-one* who has the internal reality of the Triune God living in their spirit and allows the divine character to permeate into the mind, emotions and decision-making of their soul, thus manifesting in their bodily behavior the character of Christ.

Everyone lives from the inside out, from a spiritsource that manifests character in one's thought, emotions and determinations. But it should be particularly obvious that a *Christ-one* has a distinctively different character and behavior than those of the world around them and stands out like a light in the world of darkness.

We do not want a Christian faith that only affirms the inner spiritual reality of our spiritual identity and fails to allow the character of the Christ-life to be lived out in everyday behavior. Christian religion has become renowned for the kind of hypocrisy that wears a pasted-on "evangelical smile" and knows how to "put on the charm."

We want to have the character of Christ, the *"fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and the Godly control of ourselves"* (Galatians 5:22-23), exhibited in our behavior and actions. Like an unending artesian well that just keeps flowing from within the earth, we can *"keep being filled with the Spirit"* (Ephesians 5:18) and thereby manifest the character of the living Lord Jesus from the "inside out."

Living in the NOW

Many *Christ-ones* struggle with living their Christian lives in the present. A popular perspective is "the past is forgiven, the future is assured, but the present is the pits!" Many get bogged down in their past mistakes and share repetitive testimonies of how God saved them when their lives were a terrible mess.

Jim Fowler

Meanwhile, they become obsessed with prophecies about the future and fantasize how the future will be superior to the present. The past is water under the bridge. The future is but speculation, and only God knows what will happen.

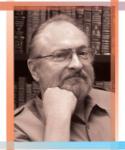
So how do *Christ-ones* live in the present? To begin with we must reject the Gordian knot of legalism that ties and binds so many in religious expectations of what they must do or not do to live the Christian life.

The Christ-life is not lived by what we DO or DON'T DO, but it is only lived out in our behavior as we receive faithful receptivity moment-bymoment. **The only ONE who can live the Christ-life is Jesus Christ!** You can't! I can't! And all of our attempts to "pull off the Christ-life" by our own effort simply thwart what God is seeking to do in the expression of His character in Jesus Christ through us.

Stop worrying about what religion says you should be DOING, but simply rest in the acceptance and sufficiency of your spiritual BEING in Christ. Living the Christ-life is not a matter of "trying to be like Jesus" or attempting to be "Christlike"—it is the opportunity of allowing Jesus to be who he is "inside and out" of our lives.

Adapted from It's All About Jesus by author and theologian Jim Fowler.

MONTE WOLVERTON



Sidewalk Wrinkles

ith every slurp of latte and every bite of organic blueberry scone, I'm struck with what a difference 70 years makes—or doesn't. I'm in a coffee shop that used to be a residence in a neighborhood where I lived when I was about 4 years old. If this shop had been here in 1952, lattes would have been absent from the menu. Espresso would've been relegated to beatnik joints. Organic? Vegan? Gluten-free? All unheard of.

Most houses in this neighborhood were built between 1910 and 1930. The young working families who bought them grew old, and by the 1970s many homes had fallen into disrepair. Then in the '80s and '90s younger people began buying up houses and fixing them, resulting in charming vintage homes with neatly trimmed yards on quiet, tree-lined streets.

It's a great place for a post-coffee dog walk. A few blocks later we're in the small park where my parents took me as a toddler. It seems vaguely familiar. In 1952, I was fascinated by F-86s thundering through the sky. Today I'm just as distracted by thundering F-15s. I look down and notice moss-filled embossments dating the sidewalk to 1913, when the only thing in the sky was perhaps a Curtiss Model E.

A few more blocks and we near the house where I lived with my parents and our dog Skooter. It's a sturdy brick house with a high-pitched Elizabethan roof, a solid oak arch-topped front door and a small fish pond in the backyard. I remember my mom chasing me around the living room trying to keep my fingers out of electrical outlets. My dad's studio was in the basement—sort of dark and dank. He looked forward to the time when he could have a studio/office above ground with daylight—out in the country (which is exactly where we moved next). As I walk and gaze at the house, other memories begin to surface and...SMACK!

Suddenly the 110-year-old sidewalk hits me in the face—or vice versa. My dog turns and regards me with puzzlement. I get up, a little dazed, looking around to make sure no one has seen my ineptitude. The thing about 1913 sidewalks is that tree roots have lifted parts of them to the point of being hazardous. I regularly hike rocky forest trails—but usually I'm paying attention. Today I'm in the past.

living

room

If there's a lesson here, it might be: Considering the past is good, but not so much while you're navigating the present. They are two different tasks, and doing them simultaneously can lead to a slapstick nosedive—or an untimely death.

You might think: Can't the past help us navigate the present? Yeah—sometimes—but things change. Those wrinkles in the sidewalk weren't there 70 years ago. It takes time, contemplation and perspective to process our history and apply it to the present. And *not every issue that pops up in the now can be governed by the then*.

I don't even like to say it, but the older we get, the more of a past we have—which can distract us from focusing on today. Sadly, some folks get to the point where they can't move forward at all either angry over the past or pining for the (often mythical) happy days of yore. Either way, they've lost the knack of navigating the now. It's a good thing the arrow of time moves forward, otherwise many would willingly regress to yesteryear and just stay there. Religion is often no help, as it can be a backward-looking affair, obsessing on traditions and requirements whose purpose has been lost in time.

But Jesus' teaching, while remembering the past, is firmly grounded in the now, in the future and in eternity. In his Sermon on the Mount, he contrasts what was said to "them of old time" with what he says now—and he is the final Word. Jesus offers us the perspective to look back with forgiveness, fondness and even joy—while *living our lives fully in the present, and anticipating the future*. He also offers us vision to step over some of those wrinkles in the sidewalk of life—or to laugh uproariously at ourselves when we stumble!

—Monte Wolverton



"If you once belonged to and

Quotes & Connections

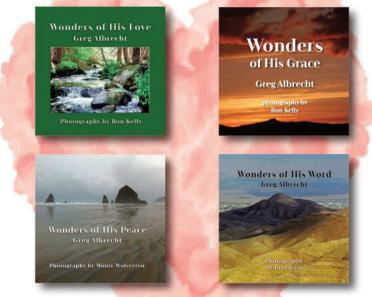


"The root of Christian love is not the will to love, but the faith that one is loved by God. The faith that one is loved by God although unworthy, or rather, irrespective of one's worth." —Thomas Merton

were enslaved and in bondage to Christ-less religion, then you know what a spiritual cattle drive is like. Lots of cattle. A broad 'road' indeed. When you are being driven in either a physical or spiritual cattle drive, the view in front of you is not that glorious or glamorous, is it? All cattle drives look and smell the same."—Greg Albrecht, *Letters to My Friends*

"Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin."—Mother Teresa "Much of my criticism of religion comes about when I see it not only affirming the system of normalcy but teaching folks how to live there comfortably. Such a religion increases our 'stuckness' in the old world... Cheap religion teaches us how to live successfully in a sick system... As a general rule, we need more and more of what doesn't work. If it worked, we wouldn't need to keep increasing the fix." —Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs*

Greg Albrecht's WONDERS series Four Titles Now Available



Order your copy at www.ptm.org/books or by calling 1-800-309-4466

MISSION STATEMENT

Plain Truth Ministries proclaims Christianity without the religion. We express our Christcentered ministry as *faith alone*, *grace alone and Christ alone*.

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

For an electronic subscription go to www.ptm.org/sub. The Internet allows us to serve readers around the world. Archives of *Plain Truth* are available at www.ptm.org. Printed copies of *Plain Truth* are a benefit mailed to generous, regular PTM Friends and Partners. If you would like to contribute go to www.ptm.org/give.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Plain Truth Ministries gratefully accepts contributions (tax deductible in the U.S.) to further the ongoing work of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. We accept donations in U.S. funds by check, money order or credit card. Please call us at 1-800-309-4466, visit our secure website, www.ptm.org/give, or write to us at Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129.

TO UPDATE YOUR ADDRESS

Be sure to notify us immediately of any change in your address by calling us at 1-800-309-4466, visiting our website at www.ptm.org/contact or writing to *The Plain Truth*, Pasadena, CA 91129.

TO SEND A LETTER OR E-MAIL

Write to *The Plain Truth*, Pasadena, CA 91129, or email us at managing.editor@ptm.org.

The editors reserve the right to print or not print comments so addressed, in whole or in part, as deemed in the public interest, and to print your name and edit the letter for clarity and space. We will protect the confidentiality of correspondence that we deem to be of a personal nature. Correspondence published by Plain Truth Ministries does not necessarily reflect the opinions of Plain Truth Ministries.

EDITORIAL STAFF

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Greg Albrecht EDITOR/ART DIRECTOR: Laura Urista EDITOR: Brad Jersak PUBLISHING AND CIRCULATION DIRECTOR: Dennis Warkentin ASSOCIATE EDITORS: Ed Dunn, Monte Wolverton

COPYRIGHT & POSTAL INFO

The Plain Truth is published six times a year by Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129. Copyright © 2024 Plain Truth Ministries. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Volume 89, Number 2: March 2024. Unless noted otherwise, scriptures are quoted from the *Holy Bible, NIV*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 International Bible Society. UBP of Zondervan. *The Plain Truth*[®] is a U.S. trademark.

SUBMISSIONS

The Plain Truth does not publish unsolicited manuscripts. The publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited artwork, photographs or manuscripts.

PLAIN TRUTH MINISTRIES

The Plain Truth is published by Plain Truth Ministries (PTM). If you are interested in learning more about PTM, visit our website at www.ptm.org (and email us) or write us at Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129.