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EDITOR'S NOTE: ABP will cover the March 19-20 meeting of the Foreign Mission Board with FMB President Keith Parks. We will send a story between 4-5 p.m. Friday afternoon if there is any news to report.

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Red Sea miracle supported by meteorological theory

By Mark Wingfield

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (ABP) -- The biblical account of the parting of the Red Sea is possible from a scientific perspective, two oceanographers reported last week.

Using a computer model and mathematical formulas, professors Doron Nof and Nathan Paldor identified a scenario that could account for the waters parting to let the Hebrew people pass on dry land while the pursuing Egyptians were swallowed by water soon afterward.

"Although such events are not very common, they are certainly possible from a scientific point of view," their report states.

Nof is professor of oceanography at Florida State University in Tallahassee. Paldor is associate professor of atmospheric sciences at Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Their research is published in the March issue of the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society.

The model used by the scientists assumes the crossing took place on the northern edge of the Gulf of Suez, which connects the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. This is the region generally accepted by scholars as a likely site for the biblical miracle.

The Gulf of Suez is an "ideal body of water" for the kind of process described in the biblical account because of its geography, the scholars reported.

The gulf is about 217 miles long and 12-to-18 miles wide. Its average depth is about 118 feet. On its northern side, the bottom slope is gentle.

Also, high mountain chains run along both sides of the gulf.

The researchers' calculations are based on a strong wind blowing for up to 10 hours across the gulf from the northeast, pushing it toward the Red Sea proper. This coincides with the biblical account, except for a possible discrepancy in the wind direction.

The study states such a wind could lower the sea level about eight feet and recede the shoreline about three-fourths of a mile.

Nof compared the action to blowing across a cup of coffee so that the coffee moves from one side of the cup to the other.

With the water blown away, the Hebrews could have walked across the uncovered ground -- perhaps on a naturally occurring ledge along the northern edge of the gulf's floor, the researchers say.

The scientific model also accounts for a sudden return of the displaced water that would have washed over the pursuing Egyptians. If the wind direction shifted abruptly, the accumulated water could have come crashing back into place in as little as four minutes, the study says.

Such an occurrence is more in line with the biblical account than the other theory often postulated -- that a tsunami, or underwater earthquake, drowned the Egyptians, the researchers claim.

Nof -- who is Jewish but says he is "not a religious man" -- said he and his colleague did not approach the research either to prove or disprove the biblical story. They simply had an interest in the phenomenon the story describes, Nof told Associated Baptist Press in a telephone interview.

Whether this research explains the crossing or not, "it should not affect the religious aspects of the exodus," Nof and Paldor conclude. "Believers can find the presence and existence of God in the creation of the wind with its particular properties just as they find it in the establishment of a miracle. Some may even find our proposed mechanism to be a supportive argument for the original biblical description of this event."

Believers should find interest in this research as a confirmation that the biblical stories are realistic, added John Watts, professor of Old Testament at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

"I do not allow my belief to rest upon my being able to explain things," Watts said.

However, the new research "does make the story somewhat more understandable and useable. It does not in my view...take anything out of the story's requirement that God does it.

"Much of the miraculous has to do with the timing," Watts said. "It's not that it was impossible for this to happen, but that it happened just when Israel needed it."

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Sunday School Board in 'brew-ha-ha'
over singer's use of TV studio

By Ray Waddle

NASHVILLE. Tenn. (ABP) -- Some Southern Baptists are livid that their Sunday School Board opened its doors recently to maverick country singer Hank Williams Jr. and a team of Budweiser representatives.

Williams and a Los Angeles production company used the board's TV studio and satellite uplink equipment Feb. 12 to arrange video conference calls with reporters nationwide to promote Williams' "Budweiser Rockin' Country" concert tour.

But the renegade Williams, known for "Hotel Whiskey," "Stoned at the Jukebox" and other recordings, is not the usual clientele found in the

liquor-free halls of Southern Baptists' largest agency. And one board trustee quickly complained when he found out about it this week.

"It's not consistent with what we stand for," said George Kinchen of Parkersburg, W.V., who read about it Sunday in an Associated Press story that prompted several calls to him from alarmed Baptists.

Board President Jimmy Draper agreed. "We made a mistake," he said March 17. In the future, board officials said, they will stress their policies on "values and lifestyle" to studio users.

Williams' manager said it was just routine business conducted in a studio that happened to be Southern Baptist.

"Hank didn't say 'Drink beer' or anything like that," said manager Marie Kilgore. "He just talked about the concert tour."

The board had a contract with On the Scene Productions, which occasionally rents the board's studio since it is one of the few in Nashville with a satellite uplink.

"We regret any false implications this has given regarding the witness of Southern Baptists," Draper said.

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-- Ray Waddle is religion news editor for the Tennessean in Nashville. This story is reprinted with permission.

Major athletics, universities
incompatible, UNLV prof says

Dan Martin

LAS VEGAS, Nev. (ABP) -- Big-time college athletics should be operated as the businesses they really are and should not continue in dysfunctional relationships with universities, a Southern Baptist ethicist says.

"It seems to me we have reached a point where major intercollegiate athletics no longer belong under the governance of universities," said Ira Peak, associate professor of ethics and policy studies at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

Peak, an associate with the Baptist Center for Ethics, said the value systems of universities in American society and the "win at any price" pressures of major athletics are incompatible.

The ethicist noted that the current "ongoing relationship between intercollegiate athletics and the nation's universities has become harmful to both sides" and warned that both will "surely sustain irreparable damage" if changes are not made.

The continuing bitter controversy between athletics and administration at UNLV has colored his assessment, said Peak, former director of Missouri Baptists' Christian Life Commission. But he said the problems associated with universities attempting to operate successful athletic programs have been a concern to him for more than five years.

Since Peak joined the faculty at the Nevada school a year ago, the problems between the basketball program and the administration of the Las Vegas school have been big news in the nation's media.

"I do not consider myself to be fully informed on all of the fine points of this ongoing debate over the future of the basketball program at UNLV," Peak said, adding the debate has involved all aspects of the problems associated with universities operating major athletic programs.

UNLV's basketball team, although it had a 24-2 record this year, is on probation and will not play in the NCAA championships. It was national

champion in 1990, and was defeated in the semifinals in 1991.

The dispute involves the NCAA, the governing body of intercollegiate athletics, the university administration, regents, basketball coach, team, students, faculty, boosters and area residents.

It has featured harsh words, public rallies, resignations, withdrawals of resignations, secret tapings of basketball practices, politics, threats of recall elections of regents, and leaks to the media among other things.

"It seems to me the problem we have is that the public assumption is for these athletic operations to be run like businesses, yet the win-at-any-cost assumption is contradictory to the purposes of universities," Peak said.

"Universities historically have had teaching, scholarship and service to their communities as their purpose. That is what they exist for. When you give them responsibility to operate programs which have a very different set of values, it produces incredible strain both for the athletic programs and for the university itself," he added.

"The kind of pressures inherent in a successful athletic program put pressures on a university which are contradictory to the purpose of the university," said Peak, who taught courses in sports ethics while on the faculty of Wayland Baptist University in Plainview, Texas.

In his paper made available by the Baptist Center for Ethics, Peak suggested a radically new way of doing intercollegiate athletics, which he said will alter the dysfunctional relationship between universities and their athletic programs and "restore some measure of integrity both to administrative offices and to athletic programs."

Peak suggested that the athletic programs become the businesses they actually are.

"Universities should divest themselves of intercollegiate football and men's basketball," he said.

"What it amounts to is that a group of 'boosters' who have been giving money to athletic programs become investors rather than contributors. They would form a for-profit corporation which would develop and field a semipro football or basketball team.

"They then would bid for the right to use a university's name, insignia, colors and mascot. They would be able to rent or lease existing stadiums and/or gymnasiums for games and practice sessions," he said.

Many universities currently have contractual relationships with entrepreneurs to operate such services as food, snack bar, concessions and other things, he explained, and he said such contractual arrangements would maintain a relationship with the school without the necessity of governance.

Peak said he is aware that his proposal will not be widely accepted, and, in fact, includes elements "that each involved group will despise." But, he added, "under this proposal, each side will lose something, but everyone involve gains something as well."

Under the plan, other sports such as women's basketball, baseball, track, tennis and the like would be intercollegiate, intramural or extracurricular activities.

Acceptance of such a plan would require athletic departments to "accept the fact that the myth of the student athlete has long since become indefensible," said Peak, who holds degrees from two Southern Baptist seminaries.

Such a plan, he said, would require that the athletes be paid, "with the pay open and above board."

The current system, he says "parades what amounts to a lesson in moral -- or immoral -- education. The high school athletes know how the system works, and they learn more from what we actually do, no matter what we

say."

Now, he said, there is the hypocrisy of an athlete "having to create the facade of being a student, showing up occasionally for classes and receiving some kind of credit for courses."

Under his proposal, Peak said coaches would continue to recruit high school athletes, but rather than getting them to sign letters of intent, they would talk about contractual arrangements.

"If the athlete and his family either is unwilling or unable to pursue a college education in a serious manner, they could bargain for a salary, wages, a stipend," he said. "But if the student is interested in an education, the contract could include a scholarship or pay or both."

Such a proposal would prevent athletes from being manipulated and would allow them to "balance long-term and near-term financial and other rewards in an open, up-front process."

The plan, Peak said, would free university administrators and governing boards "from the responsibility of trying to gain control of programs in football and men's basketball which possess the power to tell presidents, chancellors, regents, trustees, and the NCAA 'where they can stick it'."

Regarding intercollegiate athletics as the businesses they really are would allow them to "take on the responsibilities of mature business people and corporations, both in terms of honesty and accountability to the consuming public," he said.

Peak said he is aware his proposal is "not an ideal solution. We don't have an ideal solution. But this would help eliminate the elements of corruption, of fraud and manipulation which are the order of the day.

"It also would allow universities to divest themselves of a major impediment in improving their academic achievement standards, while at the same time pursuing more effectively the ends for which they were established," he said.

In circulating the proposal on behalf of the Baptist Center for Ethics, executive director Robert Parham commented: "Peak is right on target. Big-time college sports too often lack ethics. Reform is needed to ensure that athletes are not exploited, coaches are treated fairly, academic standards are maintained and that the value of honesty is advanced.

"Sports medicine, sports magazines, sports TV networks, sports stores and sports programs...spell big business, a culturally all-encompassing phenomenon and a leading social issue which has largely been ignored by ethics."

The Baptist Center for Ethics, based in Nashville, Tenn., is a free-standing network of Southern Baptist ethicists and others committed to "thoughtful moral reflection and practical solutions to real problems" faced by church members and society.

Through the work of associates such as Peak, it addresses major social and moral problems confronting society.

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Baptists have opportunity
to influence alcohol ads

By Dan Martin

Washington (ABP) -- Baptists have a "rare window of opportunity" to influence national policy on alcohol advertising, according to Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics.

Current advertisements for alcoholic beverages "glamorize drinking" and are "seductive, misleading and one-sided," said Parham, head of the Nashville-based network of Southern Baptist ethicists and others.

Parham made the remarks in written testimony submitted to the U.S. Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, whose commerce subcommittee will conduct public hearings April 2 on the Alcoholic Beverage Advertisement Act (S. 664).

Parham encouraged concerned Baptists and other Christians to call their own senators to voice support for the act.

"The act will provide the public -- especially children and young people -- with much-needed and long-overdue health and safety information in newspapers and magazines, on radio and television.

"It avoids an outright ban of alcohol ads," Parham said in his testimony. "It also avoids the other extreme of misleading ads which fail to tell the truth, fail to prevent harm and fail to promote the public good."

The bill would require prominent health and safety warning information in all alcoholic beverage advertising and promotional materials.

The advertising and promotional materials would be required to carry one of five health and safety warning messages on a rotating basis one year after enactment.

The messages would warn that alcohol use during pregnancy is dangerous, that alcohol impairs ability to drive a car, that it can be hazardous in combination with other drugs, that it may become addictive, and that it is unlawful to purchase alcohol for persons under the age of 21.

Also included is a provision that a toll-free telephone number be established and featured prominently in all print advertisements and promotional materials. The warnings also would be required in broadcast ads.

In his written testimony to the committee, Parham noted that diversity exists in the American religious community concerning use of beverage alcohol.

"Some communions have no restrictions on the consumption of alcoholic beverages; others call upon their members to abstain from alcohol use. Most Southern Baptists have historically taken a position of abstinence. However, it is a common fact that many Southern Baptists use and abuse alcoholic beverages, as do many others.

"I personally believe that the most proactive care for one's health and safety is abstinence from alcoholic beverages," he said. "I also recognize and affirm the freedom of the individual Christian to make an informed, intelligent and uncoerced decision about the use of alcoholic beverages."

However, it is difficult for impressionable, young Americans to make informed, intelligent and uncoerced decisions about alcoholic beverage consumption "when they are bombarded from their earliest years by tens of thousands of alcohol ads... which glamorize drinking, providing a one-sided distorted message."

"Clearly," Parham said, "the playing field is badly tilted. What is at issue is the tension between the unrestricted freedom to market products and our social responsibility as a society to prevent harm and to promote the public good.

"Common sense and honesty tell us that widespread public health and safety messages about the potential hazards are urgently needed and long overdue. We must counterbalance the seductive, misleading, one-sided alcoholic beverage advertisements and promotions, if our young people -- for whom alcohol is an illegal drug -- are going to have a fighting chance

to make their own informed, intelligent and uncoerced decisions."

Parham noted beer commercials "portray a fantasy lifestyle without any acknowledgement that alcohol may cause problems...problems which are widespread, enormously costly in terms of human life and potential, destructive to the American family and damaging to the nation's economic strength."

Claims by the alcoholic beverage industry "that ads do not encourage underaged, illegal drinking and excessive drinking are disingenuous at best and grossly cynical at worst."

The legislation being considered by the Senate subcommittee in early April does not seek a prohibition of alcohol ads, but to provide truthful information to counterbalance the "seductive, compelling" advertising about the "nation's drug of choice, alcohol."

Parham urged concerned citizens to telephone their senators, expressing support for S.664.

The Baptist Center for Ethics, formed last year, promotes "thoughtful moral reflection and practical solutions to real problems" faced by church members and society.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee is chaired by Ernest Hollings (D-SC). Chairman of the commerce subcommittee is Richard Bryan (D-NV). Committee members are Albert Gore (D-TN), Ted Stevens (R-AK), Wendell Ford (D-KY), Jim Exon (D-NE), John Rockefeller (D-WV), Lloyd Bentsen (D-TX), John Breaux (D-LA), John Kerry (D-MA), Charles Robb (D-VA), John Danforth (R-Mo), Bob Packwood (R-OR), Larry Pressler (R-SD), Bob Kasten (R-WI), John McCain (R-AZ), Conrad Burns (R-MT), Slade Gordon (R-WA), Trent Lott (R-MS) and Daniel Inouye (D-Hi).

The Senate bill (S.664) is co-sponsored by Senators Jake Garn (R-UT), John Glenn (D-OH), Gore, Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Hugh Heflin (D-AL), Stevens and Strom Thurmond (R-SC).

The telephone number for the Senate is 202-224-3121.

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'Domestic terrorism' target
of bill introduced in House

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A "campaign of domestic terrorism" against abortion providers must be stopped, according to supporters of a bill introduced March 17 in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The bill is designed to protect physicians and clinicians who provide abortions and are harassed by pro-life groups.

One physician, Sue Wicklund of Minnesota, endorsed the legislation at a press conference, attesting that "horrendous" harassment occurs. For example, she alleged that Lambs of Christ members have broken into her home, barricaded her driveway, followed her to work and harassed her teenage daughter.

Wicklund, whose story aired on "60 Minutes" in February, said she decided to come forward and talk about the harassment after flyers were distributed at her daughter's school. The graphic flyers named Wicklund's daughter and warned classmates that her mother was a "baby killer."

Wicklund said the Lambs of Christ obtained her daughter's name when one of its members posed as a potential buyer for their home and was shown

throughout the house by a real estate agent. The group located the Wicklund home by submitting her license plate number to the state along with a \$5 fee, according to Rep. James Moran, D-Va., one of 14 co-sponsors of the bill.

Wicklund said the harassment is designed to stop her work at abortion clinics. Other doctors have stopped providing abortions because of similar harassment.

"I am a stubborn Swede, and I am not stopping," she said.

"We need to do something to protect those of us who are being harassed so other physicians can begin to do this."

The House bill is designed to give such protection. The Reproductive Freedom Protection Act (H.R. 4477), sponsored by Rep. Nita Lowey, D-N.Y., would require local governments to enforce existing harassment and disorderly conduct laws as a condition for receiving community development grants.

"We must protect those providing safe, legal abortion services and the women who are seeking to exercise their constitutionally protected right," Lowey said.

"In effect, they (radical activists) are saying that it does not matter what the Supreme Court or Congress says," Lowey continued. "These people intend to impose their own views on American women through harassment."

At the press conference, Moran announced his intention to introduce a bill, the Driver's License Information Protection Act of 1992. The bill would prohibit state motor vehicle departments from disclosing a person's name and address to unauthorized people. Information from license plate numbers is available in 25 states and activists have used it to locate and harass patients as well as doctors, bill supporters said.

Moran's bill is expected to be introduced next week.

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-- By Pam Parry

Analysis

Backers of religious-freedom bill
work to fight abortion linkage

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A broad coalition of U.S. religious leaders has learned during the past year that winning congressional approval of legislation opposed by the U.S. Catholic Conference can be an uphill battle.

For nearly two years, a coalition now comprising 50 religious and civil-liberties organizations has been attempting to persuade Congress to approve legislation that would require government to have a compelling reason to restrict religious practice.

The Religious Freedom Restoration Act would restore the "compelling interest" test abandoned by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Employment Division vs. Smith*. In that April 1990 decision, a narrow court majority held that government can restrict religious freedom as long as religion is not singled out for adverse treatment. Many legal scholars said the court's decision, if not reversed by legislation, poses a serious threat to religious liberty.

Despite virtually across-the-board support for RFRA, the coalition has

faced tough sledding in the face of opposition by the Catholic Conference and the National Right to Life Committee, groups that contend the proposal would promote abortion as a free exercise of religion.

"The primary obstacle to RFRA continues to be the spurious charge that the bill would somehow tilt the playing field in favor of abortion," said Oliver Thomas, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, who chairs the coalition.

"Nothing could be further from the truth," he said. "RFRA is scrupulously neutral on all free-exercise issues and will simply restore the law as it existed prior to the Supreme Court's Smith decision."

Thomas said the nation's leading legal scholars and the Congressional Research Service have concluded that the measure is abortion-neutral. He noted that it enjoys the support of many of the nation's pro-life groups, including the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Traditional Values Coalition, the Christian Action Council, the Christian Legal Society, Concerned Women for America and the Mormon Church.

"Interestingly, most pro-life members of Congress agree with our analysis but have been unwilling to endorse RFRA because the United States Catholic Conference has steadfastly refused to endorse the bill," Thomas said.

If the Catholic bishops joined other religious groups in support of the measure, Thomas said, it would be approved within months.

"What makes the current situation unfortunate and so frustrating is that the bishops' interpretation of RFRA is at odds with that of even the nation's leading pro-life scholars," he said.

The Catholic Conference has withheld support for the legislation -- which restores the compelling-interest test to protect free-exercise claims -- unless the measure excludes three types of free-exercise claims: challenges to abortion restrictions, to the use of tax funds by religious groups, and to the tax-exempt status of organizations.

Members of the coalition favoring the bill, which runs the gamut from liberal to conservative organizations, argue that only legislation that does not single out specific free-exercise claims for enhanced or diminished protection has a chance of passage.

"I think we can pass this bill without the support of the Catholic bishops, but as we have seen, it will be difficult," Thomas said. "If, however, the bishops succeed in convincing the president to veto this bill, it would be exceedingly difficult to override."

Thomas said he thinks it would be difficult for President George Bush to veto the measure because more pro-life groups support it than oppose it and because "it does nothing more than restore the law to what it has been for more than 30 years. But I never like to underestimate the power of the bishops."

"Many think the bishops are holding religious liberty hostage to their own private agenda and have been resentful of their refusal to support the restoration concept," Thomas said.

Thomas also said the National Right to Life Committee's efforts to turn the RFRA discussion into an abortion debate have had an effect. "Many pro-life members (of Congress) have told us frankly that they cannot afford to go up against the NRLC in the next election," he said.

The coalition supporting the bill is hopeful Congress soon will begin to move on RFRA. Hearings on H.R. 2797 are tentatively scheduled for May 13-14 in the House Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights. The measure was introduced in June by Rep. Stephen Solarz and now has 160 co-sponsors.

The coalition has been counting on Judiciary Committee stalwarts

Joseph Biden, D-Del., and Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, to push the measure. Both senators sponsored the original version of the legislation in the previous session of Congress, but even they have wavered, Thomas said.

"As soon as you get one end of this problem nailed down, the other end pops up," he said. "We thought we were having problems with Sen. Hatch. He now is solidly on board, but last Friday (March 13) Sen. Biden, indicated he had some questions that needed to be resolved before he introduced the bill."

Thomas and other coalition members planned to meet with Biden in late March to "try to assuage any concerns he may have."

Despite the setbacks and remaining uncertainty about the proposal's chances, members of the coalition may eventually win the battle to restore the high level of protection to free-exercise rights. But after nearly two years of struggle, they doubtlessly will be convinced that the effort was more difficult than it should have been.

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