



The Tragedy of Elizabeth Struhs

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by
Terry Arnold



T. A. Ministries
A Ministry of Teaching

PO Box 432, Babinda,
4861, Qld, Australia

Website: www.taministries.net

E-mail: taministries2@gmail.com

Ph. 0411489472

In January 2025, 14 members of a Toowoomba (Queensland) based home church, called 'The Saints', were found guilty of the manslaughter of eight year old Elizabeth Struhs on 7th January 2022. Elizabeth died of diabetic ketoacidosis due to withdrawal of insulin.

Murder charges were not proven because of the group's '*genuine subjective belief that God would heal the girl and she would not die*'. But the entire group were sentenced with *manslaughter* because they *counselled and encouraged the father* (Jason Struhs) *to withdraw the insulin*.

Most of the group had followed a leader, Brendan Stevens, for 17 years - first at a *Revival Centre* church and then at his home. The *Revival Centre* churches are well known for their belief in faith healing. They follow almost all Pentecostal teachings but add the teaching of 'the necessity to speak in tongues when receiving the Holy Spirit to be saved'.

The death of Elizabeth was a shocking unnecessary tragedy. However, it is a tragedy which is repeated over and over, when the popular teaching on faith healing is fully applied and practised. Unlike most Charismatic/Pentecostals, *this group actually followed through faithfully and logically what is taught on healing!*

The Teachings

The leader, Brendan Stevens, had been involved in a *Revival Centre* church in Brisbane. He insisted on healing by faith to the exclusion of medical aid. He once refused anti Malaria tablets on a mission trip to New Guinea and challenged others to live by faith *as was taught*. He was eventually '*put out of fellowship*' when he railed against pastors as being '*against God*', at a National Conference in Melbourne in 2006. Upon the death of Elizabeth Struhs, the leader of the *Revival Centre* churches stated that it had *never been the church's teaching to thwart medical care*. However, that is arguably not evident in their day to day teaching on faith healing. Again, what is missed in this tragedy is that this house group *were practising by faith what is taught in most Pentecostal/Charismatic churches!*

After leaving the Revival Centres church the Stevens and other families then began meeting at the Steven's home, led by Brendan Stephens. Brendan's gospel was '*...The manifestation of receiving the holy spirit in power and you will speak in the unknown tongue which is a pure undefilable language to speak directly to God, or to Jesus who's at God's right hand after being killed and raised from the dead and appeared to all his followers for 40 days*'.

Doctors, medications, wearing glasses, were all forms of unbelief. Kerrie Struhs, the mother of Elizabeth, stated: '*As Christians, we believe in the healing power of God. Jesus was sent to earth by God to be a man and ultimately he was crucified, but before being crucified he was striped for our healing, twice he was striped, that means he was whipped 39 times for our healing, not only that, the first promise God gave to his people was 'I am the God that healeth you' and 'healing is the children's bread', there is so many times in the Bible that we can see that God has promised healing. To me, this means that when we are of need of healing, or we are in need of being made better, you go to God for healing. This applies particularly in life and death situations, God will heal, he will heal the body of all it's ailments*' (Police witness statement, 9 Feb. 2022).

The Path to Death

In 2019 six year old Elizabeth became ill after her mother, Kerrie, withdrew medication from her. She '*became noticeably unwell, experiencing episodes of urinary incontinence at school and at home. Her symptoms worsened throughout June and into July. She was vomiting, there were fluctuations in her appetite, she was consuming large amounts of liquids, and she was becoming increasingly fatigued. When school holidays ended on 15 July 2019, Elizabeth was too unwell to return to school. By this stage she had become unsteady on her feet and had continued to sleep and drink excessively*'.

One evening the father, Jason, had to assist Elizabeth to go to the toilet as she was '*too weak and tired*' to do so herself. Jason stated: '*It was at this time that I realised she had lost a very large amount*

of weight and things were very wrong...I was furious at this stage because I didn't realise how bad Elizabeth's condition had become and how unwell she was. It wasn't until I picked her up and carried her I realised how much weight she had lost and that it wasn't the flu that she had'.

Elizabeth was in a coma when the father finally took his daughter to hospital, against objections from his wife Kerrie and *The Saints* group. Court documents showed messages Kerrie sent the leader Brendan Stevens after her husband had taken Elizabeth to hospital: *'I declare God to the last minute! She'll rise before he gets there!...I can't have declared God any stronger'*. Other messages showed Brendan stating to Kerrie that her husband needed to change to accept her beliefs or their marriage was over. He stated: *'It seems from here he would have to either leave or no longer stand against [her]'*. He also stated that unless Elizabeth was taken off insulin, there would be no proof she has been healed. *'In my vision I see Elizabeth turning to you and saying I'm getting better now mummy'... 'She is healed Kerrie...God shall prevail not Jason'... 'God can't fail...Remember we have a covenant with our God Kerrie, sealed in His blood...We are His people. He is our God...He is not a covenant breaker and neither will we be'.*

On 17 July 2019, a Doctor Jarvis saw Elizabeth in the emergency department of Toowoomba Hospital. He first thought she might be dead. Elizabeth was pale, thin, limp and barely breathing. Her eyes were open but *'rolling around'*. She was not making *'very purposeful movements'* and *'barely responsive'*. Multiple tests determined Elizabeth had diabetes and was suffering from Diabetic Ketoacidosis. Her PH was 6.84 which was *'incredibly low'* (below 7 is regarded as *'life threatening'*). A CT scan revealed evidence of Cerebral Oedema (brain swelling). She was *'extremely emaciated'* with *'protusions of all bony prominences'* and she weighed just 13kg. An associate Professor Conwell stated Elizabeth was the *'most seriously unwell child'* she had ever seen *'in 20 years of practice'*.

With intensive care Elizabeth recovered in one month. Her father remained by Elizabeth's side for the recovery. An older teenage daughter, Jayde, also spent much time with Elizabeth. (Jayde had previously left home, her Lesbian beliefs rejected by the group).

Amazingly the members of the church group attributed Elizabeth's life threatening ordeal and subsequent recovery solely to God. Kerrie Struhs stated: *'It is absolutely amazing to see Elizabeth the way she is! Of course we expect perfect healing, but to already see Elizabeth looking healthy, singing and clapping, smiling and joking, even colouring in and putting her own dressing gown on? It's just so joyous! Apart from Sunday (which was great!), the last time I saw her was the day before she went to hospital and she 'looked' (with physical eyes) the absolute antithesis of health - even though we knew she was/is healed all along!*

To see healings come to pass physically is still just fantastic! Praise God! I can hardly believe she really was that unwell'.

On 5 March 2020, police charged Jason and Kerrie for failing to provide medical needs to Elizabeth in 2019. In 2021 Kerrie was imprisoned. She continued to communicate with Brendan and the group who counselled her. The group believed she was in prison *'for her faith'* and that the trial was miraculously orchestrated by God to make Jason Struhs see the light, join the Church, be reunited with his family in one faith, and be *'healed of his anger'*.

Kerrie was released from jail on 15 December 2021 and it is said she promised the authorities that treatment would continue for her daughter. However, she also stated: *'All we'll do is continue to pray, for the certain healing God has promised'*.

Jason continued to medicate Elizabeth's disease. But after 17 years of opposition to the group, the pressure increased on Jason when Kerrie was jailed. Kerrie Struhs threatened to end the marriage, but changed her mind after his eventual *'conversion'*. Judge Burns stated: *'I have no doubt Mr Struhs joined the church out of fear he would lose his family if he did not'*.

Jason's *'conversion'* came after constant opposition within his family and pressure from the group. He stated that *'there always seemed to be friction'* because he did not share the beliefs of his

wife and children. For a time he was sleeping in a converted garage away from the main part of the house to ‘*get away from the tension*’. His son Zachary was well entrenched in the group and constantly debating with his father. It was after a serious argument with Zachary that Jason joined the Church and his relationship with his family improved.

Hence in August 2021, Jason went with his son Zachary to Brendan and was ‘*baptised and spoke in tongues*’ as he was taught. He stated: ‘*The next four months after turning to God had been the best four months of my life, because I had peace. I now had family who loved me*’. He continued to treat Elizabeth with medication despite urging from the group not to. Witnesses outside the group stated that in conversations with group members that they were trying to get Jason to stop the medication, and when he finally did they claimed Elizabeth had been ‘healed’. One of the group, (Mrs Schoenfisch), stated ‘*Oh, we finally got Jason to take the medicine - the medicine, insulin, off the little girl*’. Another, Lachlan Schoenfisch, added: ‘*Yes, she’s just happy, dancing and running around. She’s been healed*’.

The Final Tragedy

On the morning of 1 January 2022, Elizabeth’s glucometer returned a reading of 8.1 mmol/L. Jason Struhs decided to administer only the slow-acting insulin. That evening, the glucometer reading was 21.5 mmol/L. At church on the 2nd January, Jason Struhs suddenly declared to all that *God had healed Elizabeth of her diabetes*. He later stated he had not planned to announce this, but the words just ‘*came out of [his] mouth...God must have made [him] say it*’. ‘*The Church was ‘joyous*’. That evening, at about 8pm, Elizabeth’s glucometer reading was 23.3 mmol/L. and again Jason resolved to give Elizabeth a dose of the slow-acting insulin but not the fast-acting insulin. By 3 January (Monday) *Jason was persuaded to take Elizabeth off all insulin*. At around 7am Jason awoke to the sounds of Elizabeth using her glucometer. He rushed to tell her not to use the monitor, but Elizabeth showed her father a blood glucose reading of 5 mmol/L,

which Mr Struhs took *‘as a sign from God that He had started to step in’*, and that Elizabeth did not require insulin any more. (At the trial a medical expert showed how a variety of factors can impact on the affect of insulin on any one day).

The next day one of the children who shared a room with Elizabeth went to the parents to inform them Elizabeth was ill. Elizabeth vomited throughout that day. Brendan and some of the group continued to send messages: *‘Don’t think that you are waiting for the healing, you indeed have it...Elizabeth is still healed as she was yesterday. The Lord will bless your faithful words and your declaration of His truth...Not by might not by power but by my spirit this mountain shall be removed’*. That night Elizabeth slept on a mattress beside her parents. She continued to vomit throughout the night. On Wednesday Elizabeth was *‘pretty much unconscious for most of the day’* and when she spoke, her words were *‘mostly slurred’*.

On Friday morning *Elizabeth stopped breathing*. Everybody then prayed for her to be raised from the dead. *The whole church came to stay at the house on Friday night*. On Saturday they all continued to pray until it was decided to call emergency services. By then *Elizabeth had been dead for 36 hours*. A message was found written on a white board *‘all the people said Elizabeth is HEALED! She is only SLEEPING!’*. (At the trial this was still the belief of the group).

Weighing just 21.4kg Elizabeth died of *Diabetic Ketoacidosis with acute renal impairment*.

Jason Struhs stated he *‘didn’t believe in funerals, Elizabeth was with God’*, and that he *‘would not be burying a bag of bones’*. He agreed to a government appointed funeral director taking care of Elizabeth’s remains.

Later the group came to the view that God must have intended Elizabeth’s death and resurrection to have a much larger audience - the attention of the World. The group have since proclaimed Elizabeth will be raised from the dead in their lifetime.

In court Jason Struhs testified: *‘There isn’t a minute of every day I don’t miss her and remember the true bond we shared together over this journey’*. His *‘biggest regret’* was seeing Elizabeth suffer

and that he ‘*forced her to receive injections of insulin*’. He rejected the proposition he joined the Church to save his family, stating ‘*Well that didn’t work, did it? Because now we’re all in jail and my children are apart*’. He submitted that there was ‘*no way of saving [his] family if [he] didn’t save himself first. I handed it to God because of His promise of healing. To all of you it looks like God has failed. But I know Elizabeth is only sleeping, I will see her again. Because God has promised, and she is healed. Amen*’.

Assessment - The Truth

The teaching that the group aspired to is the *Word of Faith* doctrine. This teaching has its roots in the new thought philosophy that teaches that the key to health and wealth acquisition is *thinking, speaking, declaring the right words*. In this the writings of E.W. Kenyon (1867-1948) influenced many of the leading Word of Faith teachers of the modern era.

Kenneth E. Hagin (1917-2003) is today considered the founder of the modern Word of Faith movement. Others followed him - Kenneth Copeland, Joyce Meyers and most of the modern Pentecostal faith healers and prosperity teachers. Although this teaching is rejected by all prominent theologians today, it is taught in one form or another by *most Charismatic/Pentecostal churches*.

This teaching is that healing is guaranteed in the covenant and the atonement with God. The movement urges believers to *declare the promises of the Bible*. They teach that Jesus said Christians can have whatever they pray for in faith (Matt.21:20- 22) and that Romans 10:8 teaches ‘*the word of faith that we preach*’.

However, Matthew 21 is figurative language for having *faith combined with the will of God*. Jesus and his apostles never ‘moved a mountain’ or did any such spectacular feats. James 4:3 says people ‘*ask amiss*’, rather than be heard by God in asking ‘*according to his will*’ (1Jn.5:14). Neither are we to *test God* (Matt.4:7).

Romans 10:8 is also ripped out of its context, considering the next two verses state that this ‘*word of faith*’ is actually a confession by mouth and belief in the heart of Jesus *for salvation*! It has nothing to do with guaranteed bodily healing.

I do not discount the possibility of miraculous healing by God. But at some point one must ask why *healings do not occur when there is obvious 'faith'*. No one can say this group did not have a 'faith'! In fact they are still to this day clinging to their faith that Elizabeth has actually been healed *by their declarations* and she will be raised from the dead to show that!

However, the *inconsistencies* in their faith abound. Why would Elizabeth not be physically healed *instantly, immediately*, as were the healings of Jesus and the apostles? But the most subtle misuse of scripture and *often quoted by the group* and *most Charismatic/Pentecostals* is 1Peter 2:24, which has the phrase '*by his stripes we are healed*' - again ripped out of its moorings. This passage is a direct quote from the Old Testament - *it has nothing to do with physical bodily healing!*

The two verses are: 1Peter 2:23,24 '*Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes you were healed. For you were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls*'... and...

Isaiah 53:5,6 '*But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all*'.

Both passages have nothing to do with *bodily healing* in the atonement. One can search early commentaries for this in vain to find any reference to bodily healing in Christ's atonement. All tell it as it is in Isaiah 53 - it is *spiritual healing of sin*! The use of 1Peter 2:24,25 for bodily healing is a recent invention in the late 19th and the early 20th century with the new Pentecostal movement.

The phrase '*in his own body*' refers to the sufferings of Jesus on the cross. The word rendered '*stripes*' is literally about the scourging of Jesus. The phrase '*you were healed*' refers to the '*transgressions*' in the same verse of Isaiah 53:5.

The fact that this is spiritual healing *for sins* is further attested to in the verses following in both 1Peter 2 and Isaiah 53 from which Peter quotes. The context is *sin*, not bodily healing: 1Peter 2:25

‘...you were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls’. Isaiah 53:6 ‘...like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all’.

The context is about ‘sins’, ‘transgressions’, ‘iniquity’ - with ‘SOULS’, not the body! Old Testament atonement offerings were not for sickness but for sin (Lev.16:3)! On the cross Jesus did not bear our diseases, but our sin. He was not ‘made diseases’ but ‘*made sin for us*’ (2Cor.5:21). Any healing in the atonement, any redemption of the body, would be *in the future glorified state* (Rom.8:21-23).

The group also quoted Matthew 8:16,17 *‘...He cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses’*. However, this verse was spoken three years before the cross and the verse claims that Isaiah was fulfilled there and then. It refers to the earthly public ministry of Jesus as verse 16 clearly shows. It also refers to the prophecies in Isaiah proving *the Messiahship of Jesus* with signs such as healings (Is.35:4-6; cp. Lk.7:18-22).

Miraculous healing *is not guaranteed* in the atonement for this life. We must here also distinguish between ‘healing’ by God Himself and the ‘gift of healings’. No such person exists today that has the gift of healings as it was in the first century! Jesus and the apostles healed ‘*all*’ and ‘*every*’ (Matt.4:23,24; 8:16; 9:35; 10:1; 12:15...); *instantly* (Matt.8:3; 20:30...‘*immediately*’); they healed *completely* (Matt.12:13,15 ‘*whole*’; 14:36 ‘*perfectly whole*’...); they healed *at will* and there were *no failures* (Matt.8:3); they healed ‘*all*’ diseases including *organic diseases* (Matt.4:23,24; 9:35; 15:30) - diseases that cannot be cured by psychosomatic means (e.g. AIDS, Downs Syndrome, quad/paraplegia, etc). The modern faith healers do not, and have not, healed the latter! Meanwhile these ‘healers’ wear glasses, get sick, travel with doctors, and die of the same diseases like many of us.

Again, the emphasis on healing ministries today completely misses *the purpose of the sign gifts* in the first century - to prove the *Messiahship of Jesus* (Jn.20:30,31; Lk.7:21,22; Acts 2:22) and the credentials of those *He ordained* (2Cor.12:12 '*signs of an apostle*'). God 'anointed' Jesus and those He ordained (Lk.4:17-20). *Nowhere in scripture does it state that we today will have the same power in healing as did Jesus and those He ordained!*

Miracles and healings that occurred in scripture do not necessarily mean they must happen today. Ballaam's donkey spoke to him, but do we expect our animals to speak to us? Peter walked on water by faith (for a while), but do we do the same? That healing is not guaranteed in this life is further attested to by 2Corinthians 12:9 where Paul glories in his physical '*infirmities*' which were *not healed*. Epaphroditus was '*sick nigh unto death*' (Phil.2:27), Trophimus was '*left at Miletum sick*' (2Tim.4:20) and Timothy took medicine for sickness (1Tim.5:23).

God did not authorise anyone *after Jesus and those He ordained* to expect everyone to be healed upon *words of faith*. No scripture gives us a mandate for today to expect the same as Jesus and the apostles! This is shown in the ceasing of sign gifts after the first century as attested to by the church fathers and the church down the ages...until the 20th century claims, when new 'healing ministries' were invented! Hence today Charismatic/Pentecostal churches teach God wants to heal all, healing is available in the atonement, and by faith. When this does not work, they seek medical help or often blame failure to heal as a lack of faith or sin.

Having once been a Pentecostal, and in this current ministry having tested hundreds of claims of miraculous healings, *the author has found not one to be truly miraculous, especially* of organic diseases. There are thousands of stories and claims, often from remote areas of the world, all proven over and over to be exaggerated or false. When those who believe in faith healing are asked if they *personally* have ever seen a blind person see, the deaf hear, or the dead come back to life, the answer is always negative. *Charismatic/Pentecostals need at some point to realise the fraud of*

faith healing! To expect the same anointing that Jesus or those *He ordained* had, is to be as ‘*false christs and false prophets*’ (‘*false christs*’ is ‘*pseudo christos*’ - ‘false anointed ones’).

Because the group were so isolated and manipulated by the leader, Brendan Stevens, they were never really challenged, even when there was no physical healing. But today many in Charismatic/Pentecostal circles are also unaware of the utter deception of the *same healing gospel!* Instead they would continue to quote scriptures out of context as Kerrie Struhs did to police and in court with: ‘*I am the God that healeth you*’ - this scripture was spoken to *Israel* concerning their travels and referring to diseases God had put upon Egypt (Ex.15:26). This cannot be applied to God today wanting to heal all who have faith.

The healing gospel today is from ‘*the Serpent*’ and produces ‘*another jesus...another spirit...and another gospel*’ which ‘*perverts the gospel of Christ*’ and which is ‘*accursed*’ (2Cor.11:4; Gal.1:6-9)! Truly the Devil has had a field day within this group! Even their language was foreign to sound doctrine, yet familiar with much of modern Charismatic/Pentecostal speech. Jason Struhs stated: ‘*Well, [when] I probably thought that she was gonna die...I went and prayed and got my spirit back up...the Lord’s gonna look after her and I didn’t look through my normal eyes, I looked through my spirit eyes and...it went away, I didn’t have to worry anymore because I trusted the Lord...the Holy Spirit that I received*’.

Much of this new teaching *muddies and detaches the conscience from the mind*. The phrase ‘*praying in the spirit*’ (Eph.6:18; Jude 20) was often misquoted by the group to mean *praying in tongues* which was ‘*proof*’ they had received the Spirit This ‘faith’ here is like a *force* and healing has occurred in the ‘spiritual realm’ with ‘spirit eyes’ even if it has not occurred in the physical (manifested) state. Thus the group had to keep standing on their confessions and declarations and *ignore the reality that Elizabeth was not healed*. To the group even ‘*death was not proof that God had not healed*’, for ‘*Elizabeth was only sleeping*’.

As Theresa Stevens stated: *‘The only thing that can fail is you, and in your faith towards God, and if you do fail, then God can’t hold up His end of the bargain’*. Such teaching led to a view of medical help that *‘they kill children all the time’*. The group was unanimous that they would much rather trust in God than put a child through *‘torture’* in a hospital. Theresa considered injections to be *‘rape’*. Keita Martin stated that people who use medical help were *‘fake christians’*.

Judge Burns was scathing in summary: *‘The arrogance of your belief...remains bewildering’*. To Brendan Stevens: *‘you are a dangerous, highly manipulative individual’*. Burns also stated: *‘Not one of you could point to a single line of scripture in which doctors or medicine was expressly forbidden...Instead, you spoke of parts of the Bible which, on your construction, were said to support your belief...In truth, what you did was gamble with the life of a child based on your peculiar interpretation of disparate passages from the Bible and nothing more’*.

Wherever there is serious false or cultic teaching, there is often a *‘law unto themselves’* and hypocrisy. All children in the Stevens and Struhs family attended schools *in obedience to the law*, a contradiction noted by police in questioning.

The tragedy of Elizabeth Struhs is not an isolated occurrence. Research shows this is happening in *thousands of cases* across the globe! In 1998, Dr Seth Asser (a Rhode Island paediatrician) investigated the deaths of children from families in which faith healing was practiced and medical care denied. He found that between 1975 and 1995, 172 children died due to parents refusal of medical care due to belief in faith healing. 140 of these deaths were medically treatable with a greater than 90% success rate. 18 died from conditions with a greater than 50% survival rate with medical care. Only 3 deaths were determined to have been beyond the help of medical care. How many others across the globe are not reported?

The other tragedy is as this author has seen and documented - many believers with the healing gospel walk away from their faith and the church when it simply does not work. Many end up in *despair, atheism or hardened in heart to the Gospel*.

However, *the biggest loser of this ongoing tragedy is the true Gospel!* Why add *new* teachings of healing, prosperity, Word of Faith...Is it not enough that Jesus died for our sins to satisfy a holy and righteous judge, to propitiate the wrath of God for our sins? Is it not enough that in Christ the Saviour we have a spirit made righteous, a soul being sanctified, ready for a new healed body in Heaven? Dare we expect more than what God may or may not give? Is His grace not sufficient?

Our faith and life is in *Christ the person*, not new thought downloaded in the 20th century. We are not the Messiah, the apostles, *those He ordained*. We are sinners saved by grace which is sufficient for the day of glory!

(Material extracted from the 469 page Supreme Court, Qld ‘*R vs Struhs*’ 2025)

About the Author and the Ministry

Terry Arnold holds a Doctorate in Theology (Dth), a Masters degree (MABS) and several diplomas. He was founder and president of *South Pacific Bible Institute*, a Bible college training and equipping people for ministry. In addition he was the founder of Hervey Bay Bible Church in Queensland, Australia. He has for 25 years served as an elder and then pastor.

Terry is the author of several books and is involved in a full time ministry of *teaching, informing* and *equipping* the church. He is also editor of a growing worldwide publication '*Diakrisis (Australia)*'.

His ministry includes preaching/teaching and conducting seminars and conferences in a wide range of churches and colleges.

TA Ministries is a non-denominational and non-profit faith ministry founded in 1989 when the book '*To Catholics Whom I Love*' was written by Terry Arnold. This book went through several re-prints and served as a fruitful outreach to Roman Catholics.

In 1996 the ministry became a full-time operation with the introduction of a free newsletter, later named '*Diakrisis (Australia)*'.

Diakrisis is published bi-monthly to *teach, inform* and *equip* the church of Biblical truths and to warn of false teaching. It has also been a valuable reference aid to hundreds of pastors/elders.