

Two Decades in the Providence of God

By PAUL J. SCHARF

I distinctly remember the phone call. It was the spring of 1999, and I had worked up the nerve to telephone my esteemed professor, Dr. John C. Whitcomb—the man whose reputation caused me to choose my theological seminary five years previously.

To my surprise, he picked up the phone, stirring within me a mixture of relief and horror. It just seemed like it wasn't the right instant to talk with him, however. I learned he was actually on his way to what would be his final international speaking trip, to London.

I was preparing to apply to a highly acclaimed doctor of philosophy program, and I knew from a prior discussion that Dr. Whitcomb—who was extremely sensitive to the issue of drift within theological higher education—was dubious about that choice. I was calling to seek his perspective and his guidance—and hopefully his blessing.

However, with one declarative statement, he dashed my hopes completely and offered an unexpected change of course. “What you need is a mentor,” he stated. “Who that is, the Lord knows and I don't.” His words left me puzzled—and musing.

Fast forward to the spring of 2003. A multitude of details had changed in my life, and the Ph.D. program hadn't worked out in any case.

Dr. Whitcomb, now almost 79, had just endured a major health challenge with colon cancer, and I hadn't seen him in more than a year. I sent him a letter, and then called him again—this time asking to come and interview him and write an account of his incredibly interesting life and ministry.¹ He was very leery, but—as he would say—*in a weak moment* he agreed.

My wife and I first visited the Whitcombs at their Indianapolis home the weekend after Memorial Day in 2003. I spent several hours recording interviews with Dr. Whitcomb in his basement office. But, before we left, something quite unexpected had happened. Our old car was filled with papers and projects for me and Lynnette (a fantastic secretary) to work on—again, as Dr. Whitcomb would say—*in our spare time*.

Without seeking it, or even really knowing what happened, we had agreed to assist Dr. Whitcomb in the work of Whitcomb Ministries. I had found my mentor.

Dr. Whitcomb lived for 17 more years, and we enjoyed countless opportunities to fellowship with the Whitcombs, in their home as well as at various conferences and events. We accomplished a great deal during that stretch—including the launch of a radio ministry and other media outreaches to correspond with Dr. Whitcomb's diminishing ability to travel, as he had for decades. Today, 20 years later, I continue to serve Dr. Whitcomb's ministry on a limited basis—although I can no longer communicate with him. Yet, “He being dead still speaks” (Heb. 11:4)—another reference that would cause him to smile.

Shortly before our visit, I had learned of a website that seemed almost too good to be true. It was called SermonAudio.com. Here churches and ministries could post messages for the whole world to listen to and create their own broadcast platforms. This was truly a technology of which one previously could only have dreamed.

In one of our earliest conversations about Whitcomb Ministries, I persuaded Dr. Whitcomb that he needed to be on SermonAudio.com. He didn't totally understand how something like this could work—but he was forward-thinking enough to move on it.

Dr. Whitcomb had much teaching recorded on cassette tapes, and the only type of internet I knew was dial-up. Thus, Whitcomb Ministries utilized a service that uploaded these taped messages onto SermonAudio. I remember walking away from the post office after I mailed off the initial round of sermons that we would be placing on this brand-new page and feeling exhilarated—thinking to myself, “We’re on SermonAudio!”

My prayer was that Dr. Whitcomb would live to see a million downloads at SermonAudio.com/Whitcomb. He didn't witness that milestone on Earth, and I don't know if the Lord passed the word to him ... but he exceeded it in 2021.

My experience in cataloging Dr. Whitcomb's vast teaching library on SermonAudio proved to be invaluable for me in the service to which God would call me with The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry. I was eventually able to open my own page there in 2020—two months after Dr. Whitcomb went to be with the Lord—during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns, which prohibited us from traveling, but provided a wonderful opportunity to consolidate and organize our efforts with regard to technology.

Two decades of serving Dr. Whitcomb, and two decades of collaborating with SermonAudio, have been foundational in my life and ministry. They evidence God's extraordinary providence and undeserved blessing toward me. I hope that rehearsing them will edify all those who read it.

Can you perceive the Lord overseeing your *steps* as you look back (see Ps. 37:23-24)? I encourage you to share the story. You may even hearten yourself as you do.

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¹ The results of these interviews are chronicled in the following two writings by Paul J. Scharf: “John C. Whitcomb: Hero of the Faith.” *Gospel Herald and The Sunday School Times* Vol. 23, No. 4. (Fall 2005): 12-13; and “A

Biographical Tribute to Dr. John C. Whitcomb Jr.," in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, Terry Mortenson and Thane Ury, eds., 437-451 (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008).