



ANDREA JOHNSON/Editor

Lord of the Fire

It is hard to appreciate the destructive power of forest wildfires unless you've experienced them. When we moved to Rapid City, South Dakota, in the

'80s we were intrigued by the "Fire Danger Today" road signs. A moveable arrow on a rating wheel pointed to the danger level for that day: low, medium, high, very high, or extreme. That summer the danger was usually high because of lack of rain. Throughout Custer State Park we could see evidence of past fires: acres and acres of burned trees.

Soon another fire began. I remember the constant smell of smoke, even in the house. Outside we would watch slurry bombers scurry back and forth, picking up water from the shrinking lakes to drop on the fire. They looked so small and powerless. Thankfully, the Lord kept that fire from reaching the city with a change in the wind's direction.

Coincidence? I think not, but Pete Kopp tells of an even more miraculous event. Pete was one of two incident commanders on the Gelena fire in Custer State Park from July 4 to July 9, 1988. A member of Open Bible Christian Center in Rapid City, South Dakota, Pete has extensive experience with forest fires, including serving as Incident Commander for the US Forest Service and the National Park Service, lead fire investigator for the state of South Dakota, and Special Projects Forester. He now operates his own forestry consulting business and is still called upon by the state to investigate fires. In his own words:

We had a fire we couldn't stop. The Gelena fire had consumed more than 18,000 acres. I had just been relieved after being on the fire for a week. On my way back to Rapid City, I pulled over on a hill where I could see the fire's huge column

bellowing high into the air. On my radio, I heard a helicopter pilot report that the fire had changed direction and was now on its way toward Custer, about three miles away. As I sat there helplessly watching this monster moving toward Custer, my first thought was, "God help us."

It was then I felt God say to me, "Command the clouds to form." (It was a totally cloudless day.) So with all the passion I could muster I said, "Clouds, form! Rain, come, in the name of Jesus."

Within two minutes clouds formed over the top of the fire and it began to rain. Then one of the crew chiefs on the west side of the fire came over the radio saying, "You aren't gonna' believe this, but it's starting to rain!" Several seconds later I heard, "It's beginning to hail, heavy hail! We are heading for cover."

That rain and hail ultimately dropped more than three inches of water on the fire, stopping it in its tracks. Period! In fact, so fast and hard was the rain it actually flooded out our fire camp. And the only place it rained that day was on the fire.

People who refuse to believe in signs and wonders will find an alternate explanation for events like these. But after seeing the powerlessness of man next to the power of "nature," I have no logical choice but to believe. God's ways are not always logical nor does He have to answer to us, but signs and wonders certainly showcase His power.

Andrea Johnson,
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