

The Sabbath Sentinel

September–October 2010



Solving Marital Conflict
See article on page 5.

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

Jesus said, "the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath"

The Sabbath Sentinel

September–October 2010 Volume 62, No. 5 Issue 545

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“I’m Spiritual, but not Religious”

In the last issue of *The Sabbath Sentinel* we ran a small piece about the growing number of people of faith who say that they are “spiritual, but not religious.” You have probably encountered such people. What would you say to them?

Of course, there are various reasons why people would make such a declaration. It could be that they had a bad experience with their church and simply don't want to have anything to do with “church” anymore. Then, there are those who have had very poor biblical teaching and have many unbiblical ideas about God and Christ. Others are overly concerned about the current wave of anti-Christian sentiment that has swept through our halls of government, education, the media, and the courts. These people are fearful of being labeled as Christian, bigoted, and narrow-minded.

As followers of Christ we have been given a command: “Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit:

Teaching them to observe all things whatever I have commanded you: and, see, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:19-20).

How can the idea of being spiritual but not religious be reconciled with Christ’s command to “Go you therefore...,” or can it be?

In the Body of Christ, especially in Western countries, we have a serious problem with those outside the Church because they are increasingly looking at Christians and Christianity as irrelevant. It is true that there is a very strong faction of secularists in politics, science, and the media who are doing everything in their power to portray Christians as outside-the-mainstream, anti-science, anti-progress, and just plain bizarre. Their efforts have been rewarded by a growing skepticism among the general population concerning Christianity and a refusal to take the words of evangelists and pastors seriously. These days Christians are finding it difficult to enter the public debate on issues of morality and politics. What can we do to reverse this trend?

A Guilt-free Society

Our search for a God-free salvation has led Western society to the point that no one seems to be responsi-

ble for anything anymore. Excuses are made for almost all failures. Students who fail to turn in assignments are not given zeros; they are given 50%. We are told never to judge any kind of behavior because that will make the perpetrator “feel bad.” The one “sin” that society will not permit is to judge another’s behavior. Politicians who have committed criminal acts have been reelected. Executives who cheat are often promoted. Lawyers that lie win cases. We are in the midst of a revolution—one that increasingly rejects the biblical values that are the only solution for the sickness that has invaded the body of society. This is the kind of sickness that kills.

Guilt is very often the motor that drives changes in behavior, yet we are admonished not to make people feel guilty. Our lack of demanding accountability for our own actions and for the actions of others around us is undermining our entire culture. However, it is never possible to have accountability without accepting personal responsibility, blame, and guilt. If we do not allow a sense of guilt to drive us to change our bad behavior, there is no hope for society. As Christians we must regain society’s moral high ground by being personally responsible, accepting blame, and allowing guilt to motivate us to better ourselves. This is not a “collective salvation.” This leads to personal salvation, the only kind of salvation acceptable to God.

The apostle Paul spoke of the cleansing effect of guilt and how, if used correctly, it could produce dramatic and lasting change in those who allow it to change them: “Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter” (2 Corinthians 7:9-11).

“By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if...”

Continued on Page 17

God's Boardroom (Part 2)

by Kenneth Westby



*Declaring God wise elicits no argument from us mere mortals. Could a God that created the heavens and the earth and all forms of life be any other than the zenith of wisdom? But how did he do it? That is the mystery. In the previous issue (July-August **Sabbath Sentinel**) we took a peek behind the curtain to look at the inner workings of God's heavenly kingdom, at his deputies, his divine council, his heavenly court. Key scriptures give us spectacular, albeit partial, views of the way the Wise God put his holy administration together. One thing is clear: God loves to delegate honor, power, and authority. Why is that important and why should it be good news for us?*

What we here consider is special knowledge. Not secret information—it can be sleuthed out from Scripture. This special information opens a window into the intelligent design of God's government. It reveals perfection in movement. We glimpse pure wisdom from the mind of Yahweh. We see what God highly values and what he hates.

God has rarely allowed the pens of prophets to personify¹ him by nouns other than his divine name or titles. One of those allowed nouns is Wisdom². An entire chapter in the book of Proverbs is devoted to picturing God as Wisdom, or as if Wisdom were a person standing next to God assisting in creation.

"Word" is another significant personification of God (*logos* in Greek, although the term can have a variety of meanings). God speaks and things happen. The first chapter of God's *Word* moves to the rhythm of "God said, 'Let there be light...Let the land produce living creatures...Let us make man in our image.'" In almost every verse God is speaking and that speaking produces action, creation, blessings, and God saw all that was taking place which greatly pleased him, "He saw that it was good."

The Word reflects the mind or Wisdom of God and is the *action* and *disclosure* of God's Wisdom. We must hear and heed God's Word for it manifests God's Wisdom for mankind. The most important Scripture in Judaism is "Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one. Love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:4-5). It is called the *Shema*, Hebrew for "hear," and it is recited daily by pious Jews. Jesus attested that it was the greatest of all the commandments and that all Torah rested upon its foundation.

In light of the *Shema* we should mention one other important noun that describes God: *Love*. "God is Love" (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). It too personifies God. Love ani-

mates the heart of God which is the fountain of his Wisdom, from which flows all functions of his Word, his creative actions, his Torah, and his arm of salvation. It is not easy to describe God, and Scripture uses many literary forms and adjectives to capture the majesty of the glory of the invisible God. Wisdom, Word, and Love are most important in understanding, knowing, and loving God.

Why should we love God with all our heart, soul, and strength? We must know God to love him, right? We must see and love the wisdom of God which is manifest in all his mighty works of creation and salvation, and by his Word which reveals his wisdom and which flows out with righteousness, justice, mercy, peace, and love. His Word goes out to accomplish his will and never returns void.

So is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire and
achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Isa. 55:11).

God's motivation of heart for all he does is an outgoing love for his creation—especially his sons and daughters made in his image. The *Shema* invites us to love him in return with a totality of commitment, obedience, and love. The ultimate outcome of God's *Wisdom, Word, and Love* and our response to God is found in the words of the Universal Covenant, which appears continually throughout Scripture³:

Now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God (Rev. 21:3).

Wisdom Created Everything

"Wisdom cries out," writes the sage in the first verse of Proverbs' eighth chapter. He records what wisdom has to say, frequently picturing wisdom as a woman.

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Building Lasting Change

by David Guerrero



In the January-February edition of *The Sabbath Sentinel* we examined the initial steps that are necessary to make change happen in a marriage. In order to set off in the right direction of lasting change, we need to pray that God will help us to look within ourselves so that we can see the situation as it really is. Asking God to help us examine our own hearts, as well as asking His Spirit to change us, is crucial in addressing change as He sees appropriate and best. Second, we need to treat each other in love, that is, to consider our mate's needs ahead of our own, for love conquers all. Third, we must confess our own wrongdoing to God as well as to our partner, because admitting our own faults makes our prayer life much more effectual, and it creates the platform for reconciliation (James 5; Matthew 19). Today, let's look at the heart of change.

What is Causing the Problem?

The Bible is sufficient to address all human woes. Conflict is one aspect of humanity that many of us have a difficult time addressing and handling. However, through the inspired word of God, the apostle James gets to the root of our problem:

In order to set off in the right direction of lasting change, we need to pray that God will help us to look within ourselves so that we can see the situation as it really is.

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures (James 4:1-3).

Here lies the root of our problem and at the same time the solution to our dilemma of change. The root of the problem is our heart. Our selfish desires cause us to want to have our own personal needs met at all cost and ahead of the needs of others. And therein is our problem—self! The Bible tells us that human behavior is like this: if someone gets in the way of my accomplishing or achieving my personal goals, there will be WAR!

In the midst of conflict or a difficult situation we need to ask God to help us examine our own heart, asking Him to aid us in seeing whether there are any selfish desires that are getting in the way of my being

the person He desires for me to be in Christ. Self can be so dangerous.

For example, one day I arrived home and could not get my car in the garage because my wife had parked too far to the left side of the garage. It was cold, snowy, and slippery, and I did not feel like enduring the difficulty of the weather. At that moment I had a choice. I could either submit my disappointment to God, and ask Him for grace and wisdom to deal with the difficulty or I could ruminate on how my expectations were not met. Well, what did I do? Every step toward my front door was filled with the thoughts: "How often do I have to tell her that she needs to park on her side?" I continued, "Doesn't she get it?" Then it got worse, "That selfish woman just doesn't care!" The outcome of this wrong way of handling the problem and thinking resulted in my eventually getting through the door and "letting her have it!"

After the Holy Spirit fully convicted me of my wrong, I sought forgiveness from my lovely wife which she graciously gave me. However, the Holy Spirit also led me to see that it was "self" that took over as I insisted in my desire to have the cars parked

a certain way as well as being free from any inconvenience of walking on snow and ice, a desire that overwhelmed me to the point of behaving unlike Christ. I continue to learn from God and His word how to handle my emotions and conflict in a manner that glorifies His name.

So What Do I Do with my Emotions and Desires?

I have learned that the way to victory over conflict is to pause, pray, and seek God's word in order to respond correctly (i.e. as He would want me to respond). How does this work? Well, pausing in the midst of conflict is the key. This may not come easily, but with practice it will become natural over time. As people we must learn the art of waiting before we respond to conflict. I have taught my children something called the S.T.O.P. principle (which, by the way, is good for us adults as well). I tell them that before we engage in



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any activity or respond to a situation, we must S.T.O.P. and think it through. It goes something like this:

- S = is this Safe?
- T = is this Truthful?
- O = is this Obedient to God?
- P = is this Pleasing to the LORD?

If my response can pass the yes test to all of the above, then I can move forward with what I have decided to do. I have found that when I give myself the time to think what is facing me this way, God can have the time He needs to reason with me in a way that leads me to respond in a manner that lifts up Christ and glorifies His name.

As I work through my emotions, I must also pray asking God to help me understand what I am feeling and why am I feeling this way. Am I angry? If so, why? Am I jealous? If so, why? Do I feel disrespected? If so, why? Am I afraid? If so, why? As God helps me to analyze my feelings and discover what they are and why I am feeling the way I do, He leads me to the place where I discover either that I am being selfish or that I have a legitimate reason for feeling the way I do. My next step in the process leads me to respond in a way that brings reconciliation and healing to the conflict: turning to God's word for how I should respond.

Seeking God's word is pivotal to handling any difficulty. In the midst of conflict what God has to say is an absolute when it comes to resolving the issues that are before us. As we honor God's word, He will honor us. As we honor God's word, we can always expect the best outcome for "all things work together for the good, to them that love the LORD, to those that called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Let me give you an example.

One day Sheila called me. She was angry that her husband Larry was not leading as he should in spiritual

things at home. As a result she had decided that she had had enough and was going to leave him due to his lack of being a good example to the children. "All he does," she said, "is go to work and then spend the rest of his time watching television or hanging out with his friends." Granted that Larry had some problems and did need to experience change. However, Sheila needed to do some soul searching as well. First, she needed to look at what it was that she desired that she was not getting. In other words, she needed to ask the question: "Why am I so angry?" As she answered this question, she then needed to ask herself: "Am I responding the way God desires for me to respond?" In other words: What I am about to do (my response to my situation), is it safe? It is truthful (to God, my marriage, and to being a godly woman)? Is it (my response) obedient to God's word? You see, Sheila needed to respond in a manner that speaks God's love, His choice, and His desire for her marriage. Sheila needed to consult God's Word thoroughly for how she was responding and how she should have responded to her situation.

I know that sometimes the choices we have to make are hard and work against the grain of our flesh. However, my friend, the Christian life is not about living in the flesh; it is about living in the Spirit. Biblical application to our situations will only bring God's blessing and peace. Biblical application to our situation will extend to us spiritual growth and maturity that is out of this world!

Building Lasting Change

Change is hard. However, applying God's word to the difficult situations in our life can help us make the changes that we need to make. The outcome will be out of this world. The first steps that we need to make in order to see the change in others is to prayerfully ask God what it is in ourselves that we need to allow Him to transform. We must then adjust our attitudes by His grace. After that we must confess any wrongs that we may have done. We must then further analyze the problem as God does by looking at what is motivating our response by looking at why we are thinking, acting, and responding the way we are. As we S.T.O.P. to consider this and seek to employ biblical principles to resolving the conflict before us, God will perform marvelous acts of change in our lives, and our marriages will become a place of heaven on earth.

David Guerrero is the founder and director of Rekindle the Flame Ministries. RTFM is a non profit 501(c)3 Christian organization that seeks to aid the body of Christ is experiencing transformation of life through faith-based counseling, seminars, training, and newsletters. Please contact us at (715) 310-2196 or on the web at www.rekindletheflameministries.org for more information how we can help you your church or your organization. Contact us if you like to be on our mailing list.

The Sabbath

Queen of the Commandments

By Kelly McDonald



Just how important is the Sabbath? In Judaism, the Sabbath is so important that it is often referred to as a queen or bride. A Jewish hymn, *Lecha Dodi Likrat Kallah* (translated as “come, my beloved, to meet the [Sabbath] bride”), expresses the importance of this 24-hour space of time.¹ What is it about the Sabbath that makes it so important that it would be called the ‘Queen of the Commandments’?

One clue as to why the Sabbath is considered the Queen of the commandments is found in Exodus 31:12-13: “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, “You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy.”’”² Out of all the commandments in the Bible, this is the only commandment that God says is a sign to know the Creator God. God could have used the dietary laws, tithing, sexual purity, or any of the other commandments to be His sign for us to know Him, but he chose the Sabbath. Of course, the other commandments are important and not to be overlooked or diminished, but this is the only place in the Bible where God said something was the sign to know who makes us holy. God rested on the seventh day, so by resting on the seventh day the sign of the creator God rests upon us.

The Hebrew word used for ‘sign’ here is the word *’oth*, and it can mean, among other things, sign, signal, flag, evidence, or beacon.³ The Sabbath is a flag, planted by God for all humanity to know where to meet Him. Flags are used to mark territory and the authority that a person or group has over a territory. When a person sees a flag, they automatically think of the meaning of the flag and who the flag represents. For instance, when we see the American flag, we think of the United States of America and our freedoms as Americans. The Sabbath is God’s flag, planted in the space of time between Friday sundown and Saturday sundown. When we experience it, we are supposed to think of Him. When we think of it, we are supposed to think of Him.

Said another way, the Sabbath is the beacon or sign to guide people to the true creator God. By keeping the Sabbath holy, we are literally walking beacons, guiding people toward the true creator God and his true ways. When people ask us to work on the Sabbath and we

tell them “no” as well as the reason why we do not work on the Sabbath, we are like a lighthouse shining its beacon of light to guide ships safely to the harbor. But instead of guiding ships, we are guiding people to the truth of God’s word and ways. *Just as a queen wears a crown to distinguish her from everyone else in the Kingdom, the Sabbath is a crown that distinguishes it from all the other commandments.*

In the latter part of the book of Ezekiel, God is explaining the layout of the temple of God that will exist in Jerusalem during the millennial reign of Christ. In Ezekiel 46:1-2, God says, “...The gate of the inner court facing east is to be shut on the six working days, but on the Sabbath day and on the day of the New Moon it is to be opened. The prince is to enter from the outside through the portico of the gateway and stand by the gatepost. The priests are to sacrifice his burnt offering and his fellowship offerings. He is to worship at the threshold of the gateway and then go out, but the gate will not be shut until evening.” The prince that is mentioned is a reference to Jesus Christ. The temple in the Kingdom of God will be shut during the other six days, but open on the seventh. Moreover, Jesus will stand at the gate when it opens on the Sabbath. This teaches us that every Sabbath we have a standing date with Jesus Christ.

As the sun sets on Friday afternoon, Christ comes to fellowship with us at the gates of the Sabbath. God did not say that the gates to the temple would be open on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or any other day of the week. They are only open on the Sabbath (both weekly and annual Sabbaths) and New Moon celebrations. During the 24-hour period of the Sabbath, God’s presence is continually poured out just as Christ continually remains at the gate of the temple in Ezekiel. Every Sabbath, Christ is right there, worshipping with us! All we have to do is show up! He is faithful to come every Sabbath; all we have to do is refrain from doing what we want to do and meet him on His terms.

Too many times we want Jesus to meet with us on our own terms. As I learned from the book *Holy Time With God* by Bill Shults, we have to meet with Christ on His terms. Who has ever demanded that the King of the Universe meet on their terms and succeeded? No one! Christ is our King, and if we have given our lives to Him to make Him our King, then we will comply

with what is pleasing to Him. Jesus did say that, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20). Many have used this verse to say that Christ 'did away with' or 'changed' the Sabbath. If you read the context of this verse (within verses 15-20), Jesus is talking about how to handle situations involving a brother who has sinned against you. Jesus tells them in this short passage how to handle the situation. Jesus then reassures them by telling them that, "wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst."

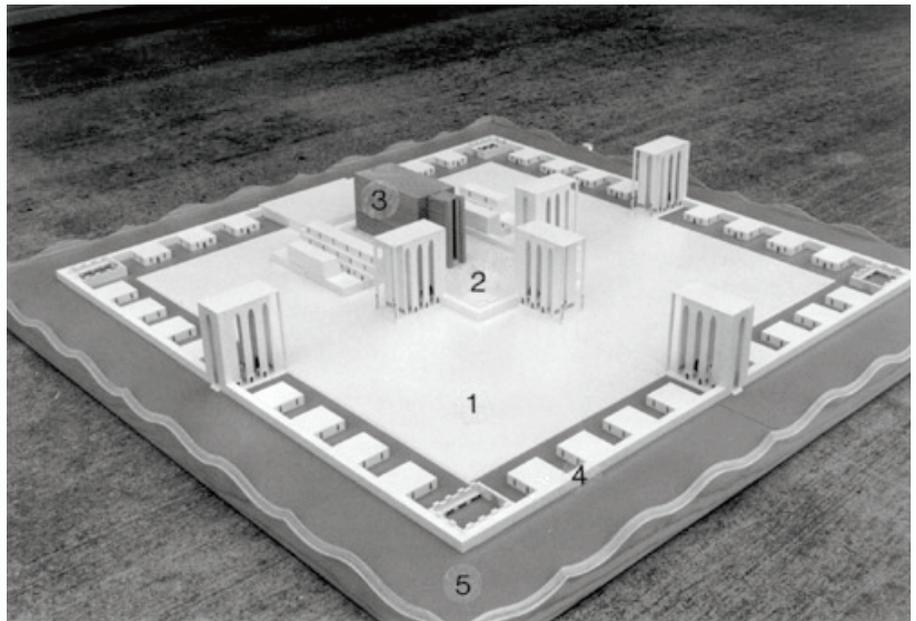
In other words, when they are gathered to make a decision in Christ's name, then Christ will be with them. This verse is more of a comfort to remind us that Christ will be there to guide us when we have to make difficult decisions. Although we might be able to apply the verse to worship, this verse, in context, does not refer to worship. Christ appears for 24 hours on the Sabbath whether we show up or not, just as the prince in Ezekiel 46:1-2 shows up at the gates of the temple on the Sabbath whether anyone else shows up or not. There is a special, continuous manifestation of Jesus Christ for 24 hours every Sabbath. This presence and outpouring is not found at any other time during the week; why would we want to pass it up? *Because Christ shows up for the entire Sabbath celebration, He is devoting special time and attention to the Sabbath just as a King devotes special time and attention to His Queen.*

In Isaiah 58:13-14, the Sabbath is further distinguished from the other commandments. In these two verses, God said, "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." God said that He will bless us abundantly if we will simply call His day a delight and honor it. Specifically, God says that we will find our joy in the Lord. We all have many hobbies, activities, and even a job with which we are involved. Sometimes our other activities, especially our job, can be a source of frustration. However, if we will delight in the Sabbath, then our joy will be found in the Lord!

Many times we try to find joy from our activities or family, but if we rely upon these other activities, or

even our own family, to be our source of joy in life, then we can and most likely will be disappointed. There is nothing wrong with enjoying our family and activities, but having our joy in the Lord is having our joy in a secure place. *A king finds joy in his queen because of the support she gives him, and the support the Sabbath gives us in our lives is our joy; we can always rely on it.* God continues by saying that He will also "cause us to ride on the heights of the land." The "heights of the land" is a reference to being in a secured position. In battle, an elevated place is a superior position; it gives you an advantage. Being on the heights of the land or of the earth means that God will give us the advantage in situations we encounter.

Where do you need an edge in your life? Are you struggling spiritually? If you will simply 'kick-up' your Sabbath-observance, then you will begin to be at an advantage rather than a disadvantage in our fight



Ezekiel's Temple — 1. Outer Court - Ez. 40:17-19 2. Inner Court - Ez. 40:44,47 3. The Temple or Sanctuary - Ez. 41:1-26 4. Wall around the outside of the Temple - Ez. 40:5 (42:15-20, 45:2) 5. Fifty cubits of open space - Ez. 45:2
(Temple rendering by Sonsoglory.com)

against Satan! Having our joy in the Lord is part of this secure or advantageous position because our joy being in the Lord means that we will not be shaken as easily as we would be were our joy in other people or other activities. *This elevated position on the heights is very similar to the elevated position that a queen has in a kingdom.*

Lastly, God says that we will "feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." Part of the inheritance promised to Jacob was that all nations on earth will be blessed through His seed. Too many times as Christians we settle for salvation and then become satisfied. We

settle for just a little of the blessing of God. Salvation is the free gift promised to all (Romans 5:15-18). If we will honor the Sabbath, God says that we will feast on the inheritance of our father Jacob. I'm tired of just a little of the inheritance promised to believers. I want to feast on the inheritance promised to Jacob and believers! Again, having our joy in the Lord is also part of accessing this feast on the promised inheritance. Only when our joy is in Him are we free to explore all of the blessings God has for us as believers! *The only way to access this abundant provision is to delight in the Sabbath and honor it! Only a queen in the kingdom has such special access to the resources of a kingdom.* God did not promise our joy to be found in him, a secure position, and feasting on the inheritance of Jacob for obedience to any other commandment. He did promise them, however, for honoring His Sabbaths.

If this day is important in Judaism, then it should be even more important to us as Christians! Jesus, our Savior, said that He was Lord of the Sabbath! The Sabbath is the only sign – this is the only commandment that God said, “If you keep it, it is a sign to know that the true Creator God is making you holy or sanctifying you.” The Sabbath was the reason why God gave the Israelites manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16). The Sabbath was given twice before the Law or Torah was given on Mount Sinai (Genesis 2:1-3 and Exodus 16). The Sabbath is when the consecrated bread or “face bread” was set out every week (Leviticus 24:5-9). The Sabbath was the main sign for the Gentiles to know that their sacrifices would be accepted in the temple (Isaiah 56:1-8). It is in this passage God said that His house shall “be a house of prayer for all nations” (verse 7). God wants His house to be a house of prayer for all nations on the Sabbath so that everyone can enjoy the awesome blessing that comes from keeping the Sabbath a delight and honoring it. It is the only commandment with characteristics similar to the special relationship a queen has in a kingdom. This, of course, does not mean that the Sabbath is more important than obedience to any other commandment, but it does mean that this commandment *has a closer place with the King.* And, when we keep it, *we have a closer place with the King.*

End Notes

¹ <http://www.jewfaq.org/shabbat.htm>

² All Scripture notations, unless otherwise noted, come from the New International Version. International Bible Society, Zondervan Bible Publishers Grand Rapids, Michigan 46506 USA.

³ H226, Strong's Concordance. Strong, James. Published: Nashville: Abingdon, c1980 (accessed via e-sword application).

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Lifespan Management

By Brian Knowles



Every living creature has a “normal” or typical lifespan. Bagworm mothers in the adult stage live for a matter of minutes; then they are gone. The Mayfly lives from several hours to several days. Some species live only a day and so are called “dayflies.” A female ant can live up to 15 years, but the male dies in days (after copulation).

A wormlike creature called a gastrotrich lives for about three days while the giant tortoise can live up to 177 years in captivity. It is the longest-lived land animal. There is a type of clam that is believed to live up to 400 years. Under the right conditions turkey buzzards are next — they can live 118 years. Swans can live 102 years and parrots up to 80 years. The homely catfish has been known to hang around for as much as 60 years.

The mighty elephant can rumble round the planet for up to 69 years before cashing in at the legendary “elephant’s burial ground.”

According to Danish studies, “man’s best friend,” the dog, enjoys a median lifespan of 10 or 11 years. Smaller breeds live longer than large ones.

The “king of the beasts,” the lion, can expect to live up to 30 years while his domestic cousin typically lives around 15 years though some have made it to 30.

In the United States today, the average life expectancy for humans is 78 years. We lag behind 30 other nations. Japan is first. There, 83 is the norm. White American women live longest in this country — 81 years. Black women live 77 years while white males typically live to 76. On average, black males live 70 years.

Many of us have lived long enough to have witnessed the entire lifespan of others from cradle to grave. Some have had their lives cut short: I lost a daughter-in-law at age 27 and a stepmother at 51. Yet my grandfather lived well into his hundredth year. The point is, none of us knows how long we’ll live. As Israel’s King David said, speaking of God, “My times are in thy hand...” (Psalm 31:15).

No matter how long we live, life will seem short and not always sweet. Moses, who lived to 120, wrote of man’s brevity and God’s eternity, “The days of our years are threescore and ten, and if by reason of strength, they be fourscore years, yet is their strength

labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away," (Psalm 90:10).

God has the power to cut short our lives at any moment. In 2006, some 2.4 million Americans died. Their life spans were over. At one point in history, God, in his wrath, wiped out two cities: Sodom and Gomorrah. Later, God eradicated the entire human race, except for eight souls, in a flood. Some time after that episode, He threatened to do it again with Israel and start afresh with Moses. Moses appealed to God not to do it and He relented.

Moses writes, "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom," (Psalm 90:11-12).

Life is precious beyond words. None of us has any idea how long it will last. No matter our age, we could be here today, gone tomorrow. Our individual life could be far longer than we expect, or far shorter. We may live out a "normal" lifespan, or we may not. It's all in God's hands. Thousands of otherwise innocent people have been blown to bits by suicide bombers. More than 3000 people, unsuspectingly going about their business, were suddenly terminated by terrorists on September 11 in New York's Twin Towers. In the last century, millions of citizens were slaughtered by their own leaders in acts of "democide." Millions more were killed in war. Life on planet earth can be fragile and uncertain.

Human vs. Animal Life

Man is not merely "the highest animal." Man alone was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Man alone has a conscience. Man is a moral creature, not a dumb brute.

An animal is governed by instinct; it does what comes naturally. Man is governed by his conscience and by his intelligence. Man chooses between good and evil. An animal has no sense of good and evil. If it's a predator it preys on prey animals. When a lioness tears the throat out of a wildebeest, it doesn't see it as a terrible act of cruelty. For the predator, it's a natural act, based on instinct.

When man murders man, it is an act of homicide worthy of the death penalty (Genesis 9:6). Mankind alone is called upon to protect the sanctity of life. We are instructed to treat with kindness the creatures over which we have been given dominion (Proverbs 12:10).

To wantonly destroy a human life is to obliterate a part of the image of God on the earth (same verse). Those who slaughter people without conscience are serving the purposes of Satan, who was "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). The point is, because evil stalks the earth, any one of us could become its victim when we are least expecting it. The six million hapless Jews who died in the Holocaust had no idea that the demonized Adolph Hitler could perpetrate

such cold, irrational cruelty. Devout Jews, great Torah scholars, beautiful children, helpless babies, elderly grandparents, talented scientists and musicians were all treated as lambs to the slaughter. But the barbarians who did it to them lived on — at least for a time, then they too were gone (study Psalm 73).

Life, precious though it is, can be suddenly terminated by evil people, deadly disease, accidents, attacks by wild animals, floods, tsunamis, volcanoes, hurricanes, tornadoes or earthquakes. "Time and chance" happens to us all (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

So what do we conclude? Simply this: Man alone is created in the image of God. Man alone is gifted with a sense of morality and ethics. Man has a conscience (assuming it hasn't been seared). Therefore man alone can and should self-consciously manage his own life — however long, however brief. Man can overrule his drives, appetites and instincts and bring them under control.

Because our lifespan is unknown and uncertain, it behooves each one of us to make the most of our brief time on this planet. Each of us should take seriously the admonition of Ecclesiastes 9:10: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, wither thou goest." No matter how long we've lived, time is running out.

We can choose to squander our lives, or make the most of them. As Paul wrote, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise. Redeeming the time, because the days are evil," (Ephesians 6:15-16). If ever there were evil days, we are living in them. The dangers are real and growing. To the world's barbarians, Christians and Jews are prey. This makes our lives all the more precious. We must protect and actively manage them — maximizing every waking moment. Unlike animals, we can, and should, make moral choices. Our real enemies are not flesh and blood, but wicked spirits in high places (Ephesians 6:12). Evil is as evil does.

In whatever time we have "under the sun," let us live life to the fullest. Keep clean. Avoid the contaminations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Live the moral life. Do all the good you can get away with. Try to leave the part of the world you influence a better place than you found it. Yield to the leadings of the Spirit of God. Pray about everything. Rejoice in your calling and enjoy the material blessings God has given you. Eat, drink and be merry when you can, always giving God thanks. Actively manage your life to the glory of God.

Brian Knowles is a professional artist and writer and is a former magazine editor. Brian is an avid student of the Bible and a frequent contributor to the Association for Christian Development website (www.godward.org).

Book Review

Too Long in the Sun

Author Richard Rives relates the fascinating history of how mankind turned away from God to embraced Sun worship. The story begins shortly after the Flood and continues into our day. This easy-to-read, 256-page book is chock full of detailed information of how the true worship of God was co-opted soon after the time of Noah. Sun worship has donned many disguises over the millennia, but has continued to maintain the same essential nature and purpose: to turn man's back toward God and direct his gaze toward the eastern sky and rising sun.

If you have ever been confused by the names of ancient gods and goddesses, Rives lays out a clear path from one to the next, to the next. The names of the gods change from culture to culture, but their function never deviates from its purpose—to turn the hearts and minds of each new generation from the Creator God to the “Bringer of Light,” Lucifer, embodied in the worship of the Sun.

According to Rives, it all started with Nimrod.

The example of deification of monarchs seems to have begun with Nimrod. Under the title of Bilu Nipru, or Bel Nimrod, the worship of Nimrod by one name or another has passed down through history to present times.

Because of man's rebellion, languages were confused [see Genesis 11:1–9] and the people of the earth were scattered.

It is important to note that the rebellion took place in the kingdom of Nimrod. Many historians have identified the biblical family of Ham, Cush, and Nimrod as the source of post flood false religions.... The facts presented [in this book] will reveal that the sun worship of most ancient times, known by man as the Chaldean mysteries, is still being practices, unknowingly, by many claiming the title of “Christian.”

There is no question that elements of sun worship has had a very powerful influence over the development of Christianity through the ages. After the death of the apostles there was a very powerful tug-of-war between the Church in the East and the Church in Rome, the center of power in the Roman Empire and the focal point of sun worship throughout the Empire. In its drive to bring uniformity of worship to all parts of the Empire, the emperor placed himself in the center of the debate that eventually melded Christianity and sun worship. Even though there is no credible evidence that Emperor Constantine ever genuinely accepted Christ as his Savior, it was his efforts that brought this hybrid form of Christianity to the forefront and made it the official religion of the Empire.

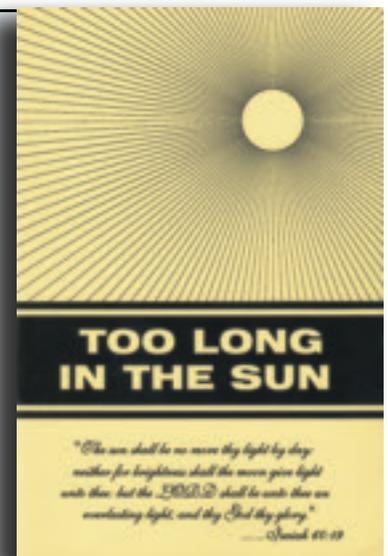
While claiming to be “Christian,” Constantine maintained the title “Pontifus Maximus,” the high priest of paganism. His coins were inscribed: “SOL INVICTO COMITI” (COMMITTED TO THE INVINCIBLE SUN).

The importance of the actions of Constantine cannot be overstated, as during his reign pagan sun worship was blended with the worship of the Creator, and officially entitled “Christianity.”

The back cover of the book states, “**Too Long in the Sun** is packed with details which relate to the apostasy of the ‘Last Days,’ prophesied by both the Old and New Testaments. Revealed are the astonishing facts about the ancient ‘Mysteries’ and their Satanic influence upon present-day thought.”

I heartily recommend **Too Long in the Sun**. If you would like to order a copy of this interesting and informative book, just call us toll free at (888) 687-5191, or write us at **Bible Sabbath Association, 802 N.W. 21st Ave., Battle Ground, WA 98604**. The BSA member price is \$10. The price is \$13 for nonmembers, which includes \$3 for shipping and handling.

—Kenneth Ryland



Westby: "God's Board Room, Part 2" cont. from page 4.

"I wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion.... Yahweh brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began" (Proverbs 8:12, 22-23).

Six times (!) in this chapter Wisdom emphasizes her existence before creation, much like the Word or Logos is personified as preexisting in the prologue of John's gospel.

I [wisdom] was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep.... I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind (Proverbs 8:27-30).

All of God's works are the product of his wisdom but such wisdom is not easily found; it's not lying along the roadside. It must be sought. In the surprise personification of wisdom in the Job saga (chapter 28), the message is clear: Humans can find hidden treasures in the earth such as sapphires and nuggets of gold, but they cannot find true wisdom, the truth behind all reality (vss. 12, 20). Ultimate wisdom is inaccessible, known only to God. It can be accessed by man when he wholeheartedly seeks God; "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (vs. 28).⁴

Wisdom is the fundamental principle which governs all God has made including the apparatus he has constructed to manage and serve all that he has made. Yahweh has implanted meaning and purpose into everything he has created. This is the wisdom of God and he does not intend it to remain hidden. He invites us to learn of him, seek his wisdom, and obey his word. One day we will be part of his heavenly administration ruling with him and Christ over the expanding cosmos. We may want to pay closer attention to the wisdom of God's rule.

"He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son" (Rev. 21:7).

A Heavenly Headquarters

Let's take a look at what "the only wise God"⁵ has revealed about his cosmic administration. Yahweh is frequently depicted as enthroned over an assembly of divine beings who serve to dispense his decrees and messages. They are variously called the "assembly of the holy ones" (Ps. 89:6) or God's "council" (Jer. 23:18, 22; Ps. 89:8; Job 15:8). Some times these angelic personalities are referred to as "sons of god(s)" (Ps. 29:1 or "mighty ones) or "all the gods" as in Ps. 97:7 where even unrighteous or false gods may be in view.

Our first introduction to the heavenly host is found in the first chapter of Genesis where God says "Let us

make man in our image..." (vs. 26). Modern scholarship rightly understands this plural "us" as the Creator-King announcing his crowning work to members of his heavenly court. Yahweh is surrounded by his heavenly court, the created lesser deities who make up the divine entourage. They remain in the background, for the most part, as all attention must be given to the God who rules them. Mankind has been tempted to focus on these supernatural beings (including the hostile fallen angels) and sects have developed elaborate angelologies of specific ranks and hierarchies of divine beings. A practice condemned by God.

These supernatural, supraterrrestrial beings though clearly inferior to the uncreated God Almighty, serve in a variety of functions as part of the divine retinue. They form a military force that fought alongside God in times past. The phrase "YHWH Sebaot" is Yahweh of Hosts or Armies. These divine beings serves as messengers and envoys of God, they lead in praise and adoration of God thus setting a high example for humans to follow, and serve as councilors and a myriad of functions beyond our earth-bound comprehension. They serve God with great speed, intelligence, and wisdom and assist in every way to fulfill God's will.

Yahweh has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. Praise Yahweh, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding who obey his word. Praise Yahweh, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise Yahweh, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise Yahweh, O my soul (Ps. 103:19-23).

This vast "heavenly host" of super-beings, spirit powers, some of mixed form, half human, half animal, winged, full of eyes, etc, but all creatures of great brilliance and skill, have been made subject to Jesus Christ, who, as the writer of Hebrews describes, is the appointed heir of all things his Father rules.

When God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire" (Heb. 1:6-7).

Flames of Fire

God's boardroom has been described by a few devout humans who struggled to capture the sights and sounds. They received visions of the inner workings of God's throne which, though highly symbolic, convey the feeling any of us might take away from such supernatural exposure. Simply summarized, God's throne and heavenly host fairly burst forth with scary pyrotechnics, deafening sounds, other-worldly creatures, but also with awe-inspiring beauty, rainbows of color, translucent glass-like pavement of jewels, joyful music, purposeful activities moving forward at blinding

Continued on Page 14

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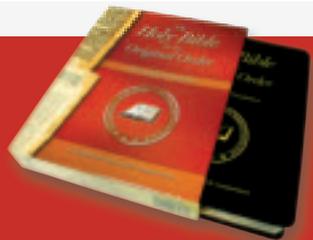
canonized and by whom? Other **Commentaries** and **Appendices** answer critical questions such as: When was Jesus born? What is the true Sabbath Day? How did Jesus Christ fulfill the Law and the Prophets? When was Jesus crucified? How long was He in the tomb? When was He resurrected? What does it mean to be born again? What are works of law? What are the true teachings of the early apostolic New Testament Church that Jesus founded? Also, **biblical and historical chronologies** show an accurate timeline from the creation of Adam and Eve to the present. There are **detailed footnotes** and **marginal references** explaining hard-to-understand passages of Scripture.

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Westby: "God's Board Room, Part 2" cont. from page 12.

speeds, and above it all seated on a majestic throne, the Creator, the Heavenly Father in his full glory, his face radiating like the Sun.

Daniel had such visions. So did Moses, Isaiah, and Ezekiel who records the amazing sights of God's throne, great jeweled wealth, living creatures, moving wheels and much fire and lightening⁶. New Testament (NT) leaders like Paul saw the vault of heaven (carried up into the 3rd heavens and hearing "inexpressible things"⁷), and John saw more visions than all others—the entire book of Revelation.

Walter Eichrodt, the great German Old Testament (OT) scholar, comments on Yahweh's heavenly boardroom. "Here [Isaiah 6] before the eyes of the prophet waiting in the Temple the earthly sanctuary opens up into the heavenly throne-room wherein Yahweh holds council as king in the midst of his celestial courtiers.... And in 1 Kings 22:19, in which Yahweh as king of heaven takes counsel with the entire heavenly host, standing beside him to right and left, how best to deceive Ahab."⁸ In Job 1 and 2 we see another heavenly council meeting where Satan attends and participates.

One of the most striking is the theophany to the elders of Israel in Exodus 24:10-11, when on the mountain they "Saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank." Clearly, they are having a covenant meal ratifying God's rule over the nation.

There is strong evidence that God moves about his creation and is attentive to his people and what is going on in their lives. Yet rarely is his presence evident to mankind in general. When he makes his presence evident he shields man from the full force of his glory/energy as was the case with Moses and the elders of Israel. Since the Garden of Eden, God, in his wisdom, has chosen to remove his "evident presence" from mankind, not his actual presence. Mankind, unwisely, has been tempted to think God has gone away and is no longer involved in human affairs. Nothing could be further from reality.

God is likened to a consuming fire⁹ and we are warned that one cannot behold God in his full glory and live to tell the story. Moses negotiated Yahweh into giving him a shielded peek at His glory and even that left Moses' skin glowing for many days following. People were afraid to look at Moses.¹⁰

Reality, Not a Stage Prop

The throne scene in all its intimidating presence is not a stage prop to impress humans. It is beyond the capacity of mortals to see, much less enter the heavenly

sanctuary, so impressing is not God's object. Only by way of God-given visions have mortals "seen" where God dwells. Those who did were shaken to the core by fright and awed to the point of coming apart, thinking they might die as Isaiah exclaimed, "Woe to me, for I am undone!" (Isa. 6:5). Those chosen few granted a peek into God's chambers were commissioned to record it for mankind's knowledge. The clear take-away message: God is real, active, and Almighty!

The Divine Boardroom visions, even in their profound symbolism, picture actual reality, not fake stage scenery or special effects. They show the mighty Kingdom of God at work. Jesus said, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (Jn. 5:17). The heavenly visions picture God at work, in council with his angelic host, directing the myriad millions of specialized, sapient beings storming forth to carry out God's will, sustaining the entire cosmos, and carrying out his plan on earth.

The visions present a dazzling hub of activity possessing such an energy magnitude that human observers could describe it only in earthly phenomenal terms: thunder, lighting, rumblings like quaking earth, fire, smoke, all punctuated with loud voices, commands, trumpet blasts, and extraterrestrial music. Hollywood at its high-tech best would prove woefully weak to capture what the prophets saw.

Why have these visions been preserved for God-fearers over the centuries? The answer should be plain: they tell an important truth about God and his kingdom. When we pray it is important for us to know that God hears and acts, and commands all power to do his good will. As a child of God we can be confident of his love and care for us. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" asks Paul. The apostle is also seeing the risen Christ at God's side, both committed to loving us and doing what it will take to bring us into their everlasting presence.

Such truth about God, which these visions reveal, should give us boldness to live our faith. There is nothing to fear. Paul continues: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:31, 38-39). Did Paul cover everything? I think so.

God the Judge of Good and Bad Angels

Psalm 82 offers a treasure of insight into God's management of heavenly powers—especially the evil ones responsible for most of the horrible suffering and injustice on earth. This short psalm takes us into God's court of heaven where an "assembly of gods" has been called into account.

"God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgment among the gods" (vs. 1).

The psalmist takes us in a few words behind and beyond the present evils of this world, to portray God's ultimate and unbounded jurisdiction, His delegation of power, his diagnosis of the human condition and his drastic intentions to settle accounts.¹¹ These lesser deities (gods, angelic beings) are being reprimanded for injustice. These "gods" are "principalities and powers, the world rulers of this present darkness," as Paul describes them in Ephesians 6:12. Behind the wrongdoing in the world is not merely human initiative but supernatural initiative. There are several OT references¹² to such potentates, good and bad for whom the NT uses the term "angels" (Rev. 12:7).

This assembly brought before God's boardroom is not there for consultation, but to be judged and condemned. It is a dramatic court scene that is prophetic and joins with scenes from the book of Revelation. There is rebuke and warning, but the sentence is yet to be carried out (vs. 7).

"How long" (vs. 2), is the groan from suffering mankind oppressed by evil, injustice, ignorance, and corrupt rule. God, at a time in the past, appointed them "gods" but they rebelled, sinned, and brought oppression and evil upon the earth. For that they are being judged. God has been patient and is letting their appointed time of rule run to its scheduled end. Then, says the Almighty One, the Only True God:

"You will die! like mere men; You will fall like every other ruler" (vs. 7).

These ruler-gods or leaders to whom God had delegated subordinate heavenly powers proved morally incompetent in their governance, they perverted justice, oppressed humans, persecuted the righteous and fertilized every form of evil. Daniel 10 pictures each of the nations as having their own heavenly "leader." There is a supernatural being responsible for Persia, another for Greece, and so on. Like any top executive, God can (and does) delegate authority to subordinate leaders but cannot delegate ultimate responsibility to them. When things go wrong, the "buck stops" with God. He must act to make things right. He will. These criminal angels will die.

From the flood story onwards the patience of God is oriented toward perfecting salvation, not condoning the corruption which meanwhile abuses the earth. But the judgment of God will be complete and everyone will give account for what he has done—especially these "gods" being addressed in Psalm 82. They are going to die for their sins. Yes, Yahweh, who made angels will annihilate those who forsook their God-given purpose. As for their death sentence, the NT confirms that the devil and his angels will share the fate of human rebels (Matt 25:41; Rev 20:10, 14f).

The final judgment of the "gods" is death, thrown into the same Lake of Fire pit that burned up their human counterparts. There they will die as did their

human disciples, the Beast and False Prophet. For mortals it is the second death, for these apostate "gods" it will be their annihilation. Jesus warned, "Fear not them [men] who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One [God] who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Gk. *gehenna*, a fiery place of final punishment).¹³

Justice Waits No Longer

The psalm ends with a prayerful appeal: "Arise, God, exercise authority for the earth, because you yourself own all the nations" (vs. 8). So much for the devil's claim in Lk. 4:6, when inviting Jesus to worship him, that he owned "all the kingdoms of the world" and could "give it to whom I will." God owns all the earth and directed angels to assist him in its management. Some of these "gods" exercised their free will to become criminals and try to take for themselves that which never rightly belonged to them.

This appeal for justice and restitution (vs. 8) is echoed many times in Scripture. It is the cry of the martyred saints who symbolically cry out from under the sacrificial altar, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"¹⁴ Psalm 82 ends where Revelation ends, appealing to God to bring his kingdom to earth, to stop misrule, to bring peace.

Revelation pictures a representative of God's "boardroom," a powerful angel straddling earth's land and sea, delivering God's long-awaited answer to a groaning creation:

He raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay!" But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.¹⁵

Jesus asks and answers the big question: "And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly."¹⁶ Isaiah wrote: "In that day Yahweh will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below.... For Yahweh Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously."¹⁷

The New Rulers

Our survey of God's angelic servants and boardroom of high counselors is brief and incomplete, yet I think it clearly illustrates that God is not a loner, that he delegates real authority and the power to do specifically appointed jobs. God has chosen to *work with*, to *rule with* his created beings.

God is free and made all his thinking-creatures free as well—angels included. Some used that freedom to oppose God's good and righteous rule and stand guilty for the evil and injustice they have caused. Their allotted reign will soon expire, as will they. The vast majority of angels, however, freely chose to remain faithful to their Maker, embracing fully his Grand Plan, and wholeheartedly worshiping and loving Him. God cherishes freedom of choice even if it means that some people (and angels) will choose wrongly. He wants his servants to freely choose to love and obey him because they have internalized the goodness, kindness, mercy, justice, and love that is his heart and character, not because they've been forced to, or didn't have a choice in the matter.

A major part of that Grand Plan involves you and me becoming a new order of rulers, subordinate to God and Christ, but superior to the entire heavenly host. To the saints God will delegate unprecedented honor, authority, and power. We will rule and reign with Christ over the nations as legitimate sons and daughters of the Almighty himself. In this life we will have exercised our freedom of choice to choose God's Way and remain faithful to that choice to the end. This choice God will reward abundantly.

The rebellion of Satan and his minions will not be repeated. God will have his children freely choose his Way *prior* to giving them supernatural bodies and powers. That choice is worked out daily as we overcome evil/sin with goodness and live a life of righteous service to God and man. Jesus said,

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.¹⁸

Angels will serve those of us enthroned by God and Christ. God wants to share with us all that he has, which is everything that exists. He invites us to join him in making all things new.

Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them....He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" (Rev. 21:3, 5)

When we pray, our prayers penetrate that clear blue sea of crystal sapphire into the very celestial throne of Yahweh and his firstborn Son. God hears and will answer. Soon, we will see God face to face¹⁹ and behold not in vision but in person the heavenly grandeur of his magnificent kingdom and the marvels of his angelic servants.

At that time he will honor us in many ways, with banquets, new names, crowns, and delegate to us a position in the Divine Kingdom. God loves to give, to share, to honor.

What will your job be?

Our God is wisdom personified and he will make your position a unique and perfect fit for you. God has been forming you into his divine character and image and he has tasked your elder brother, Jesus the Christ, to see to it your placement is lovingly, perfectly

prepared.²⁰ We will be thrilled beyond description and overcome with joy unspeakable. Thy kingdom come! Let us be about our Father's business.

End Notes

- ¹ Personification is no stranger to the Hebrew Bible. Justice leads Israel out of Babylon (Isa. 58:4); in Ps. 84:11 kindness and truth meet, justice and peace kiss. Wine is arrogant (Prov. 20:1). But personification of wisdom is simply unique in the Bible, both for its quantity and quality. See *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 6, p 926.
- ² In Proverbs 1:20-33 Lady Wisdom is portrayed in the style of an OT prophet. Wisdom=Heb. *hokma*; Gk. *sophia*, both feminine gender nouns.
- ³ Lev. 26:12; Jer. 7:23, 11:1, 4, 30:22; Deut. 26:16-19; Ezk. 36:26-28; 2 Cor. 6:16, and many, many more.
- ⁴ See also Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; Psalms 111:10
- ⁵ Romans 16:27
- ⁶ See Ezekiel chapters one and ten.
- ⁷ 2 Cor. 12:1-4
- ⁸ Eichrodt, Walter, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, Old Testament Library series, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1967, p 193. See his entire section on the celestial world and Yahweh's dwelling place: pages 186-209.
- ⁹ Deut 4:24; Heb 12:29
- ¹⁰ Exodus 34:29-35. The radiance was refreshed when Moses went privately to speak with God, but it eventually faded from Moses' face.
- ¹¹ See Derek Kidner's fine summary of Psalm 82 in the *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* series (Vol. 14b, pp 296-299, IVP, 1975).
- ¹² Isa. 24:21; Dan. 10:13, 20f; 12:1. These are shown as princes rather than judges though it is for their unjust rule and judgment they are being examined and condemned. Occasionally the OT uses the term "gods" or "sons of God" referring to angels (see Ps. 8:5; Job 1:6; 38:7).
- ¹³ Matt. 10:28. Man can kill the physical body but God remembers/preserves life for future resurrection (Col. 3:5). God alone can resurrect the dead and God alone can annihilate forever the life and memory of both evil mortals and evil spirits.
- ¹⁴ Rev. 6:10. God said the "blood of Abel cried out" and here the blood "under the altar," belonging to the righteous, cries out for vindication and for judgment upon the wicked. God remembers every life, every deed, and he will justly settle all accounts.
- ¹⁵ Rev. 10:5-7
- ¹⁶ Luke 18:8
- ¹⁷ Isa. 24:21, 23
- ¹⁸ Rev. 3:21. See also 5:10; 20:6
- ¹⁹ 1 John 3:1-3
- ²⁰ John 14:1-4

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This verse, John 13:35, tells us what people are supposed to see when they look at Christians: "...you have love one to another." One characteristic that distinguishes Christians from other groups in society is that we tend to look at ourselves as a community. Regardless of race or ethnic background we feel a responsibility to others who share our faith, and that is a good thing.

Being a Christian is not just about you and God. It places you squarely in the middle of a community of believers. The one factor that we all share is the Spirit of Christ which lives in us. That Spirit works in us to produce an active concern for the welfare of our brothers and sisters in Christ. It also gives us a sense of compassion for those outside of the Church who are struggling to overcome the same weaknesses and sins that drove us to seek Christ in the first place. It is God's purpose, if possible, to bring every human being on earth into a relationship with Christ and through that relationship into His eternal kingdom. These goals bind us to each other and to the purpose of our being: to lead all mankind into God's kingdom.

Some churches have a stronger bond among members than others. Those are the churches that are the best examples of what the Church of God should be. The hallmark of committed, biblical Christians is their yearning to see God's best and highest goals worked out in the lives of their fellow Christians. When a brother or sister is sick, they visit them and pray for them. When someone is in danger, they save them. When one is weak, they seek to strengthen the weak one. As Jesus said,

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the

eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matthew 25:31-46).

When Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples...", He was telling us that the mark of a true Christian is not doctrine, but fellowship.

The Structure of Salvation

One of the problems with the "spiritual, but not religious" movement is that those who follow this philosophy can make up their own rules about who God is and what he requires of those who seek Him. This type of thinking is both convenient and lazy—each doing what it right in his own eyes. If there is no guilt or condemnation for any type of behavior (except to judge others), then our relationship with God can be made into anything that suits our fancy. We can excuse anything and every indiscretion or sin.

That is not the way God operates. It is true that He is willing to forgive any sin and wipe away our guilt, but He gives us the instructions on how that is to be done. The first thing for all Christians to remember is that Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the doorway to salvation. If you don't go through Him, you cannot be saved.

Think of it this way: You and several family members are lost in the forest. The foliage is so thick that it is impossible even to know which direction you need to go to get through the forest to your long-lost home, a fabulous estate on which your ancestors once lived and worked quite happily. Your forebears were forced to leave the estate, however, when they tried to steal something that didn't belong to them. You heard stories from your father and grandfather that this wondrous manor really exists and that you have to go through a treacherous and dangerous woodland to get there, but that's all you know. You set out through the woods on your own, thinking that you need no help to reach this estate, in spite of the fact that your family received word from the owner that the only one who can lead you there is the owner's son. Many have attempted to make the trek through the forest to the manor, but lost their way and died from one of the many dangers that lurk there to trap the unsuspecting victim. Luckily, the owner's son went into the forest looking for you, expecting that you would try to make it on your own. He greets you with a smile, and says,

“Follow me.” You now have a decision to make. Do you follow the owner’s son to his father’s estate, or refuse the help and continue on your own?

Jesus said, “In my father’s house are many mansions [or abodes]” (John 14:2). The only way to get to that mansion is through God’s Son, Jesus. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that enters not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber” (John 10:1). “Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7).

God has rules and parameters that He uses to offer us salvation. There are no shortcuts. “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (John 14:6). The fluffy sentiment that says all good people go to heaven is a myth. Our Heavenly Father provided only one way for us to get into His Kingdom—through His Son, Jesus.

The way to God’s salvation is not formless and does not conform itself to our wants or desires. It requires change that comes from repentance—a sincere commitment to turn our lives around and go the other way. “He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:10-12). What is “evil?” It is living contrary to the will of God and His laws. As Jesus said, “If you would enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17).

The Benefits of Belonging to a Church

Apart from the fact that the writer of the book of Hebrews stated that we must not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, especially as we see the nearness of the coming of Christ for His church, there are practical benefits to Christians meeting together.

- We form bonds of friendship with those who have the same hope of eternal life.
- We are able to see the needs of other Christians and respond to those needs, either materially or through prayer.
- We are able to encourage others not to lose hope, in spite of the difficult circumstances that each of us encounters from time to time in our lives.
- We learn forgiveness and the proper treatment of others.
- We live in a way that has been time-tested over the centuries that yields the fruit of goodness, thrift, and a strong common morality.

- In coming together each week to sing hymns of praise to God and share our experiences of God’s goodness in our lives, we bind ourselves to the central core of our common belief of God’s salvation through Christ.
- Jesus said that wherever two or three are gathered in His name, He would be in their midst (Matthew 18:20).
- The “niceness” of the “spiritual, but not religious” myth pales in comparison to the Christian teaching on hospitality and compassion.

God is seeking not just our obedience, but our love, a love that He was willing to express in advance with the sacrifice of His Son. As one writer in *The Christian Century* put it: “faith [is] a way of life born out of love for God rather than a set of religious propositions to which we subscribe....God is far less concerned with religion than with identity and relationship.” That relationship is nurtured through God’s demands and rules, which were set in place for the purpose of building a close fellowship with Him and His Son. Expecting God to live by our own rules and excuses violates the very nature of the relationship and intimate fellowship that God seeks to have with us and desires that we should have with other Christians.

—Kenneth Ryland

School Rejects Lesbian Couple’s Daughter

BEDFORD, Texas (Aug. 20, 2010 DFWFox4 News) — A Bedford couple is upset that their daughter was denied admission to a private Episcopal school. The school says it does not agree with their lesbian relationship. Jill and Tracy Harrison were married in Canada in 2006.

School officials said they assumed Tracy was a man. But after the couple attended parent’s night, Olivia, the daughter, was denied admission.

In a statement the school said its decision was based on what it considered best for all students and “in conformity with scripture and our own church’s doctrinal standards.”

“We regret the disappointment the mother feels. It is clear, however, that enrolling the child in a traditional Christian school, such as St. Vincent’s School, would not foster her own personal values at home. And it might undermine the moral instruction of our clergy and teachers in the minds of our school’s students and parents. Our prayers are with Olivia and her mother,” the school said.

The school says it would also deny admission to children of a heterosexual couple living together outside of marriage.

Living in the Time of Miracles

by Janet Short



Some people of faith say they see miracles every day, or at least often. They will insist the God of miracles never changes and point out scriptures to back that up. Personal testimonies from many today confirm this.

A number of believing people will contend miracles ended with the demise of the Apostles. They note that miracles of the Bible seem to come in clumps: when Moses delivered his nation from bondage for instance, then also during the time of the prophets. Again, there were a lot of miracles accompanying Christ's ministry and the formation of the early church. Those who believe the time of miracles has past will assert that God uses miraculous events to transition from one era to another, but such events are not needed, nor to be expected, in this day and age. Some may allow that another time of miracles will occur at, or immediately preceding, the return of Christ.

Still others think all so-called miracles can be explained by science or logic and dismiss such claims as superstition. This group includes the skeptics who've postulated how the Red Sea that Israel crossed on their journey from Egypt was actually the Reed Sea and that the water was stopped by an earthquake. They see miraculous healings as either something accomplished by science or as a coincidental thing that would have happened naturally.

This last view is not often heard in church circles or among those of faith. It does occur sometimes, however, and serves to illustrate that the subject is not a simple one. This view does not necessarily indicate a lack of faith in God, but is often accompanied by distrust of the Bible as being the truly inspired words of God.

I was surprised to learn that one of this nation's great statesmen, Thomas Jefferson, shared this belief and even went so far as to scissor all the written accounts of Jesus' miracles out of his New Testament.¹ Jefferson's version of the Bible did not include the resurrection of Jesus, but ended with his body being

placed in the grave.² He believed the Bible true, but thought its stories should not be taken literally.

It is likely that some of the controversy surrounding this topic is due to a variety of meanings applied to the word miracle. Some use the word loosely, to describe everyday things like a beautiful sunrise, the birth of a child, or a car accident with no serious injury. Although we may appreciate these kinds of happenings and thank God for them, this definition is not universally accepted.

Granted that God is ultimately responsible for these marvelous but commonplace occurrences, I do not generally apply the word miracle to them. Yet I do believe in miracles.

Most of us who believe in modern day miracles have experienced something miraculous or have had occurrences related to us by those we trust.

Those most skeptical among us will not accept the use of the *m* word unless some natural law is suspended and something happens that cannot be explained by coincidence or the laws of science but only by the intervention

of God. With this definition there may be no real miracles.

Those who investigate claims of miracles and supernatural healings find that these are difficult, perhaps impossible, to verify. The authenticity of any miracle is not easily demonstrated to others. Yet those who experience them cannot readily be persuaded that God hasn't intervened in a supernatural way.

By the very definition of the word, miracles are something "held to be supernatural in origin or an act of God."³ Notice the words "held to be" make miracles subjective, or defined by anecdote and personal experience.

Most of us who believe in modern day miracles have experienced something miraculous or have had occurrences related to us by those we trust. One incident may be explained by science, the law of averages, or luck. But the more times one experiences the unexplainable or hears about miracles from someone he gives credence to, the more decidedly one is likely to affirm them as miracles.

Here is my recollection of one event I define as a miracle. My family was getting ready for church and I was having a “bad hair” day—just grumping about everything. As I carried a pot of soup out to the trunk of the car, the wind was whipping trash down the street, my skirt over my head, and my bad hair into an explosive mess.

I stomped back in whining about the wind. “Why does the wind blow? I understand a gentle breeze to pollinate our crops. Rain, sun, lightning—but why did God make this blustery wind? It serves no good purpose I can see!”

My children looked at me wide-eyed. My husband gently tried to calm my temper with explanations.

We were into our fifth month of his unemployment. The cupboards were bare, utility bills late, mortgage payment put off twice, and no end in sight. Worry and tension were getting the best of me. Thank God we didn’t often have days when both of us weren’t coping. Today was my day. It didn’t really matter what anyone said—I was going to have a bad morning.

I gathered up an armload of Bibles and banged back through the front door. A piece of trash was caught in the hedge next to the driveway. That’s what this wind is good for—blows my hair, torments my skirt, and dumps trash in the yard. I put the books in the backseat and turned to snatch the paper from the greenery. It was a twenty-dollar bill.

I stood for just a moment with my mouth open. Here was enough money to feed my family for a week if I was frugal. I pictured beans, rice, cornmeal, and oil in my pantry. Slowly it dawned on me. The wind put that money in our hedge. God made the wind blow today.

The authenticity of any miracle is bound in the hearts and lives of those who experience it. When people say something is a miracle, they may not be trying to claim that God broke the laws of nature but only that God allowed or arranged for something to happen because He cares so much for us. That is why we will always be living in a time of miracles.

End Notes

- 1) “The Mystery of Miracles” by Bill Newcott, writing in AARP, The Magazine, January & February 2009
- 2) <http://www.angelfire.com/co/JeffersonBible/jeffb17.html>
- 3) Houghton Mifflin American Heritage Dictionary (eReference, 2009)

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The One Who Is Strong to Save

“Who is this coming from Edom, coming from Bozrah, his garments stained red? Under his clothes his muscles stand out, and he strides, stooping in his might. It is I, who announce that right has won the day, I, who am strong to save” (Isa. 63:1, N.E.B.).

Isaiah 63:1-6 is a Messianic prophecy of Christ's victory over the forces of evil. Christ is here depicted as coming from Edom, representative of the enemies of God. His garments are reddened by the blood of the conflict, but He returns from it victorious.

The Edomites, descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother, persistently took an attitude of hostility toward their kinsmen. When Israel neared the borders of the Promised Land and asked the Edomites for the right of passage through their country, Edom replied, “Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword” (Num. 20:18). After Israel settled in Canaan, when war broke out between them and any of the surrounding nations, the Edomites always seemed to side with the enemies of God's people and rejoiced when they were defeated. Full of pride and unnatural hatred, they became a type of sin and rebellion against God. In Isaiah 63:1–6 we have an allegorical representation of Christ's battle with Satan for the dominion of the world. In verse 1, as He returns from the scene of the fearful struggle, His garments are stained, not only with the blood of His enemies, but with His own, as well.

Verse 3 also alludes to this terrible conflict: “I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me.” These expressions refer especially to Christ's struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane. His disciples should have prayed for Him and encouraged Him in that dark hour; instead they fell asleep, and He had to struggle on alone, yet not alone, for, though He fought the battle singlehandedly, His Father gave Him strength, not to live, but to drink the death cup, “that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14).

Have you ever gone through a period of discouragement, when you seemed to be struggling alone with the powers of darkness and your prayers did not seem to be getting through? Jesus had such a feeling, only infinitely worse. Yet He did not give up. He persevered in prayer, praying for deliverance from death, yet submissive to His Father's will. It was this that gave Him the victory.

If we would be victorious in our struggles with the powers of darkness we must follow Christ's example. We have the assurance that He who is strong to save will be by our side to give us victory.

Donald Mansell, New Every Morning, page 111. Review & Herald Publishing Association. 1981.

Marital Strife and Your Health

By Rusty Wright

Special to ASSIST News Service

MOUNT HERMON, CA (ANS) — “Is Marriage Good for Your Health?” asked the New York *Times* headline. It depends, says current research. If you’re married, being happily married seems to matter most. So learn to fight fair.

For years, scientists have known that married people tend to be healthier and live longer than the unmarried. But recent research indicates that the quality of the marriage may be what counts. People in troubled relationships can end up having more health problems than the never married.

Stress and Your Immune System

Stress and unresolved conflict can weaken the immune system. Hmmm. Maybe that’s why when I’m less kind than I should be and my wife and I snap at—or ignore—each other, I sometimes sense a cold coming on. (Excuse me while I sneeze.)

Or when I interrupt her by trying to finish her sentences—especially when my assumptions of what she would say are incorrect—her icy (she says “wounded”) silence makes my neck hot and my stomach tight.

The *Times* article surveyed contemporary research on relationships and health. Pneumonia, surgery, cancer and heart attacks are rarer among marrieds than unmarrieds. But according to the *Times*, “One recent study suggests that a stressful marriage can be as bad for the heart as a regular smoking habit.”

The article quotes marriage historian Stephanie Coontz: “It is the relationship, not the institution, that is key.”

Newlywed Games

A novel experiment by Ronald Glaser and Jan Kiecolt-Glaser at Ohio State University College of Medicine arranged for ninety newlywed couples to have their blood drawn during discussions of potentially volatile issues like housework, sex and in-laws. Sure enough, relationship hostility saw immune-system declines. A subsequent study saw marital hostility correlate with slower healing of skin wounds.

The message: Spousal hostility can negatively affect your marriage and your body. “Try harder to make [the relationship] better,” advises University of Chicago sociologist Linda J. Waite. “If you learn ... how to manage disagreement early,” she says in the *Times*, “then you can avoid the decline in marital happiness that follows from the drip, drip of negative interactions.”

Wise Words

Some of its simply Divine advice ...

“Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry.”

“Be quick to listen and slow to speak or to get angry. If you are angry, you cannot do any of the good things that God wants done.”

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Words, of course, affect the emotional tone of discussions. University of Utah psychologist Timothy W. Smith found that among couples married an average of 36 years, arguments that lacked any warmth—or that emphasized controlling language—were associated with increased heart risk. “Difficulties in marriage seem to be nearly universal,” notes Smith. But, as my wife observes, nastiness need not be.

So, conflict is inevitable, but fight fair. It’s better for your relationship and your health. And it makes making up much more fun.

Rusty Wright is an author and lecturer who has spoken on six continents. He holds Bachelor of Science (psychology) and Master of Theology degrees from Duke and Oxford universities, respectively. His website is: RustyWright.com.

The Church in the World

Pastor in Russian Republic of Dagestan Killed *Media had spread call to take action against him for his work among Muslims.*

CompassDirect News

ISTANBUL, July 28 (CDN) — A pastor in the Russian republic of Dagestan known for founding the biggest Protestant church in the region and for successfully reaching out to Muslims has been killed by unidentified gunmen, local authorities have confirmed.

Artur Suleimanov, 49, pastor of Hosanna Christian Church in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan, was shot on the evening of July 15 while leaving his church building.

The identity of the shooters remains unclear, but in the weeks leading up to the killing, Dagestan media broadcast calls for people to take measures against Suleimanov because he was too “active” and converted ethnic Muslims.

Suleimanov founded Hosanna Christian Church in Makhachkala in 1994. It started out as a small prayer group, but now with 1,000 members it is the largest Protestant church in the Northern Caucasus region. According to a letter Suleimanov wrote to Compass several years ago, 80 percent of the congregation is made up of former Muslims.

The congregation established other branch churches throughout Dagestan and a formal Bible study center at the Makhachkala church. Suleimanov also equipped the church to distribute food and other aid to residents of the poverty-ridden country.

His death follows the shooting of Orthodox priest Daniil Sisoiev of St. Thomas church in Moscow last November; a Muslim group claimed responsibility for the slaying.

Suleimanov is survived by his wife, Zina, and five children.

Dagestan is a small Russian republic of about 2.6 million people in the Caucasus Mountains on the border with Chechnya. Ethnic Avars, Dargins and Lezgins, who are all traditionally Muslim, make up almost 75 percent of Dagestan’s population. In total, 91 percent of the population is Muslim, with the remaining 9 percent being Christian, mostly Russian Orthodox.

Because of Dagestan’s location, its population is trapped in a long-standing feud between Russia and the Chechen separatists fighting next door. The political

realities of the conflict often bleed into Dagestan, resulting in civilian deaths.

The Russian government has from time to time cracked down on the Wahhabis, a sect of Sunni Islam with separatist tendencies. The Muslims in turn persecute Christians, because they see Christianity, and Orthodoxy in particular, as a Russian religion.

Many converts to Christianity have to practice their faith in small, discreet home groups.

As an ethnic Avar, Suleimanov was considered by many Muslims to be an apostate and therefore deserving of death. But part of his success in reaching people was the fact that he was native to the region. Missionaries from outside Dagestan have met with mixed success.

On Nov. 19, 2009, a masked gunman entered St. Thomas church in Moscow and shot Orthodox priest Daniil Sisoiev four times. Sisoiev, who was also known for his work among Muslims, died while being transported to a hospital. Before the shooting, he received numerous death threats from Islamic activists. After the shooting, a Muslim group claimed responsibility for the killing.

The Moscow-based Slavic Centre for Law and Justice and the Institute of Law and Religion issued a statement about Suleimanov shortly after the shooting. Saying he was a charming man and one of the most well-known Christian ministers in Russia, they called him a “true missionary with fervent heart and sincere faith. He was a man of faith who fearlessly preached the gospel, sharing the faith in Christ with people even in difficult circumstances,” the statement read. “Since the beginning of his mission, Pastor Artur Suleimanov prayed for the salvation of the Dagestan nation, despite all the difficulties and threatening that the community and preachers faced.”



Artur Suleimanov

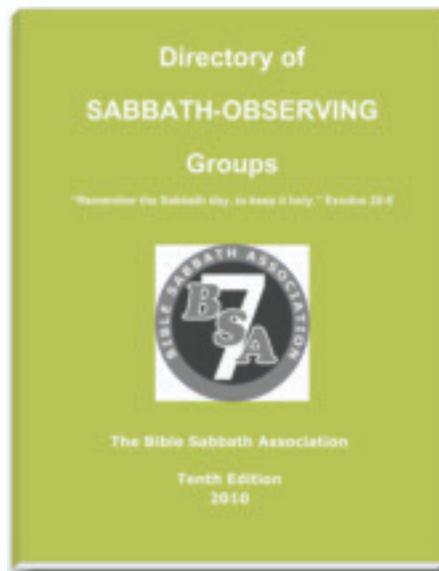
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The *Directory of Sabbath-Observing Groups* serves as the “Yellow Pages” for Sabbath keeping Groups and churches.

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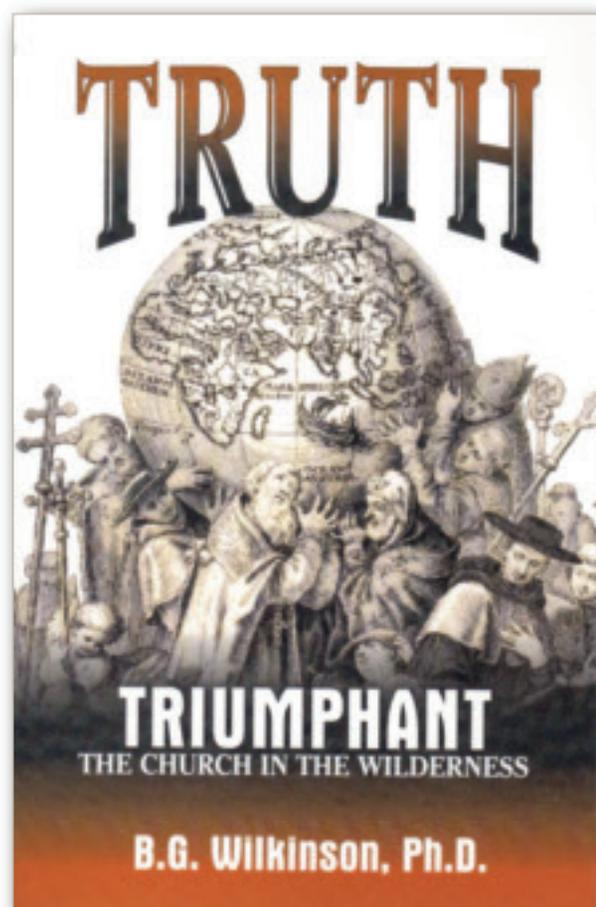
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