

The Sabbath Sentinel

May–June 2015



Summer Fun

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

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

The Sabbath Sentinel

May–June 2015 Volume 65, No. 3 Issue 573

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Cover Source: Dreamstime

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Editor: Kenneth Ryland, tss_editor@mac.com.

Associate Editors: Julia Benson & Shirley Nickels

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Donations are gratefully accepted and are tax deductible in the United States. Those who choose to voluntarily support this international work to promote the Sabbath and proclaim gospel of the kingdom of God are welcomed as contributors.

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BSA Worldwide Web Site: www.biblesabbath.org.

Correspondence and manuscript submissions: Address all inquiries to: Kenneth Ryland, c/o *The Sabbath Sentinel*, 802 N. W. 21st Ave., Battle Ground, WA 98604. Phone: (888) 687-5191, E-mail: tss_editor@mac.com.

International addresses:

Australia: Materials and magazine subscriptions available at www.biblesabbath.com.

Sierra Leone: The Bible Sabbath Association Sierra Leone, 326 Bai Bureh Road, Calabar, Town, P.O.BOX 289, Freetown, Sierra Leone

Philippines: Enrique M. Gabuyo, 398 Kinville Subdivision, Calamba Laguna 4027, Philippines, cogemg007@yahoo.com

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Our Mailing Address

Bible Sabbath Association

802 N.W. 21st Ave.

Battle Ground, WA 98604.

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Dear Friends: When I started working for BSA in August of 1996 I was very green. I barely knew how to use a computer. Even though starting with an Apple computer was much easier than an IBM, I still had a big learning curve. Thanks to the patience of Bryan and Sue Burrell, and an extremely patient husband, Richard Nickels, I slowly learned the ropes. Richard was a very talented computer person, and after he passed away in 2006, I often wished I had listened a little closer or taken his advice more often, because I had a lot of things I had to learn on my own. I had a bad habit of letting him do things for me instead of letting him teach me

There was a one page order form and a few faithful people that sent donations, but BSA was slowly losing ground. Thanks to Richard's tireless work on finding good books and materials, we slowly grew to where we could continue to help our brethren with Sabbath materials, send out free information and books to prisoners, and help in any way we could to spread the Sabbath truth. I remember that BSA was in the middle of getting a *Directory of Sabbath Observing Groups* published and Richard and I were very impressed with the response after it became available.

I really enjoyed the phone conversations I had with brethren. I felt I was an intricate part of the Sabbath community, and I will always treasure the contacts I've made and the beautiful people I've met through the years, either over the phone, or through letters. One particular person I would like to mention is Mary Hudson. I would get a letter from her from time to time where she would order some materials. One day, she called and somehow we made an instant connection. She has had a really rough life, and we have continued to keep in touch. She could use your prayers because she lost her husband several years ago under very hard circumstances, and she is suffering from cancer. She basically has no church support, so I've tried to be there for her.

Others along the way have continually supported our efforts and I often wished I could meet

them in person, just to give them and hug and say a big Thank You.

After the loss of my husband to cancer in 2006 I learned how to empathize with others. Up until that time I would try to help, but really didn't have any idea what they were suffering. I just went to a Women's Retreat with the United Church of God in Portland. Our theme was "Showers of Comfort." I learned so much about the trials and pain that women have suffered in their lives; either through death, divorce, abuse, or serious problems with their children. I was able to understand and know what they were feeling because I have been there, and it made me thankful for all the blessings God has given me over the years.

So many people were there to comfort and help me with the death of Richard, many of whom I didn't even know but they just reached out a helping hand. I would like to encourage all of you to find someone who has suffered a loss or are going through a bad illness or are just simply having a hard time, and put your arms around them and listen. That's what I learned. Those who are suffering often just want someone to listen or feel a loving arm around them. I am a hugger and on several occasions had people tell me, I just need a Shirley hug. Become a hugger, a listener, or a helper and it will often lighten your burden.

I was married on May 3rd to a wonderful man who came into my life a few months ago. We are planning on traveling and spending time with our families so we made the decision that I would retire. The BSA board voted to have my daughter, Barbara Parada take over the duties of **The Bible Sabbath Association**. I know she will do a wonderful job.

It's with a joyous heart I move into the future, but with a heavy heart I leave all of you. I will still live at the same address as BSA if any of you wish to write. I would love to hear from you. Shirley (Nickels) Hoisington

The Resurrection of the Dead

By Kenneth Westby



Confusion Reigns

When you die, then what? Atheists have the simplest answer: “nothing!” The religious among us have opinions all over the map.

Allah’s Islamic warriors see a brothel of panting virgins awaiting them in heaven. Some Catholics see purgatory as their likely first stop after death, others see the fluffy clouds of heaven. Non-believers and backsliding Christians had better enjoy the cold now for the fires of eternal hell await them. Eastern religions and New-agers speculate that upon death souls transmigrate to another incarnation of life, perhaps a bird, snake or even into a newly born human.

Citing several “near-death experiences,” some suggest all the dead will universally experience a tunnel of white light leading their departed souls to a heavenly home.

Does the average person have in hand a clear doctrinal understanding of the afterlife? Hardly. What passes for doctrine is mostly loose talk of going to hell or heaven. More often the afterlife is a setting for cartoons and jokes with Saint Peter screening would-be-saints at heaven’s Golden Gate; or the Devil welcoming lawyers and used car salesmen to the fires of hell. They’re funny, but have absolutely no resemblance to biblical or historical fact.

Even among religious folk, notions of the afterlife are vague at best and rely more on denominational traditions than on Scripture itself. It’s sufficient for most believers to just assume the Bible teaches blissful heaven is the reward of the saved and a super-heated hell awaits the unsaved. Yet assumptions don’t equate to facts anymore than fantasy does to faith.

It’s no wonder folks are confused by the variety of religious opinions on the “afterlife.” Is there

a reliable authority, beyond mere opinion, to consult with our “after death, then what” question?

Would you be surprised to learn that the biblical answer to each of the four questions to the left is . . . *NO!* ?

Would you be surprised to learn that the Bible denies you have an immortal soul? Rather, it affirms that you (and your “soul”) are mortal and that when you die, you, not just your body, are dead and without thought or consciousness.

Another surprise, the Bible does not offer heaven as the reward of the “saved.” Nor does it teach an ever-burning hell for the eternal torment of the “unsaved” —be they unrepentant sinners or among the unlucky millions who never heard the Christian Gospel.

Yet happily, the Bible affirms there *is* life after death and God’s offer of eternal life is at the heart of his plan for mankind.

Everybody Dies

Somewhere along the road of life we discover the phenomenon of death. This usually happens sometime in our youth and it may be a novel discovery, as is the case with a boy in this nineteenth century verse by Frances Cornford, *A Recollection*.

My father’s friend came once to tea.
He laughed and talked. He spoke to me.
But in another week they said
That friendly pink-faced man was dead.
“How sad...” they said, “the best of men.”
So said I too, “How sad” but then
Deep in my heart I thought with pride,
“I know a person who has died!”

My first awareness of death, at age four-and-one-half, was my Father’s funeral in 1943. A few days earlier I recollect sitting on a park bench on the

Continued on Page 6

Counting the Torah as a Strange thing

Because Ephraim hath made many altars to sin, altars shall be unto him to sin. I have written to him the great things of My law, but they were counted as a strange thing.”Hosea 8:11f

By Daniel Botkin, Ph.D.



There are different degrees of strangeness. If someone says they think something is strange, they might mean that it is just a bit odd or unusual or unexpected. Or they might mean that it is eerie, weird, bizarre, creepy. Most of the time they mean that it is somewhere between the slightly unusual and the extremely weird and creepy.

In Hosea’s time, the Torah that God gave through Moses was considered “a strange thing” to Ephraim. The Torah is still considered a strange thing in varying degrees to many modern-day Ephraimites in the church world today. If you talk about the commandments of God’s Law (specifically about commandments which are neglected by most Christians) many Christians think those commandments are strange.

“Mezuzahs on the doorposts of your home? Strange. Fringes on a four-cornered garment? Strange. Church on Saturday instead of on Sunday? Strange. Ancient dietary laws prescribed in Deuteronomy? Strange. Old Testament holidays from Leviticus? Strange. Unleavened Bread and Feast of Tabernacles? I don’t know what those things are, but they sure sound strange.”

Depending on the Christian’s knowledge of the Bible and his exposure to Messianic teachings, the strangeness he feels about such things will range anywhere from the slightly unusual to the extremely bizarre and creepy. Or to the laughable.

Yes, I have actually heard Christians laugh and scoff at some of these God-given commandments. If they would think more deeply about it, they would realize that they are laughing and scoffing at the One who gave these commandments. If these laughing, scoffing Christians knew the Bible better, they would realize that their laughing response to God’s laws is similar to the response of those who oppose Yahweh and His Messiah in Psalm 2, those who view God’s laws as bands that bind them and as cords that confine them. “Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us,” the rebellious say (Ps. 2:3). They want to be free of God’s strange laws. They may scoff and laugh at God’s commandments now, but God will have the last laugh, because the very next verse says “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: Yahweh shall have them in deri-

sion. Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure” (Psalm 2:4f).

Those who laugh and scoff at God’s “strange” commandments will someday have their mouths stopped. Their laughter will be silenced when Yahweh laughs at them and derides them, but His laughter and derision will not be a good-natured chuckle that invites them to share in the laughter, because His laughter will be followed by His words of wrath and vexation and sore displeasure. If you make the Lord sore, you are going to be vexed in His sore displeasure. So I’d be careful about scoffing and laughing at God-given commandments.

Even without any scoffing or laughing, why do some Christians think that some of God’s commandments are strange? Simply because these commandments have never been a regular part of their lives. And if they have never seen anyone else (Jews or Torah-keeping non-Jews) practicing these commandments, they seem even stranger. And for Biblically-illiterate Christians who are not even aware of the existence of these commandments, they seem even stranger still.

For people of faith, the idea of what is strange and what is normal is usually based on their own church background and their personal religious experience. If a Christian grows up in a formal, liturgical church with bells and incense, candles and snuffers, elaborate rituals and prescribed prayers chanted in a foreign language, he thinks this type of worship is normal. It does not seem strange to him at all, because he is used to it. But put him in a loud, lively, wild, spontaneous, hyper-charismatic Holy Ghost revival meeting for the very first time, and he will think that’s strange — just as a Christian whose only church experience is of the wild, spontaneous, charismatic kind would think that a formal liturgical church service is strange.

After I wrote the above paragraph but before I typed this article (I write all my articles in pencil before typing them), I happened to read about a real-life example that perfectly illustrates this. Benyamin Cohen, a son of an Orthodox Jewish rabbi, decided to visit different Christian churches every Sunday for a full year to see how Christians worship God. Having lived his entire life in an insulated Jewish community, he did not know what to expect. In his book *My Jesus Year* (HarperCollins,

2008), he writes about the things he saw and tells how those things appear to an outsider who is clueless about Christian forms of worship. Much of what he saw and heard seemed very strange to him. What is interesting is that the Christian forms of worship that seemed the least strange to him were those forms that most resembled the Jewish worship he grew up with. Listen to what he says about his visit to St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church:

"As for the service itself, it's all very ritualistic. That's what I'm used to. So much of what I had witnessed at other churches was completely foreign to me, especially the prayers themselves... But here at St. Bart's they were reciting an ancient liturgy, reading Psalms, and performing traditional rituals. This is the first time since I started this trip that I feel a connection to what Christians are doing during the service... about five different church leaders are now on the dais, all in Crusade-era robes, preparing for Communion with an elaborate wine-pouring ceremony using shiny silver vessels over a large table. All of them are facing the middle one, a slight reference to the Last Supper I suppose, in this moving ecclesial ritual... this reminds me of the Jewish prayer known as the Yizkor" (page 90f).

Reading through Benyamin Cohen's book, it is obvious that the degree of strangeness he felt at various Christian meetings was determined by how different things were from his own personal religious experience in a traditional Jewish synagogue. The Christian services that were the most similar to a synagogue service were the least strange to him, and the Christian services that were the most different from a synagogue service were the strangest to him.

If some of God's commandments seem strange to you, it is only because you are a stranger to them. But you do not need to remain a stranger to them. You can get acquainted with these commandments by starting to practice them. Just as a stranger can be transformed into a friend by spending time together, so these strange commands can become a familiar part of your faith. As you become more familiar with these forgotten commandments, you will begin to appreciate them and you will thank your heavenly Father for giving us these commandments for our own good. You will welcome these commandments like a man welcomes a familiar friend into his home.

When you learn about God-given commandments that seem strange to you, you can embrace them and learn to do them. The longer you do them, the less strange they will seem to you. Or, you can reject them and remain a stranger to them. You can ridicule and despise them the way xenophobic folks ridicule and despise foreigners who seem strange to them. But God

has a long list of curses promised to those who despise His commandments. "And if ye shall despise My statutes, or if your soul abhor My judgments, so that ye will not do all My commandments..." (Leviticus. 26:15). You can read the curses that God promises to those who despise His statutes and abhor His judgments in Leviticus 26. It's scary.

Hosea also said that Ephraim made many altars to sin. Why did Yahweh consider Ephraim's altars "altars to sin"? Because after the children of Israel entered the Promised Land and built the Temple, there was to be only one altar. In Deuteronomy 12, Yahweh said that He would designate one specific place for sacrifices:

"Then there shall be a place which Yahweh your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto Yahweh... Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: but in the place which Yahweh shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee" (Deut. 12:11, 13f).

The place the Lord designated for sacrifices was Jerusalem. The altars of Ephraim were in effect competitive altars, and therefore "altars to sin." The very first altar of Ephraim was built by King Jeroboam, who set up two golden calves, one in Beth-el and one in Dan. The reason Jeroboam did this was to discourage the people from going to the Temple in Jerusalem to worship. The ten northern tribes had split from the tribe of Judah and the house of David, and Jeroboam feared that the people would turn against him if they went to Jerusalem to worship:

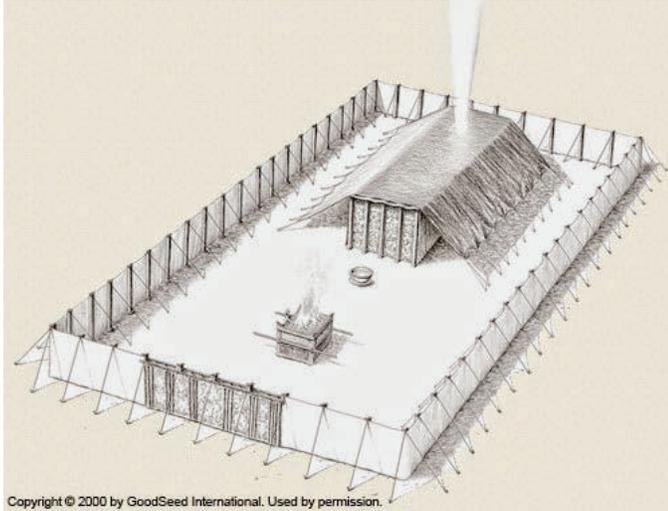
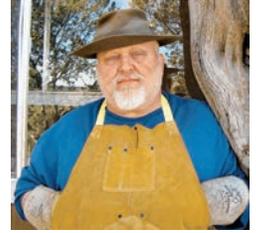
"If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of Yahweh at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (1 Kings 12:27f).

King Jeroboam burned incense on the altar at Beth-el, and a man of God from Judah prophesied against the altar. When Jeroboam stretched forth his hand and called for the man of God to be arrested, Jeroboam's hand dried up. The altar was supernaturally rent asunder, and the ashes poured out.

But all this did not stop Ephraim from building more altars to sin. By the time Hosea came along, he could say

Christ and the Hebrew Scriptures

by Terrell Perkins



It is a historical fact that most of the first Christians were Jews. (Those who practiced the religion of Judea.) We often hear why most early Jews rejected Christ as the first coming of the messiah. We don't often hear why those Jews that did accept Christ as the Messiah did so. Those early Jewish Christians recognized the teachings of Christ and, later, His disciples as extensions of things they understood well from the Hebrew scripture. Scholars often point to the many scriptures that prophecy about Christ but there are more, perhaps more subtle, things in the Hebrew scripture that point to Christ.

1). Why did the early Jews see the baptism that John the Baptist, and later the early Christians, practiced as a logical extension of what they understood?

Baptism is symbolic of the children of Israel coming out of Egypt through the

Red Sea. Egypt was well understood to be a type of sin and coming through the Red Sea was symbolic of leaving sin behind...IE. Repentance.

2). Why did the early Jews see the tongues of fire over the heads of the followers of Christ on the Day of Pentecost as a logical extension of what they understood?

They understood the power of God to be manifested in the pillar of fire / cloud of smoke their ancestors followed in leaving Egypt. The pillar of fire they followed through the wilderness was a sign of Gods power leading the nation of Israel. This time, on the day of Pentecost after Christ's death and resurrection, the power of God was leading individuals.

3). Why did the early Jews see Christ entering Jerusalem for Passover on the back of an ass and throw palm branches down in front of him, as a logical extension of what they understood?

Without knowing or understanding it they knew that God was going to 'tabernacle with men'. The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated by using palm branches to make temporary dwellings. They became symbolic of God residing with men.

4). Why did the early Jews see Christ feeding the multitude with five loaves and two fishes as a logical extension of what they understood?

They knew God could miraculously feed them like He did in the Sinai with manna. This was a proof of who Christ was to many.

5). Why did the early Jews see the sacrificial and priestly aspects of Christ in His gospel as a logical extension of what they understood?

They knew they needed a sacrifice to atone to God. They understood that sin demanded a life, that's is how grievous it is to God. A sacrifice was the vehicle of their approach to God. They saw in Christ the fulfillment of the five major kinds of sacrifices that were outlined in Leviticus as well as a fulfilling of their Passover lamb.

They recognized they needed a High Priest. He was the facilitator of their approach to God. They saw the resurrected Christ as fulfilling that role at the right hand of God the Father.

These things, being fulfilled by Christ, made the old sacrificial system with its temple, priesthood and animal sacrifices no longer necessary.

6). Why did the early Jews recognize the gospel of Christ as an extension of what they understood?

They recognized in the gospel of Christ what they were taught by the tabernacle in the wilderness...the place of their approach to God. It was the template for the design of the temple of David built later. Here are just a few observations about the Tabernacle in the wilderness:

-There was only one tabernacle, only one way to approach the one God.

Continued on Page 10

"Ephraim hath made many altars to sin." Ephraim continued to follow the example of Jeroboam, their first king.

There is an important lesson for Christians in the story of King Jeroboam and Ephraim's altars. If God's covenant people do not do things the way God prescribes in His Word, then they end up doing it their own way. If they do not want to follow God's instructions, then they just make stuff up to serve as substitutes for the things God said to do. And usually the man-made stuff is very similar to the commandment of God that it is replacing, just as counterfeit money is very similar to real money. An undiscerning eye will not detect counterfeit money, and an undiscerning Christian will not detect counterfeit substitutes for the commandments of God.

King Jeroboam not only made counterfeit altars. He also set up a counterfeit priesthood that consisted of people "which were not of the sons of Levi" (1 Kings 12:31). Then he ordained a man-made feast similar to the Feast of Tabernacles, but in the eighth month instead of the seventh month, the month for Tabernacles. "And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah" (1 Kings 12:32). The Bible makes a point to tell us that this substitute feast of Jeroboam was the fifteenth day of the eighth month, "in the month which he had devised of his own heart" (1 Kings 12:33).

If you are familiar with Church history, you know that Rome, like Jeroboam, set up a counterfeit, substitute priesthood consisting of people "which were not of the sons of Levi." You also know that Rome decreed that Sunday serve as a substitute for the seventh-day Sabbath, just as Jeroboam decreed that his feast of the eighth month serve as a substitute for the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month. This is even more remarkable when you know that Sunday was called "the eighth day" by Christians shortly after the Church began its decline into apostasy. The anti-Semitic apocryphal *Epistle of Barnabas* claims that the "real Sabbath" came when God "usher[ed] in the Eighth Day, the commencement of a new world. (And we too rejoice in celebrating the eighth day [i.e., Sunday]; because that was when Jesus rose from the dead" (Barn. 15:16f).

But this change was all man's doing, not God's. God did not usher in an "eighth-day/first-day" Sunday to replace the seventh-day Sabbath any more than He ushered in Jeroboam's eighth-month feast to replace the Feast of Tabernacles of the seventh month. Jeroboam's eighth-month feast was a feast "which he had devised of his own heart," and Rome's eighth-day re-

placement of the seventh-day Sabbath was something which Church leaders devised of their own hearts. And because this system is the only form of worship that most Christians know, the biblical system is now regarded as a strange thing by many Christians.

The altars of Ephraim were allegedly built to offer sacrifices to Yahweh, not to pagan gods. Even Jeroboam's altars by the golden calves were allegedly for the God of Israel who had brought them out of Egypt. Jeroboam pointed at the golden calves and said, "Behold thy *elohim*, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt (1 Kings 12:28).

Hosea said that Ephraim was offering sacrifices on their altars, "but Yahweh accepteth them not" (Hosea 8:13).

If Yahweh did not accept sacrifices on the altars built by Ephraim of old, will He accept worship offered on altars built by modern-day Ephraimites, altars that are built as substitutes for God-given commandments because God's commandments seem strange?

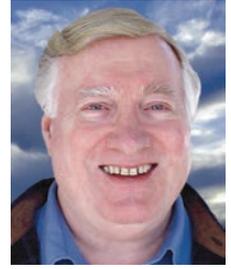
If some of God's Torah seems strange to you because you have never practiced it or seen others do it, that is understandable. But please consider the following:

Suppose the Church had universally continued to keep the Sabbath on the seventh day all these centuries and it was all you had ever known. Then suppose someone suggested abandoning the Sabbath and having church on Sundays instead. You would think *that* was a strange idea! And if the Church had universally continued to celebrate God's holy days as prescribed in Leviticus 23, and someone suggested scrapping God's calendar and substituting holidays and traditions borrowed from pagan idolatry, you would think *that* was strange! And if the Church had universally continued to follow the God-given dietary laws, and someone suggested disregarding those laws and prescribing abstinence from meat on Fridays and voluntary abstinence from various foods during the 40-day mourning period when pagan women wept for Tammuz, you would think *that* was strange!

If God's Torah seems strange to you, don't let it remain that way. Acquaint yourself with the ancient paths that were trodden by the Patriarchs and Prophets and the Messiah and His Apostles.

Reprinted from "Gates of Eden," May-June 2015, p. 17. "Gates of Eden" is a bimonthly newsletter produced by Gates of Eden, a messianic Jewish ministry. Write to Gates of Eden, P.O. Box 2257, East Peoria, IL 61611-0257. Gates of Eden is on the Internet at www.gatesofeden.org.

The Bible and the Life We're Supposed to Live



In our time, it's becoming ever more difficult to know how to be an authentic, Bible-advised, Christian. Just about every aspect of the Christian faith is under attack by someone. Satan is launching broadside after broadside against the Church. As the Church continues to take hits parts of it are crumbling.

As a Christian writer, it's hard to know what to write about anything. Virtually every word penned is controversial to someone. For example, some will take exception to the idea I presented in the first paragraph above: that Satan is launching broadsides against the Church. Many Christians no longer believe that Satan is a literal being. To them, he is just "the personification of evil" – or a literary symbol or figure of speech.

Writing about Israel is another minefield. Hatred for Israel, or Jews, seems a near-universal phenomenon, even within parts of the Church. To write anything supportive of Israel instantly brings the anti-Semites and Israel-haters out of the woodwork.

"Fundamentalism" is under attack. Charismatic Christianity is under attack. Christian sexual morality is under attack. Christianity, the Bible, and even church buildings are under attack. The Christ (Anointed One) himself is under attack. According to *Christianity Today*, some 171,000 Christians per year are being murdered worldwide for their faith (2006 figures). Some estimate that as many as 70 million Christians have been martyred since the time of Christ – and most of those murders have occurred in the 20th and 21st centuries. The "spirit of antichrist" is running rampant in the earth. And you're welcome to call me a "fundamentalist nut" for saying so. I don't apologize for it.

Writing about Bible prophecy is, in some circles, another dead letter. Anything written on that subject is controversial. Taking the Bible literally is under attack. *Not* taking it literally is also under attack.

The study of the Hebrew roots of the Bible and the Church is under attack. And just about every mainstream, traditional, or fundamental Christian doctrine is under attack.

To raise one's head in print these days is to be instantly caught in a withering crossfire of contrary opinion. It's open season on Bible interpretation. Everyone's an

amateur theologian these days. We all have our pet ideas and doctrines – I included.

What it all comes down to for me is this: What did Jesus teach? What did it mean in its original context? How do I appropriately apply it today? A corollary is: What did his original rabbinic students (*talmidim*) believe, practice and teach? If I can sort out those things, then I'll know what it means to be an authentic follower of Jesus the Anointed One. Of course I'll have to seek God's counsel on how to adapt those teachings to the issues of modern life.

Can we trust the New Testament?

The only way we're going to gain access to the teachings and practices of the original Christian community is through the New Testament. Its documents are the only significant record we have of what the first Christians believed, lived, and taught.

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Continued on Page 10

-Only priests were allowed to enter the tabernacle. These were men sanctified, set apart for a special function, to serve God and their fellow man.

-The tabernacle was laid out in only one way. It was very specifically to be constructed to lay East-West. One entered facing West, the opposite of what pagans did in worshipping the rising sun.

-The narrow way laid out by the tabernacle pointed towards God. There is only one way to God the Father. It was not the way most of humanity would assume.

-Once entered, the first thing one encountered was the sacrificial altar. One had to accept the sacrifice before continuing. One who had accepted this sacrifice was set apart from the rest of the people.

-While not all who accepted the sacrifice went on to enter the Holy Place, all who accepted the sacrifice were set apart. An 'innumerable multitude' could reside there.

-The next thing one encountered was the brass laver where one was ritually cleansed before entering the Holy Place. Like baptism it was symbolic of repentance. One had to be cleansed by repentance before entering the Holy Place.

-The tabernacle was ONE structure made up of TWO separate enclosures. There was only one way to enter, through the Holy Place. The Holy Place represented the Body of Christ...the other, the Holy of Holies, represented the presence of God the father. There was no Trinity represented.

-To be inside the Holy Place was to be symbolically in the Body of Christ.

-Once inside the Holy Place one saw the menorah on the left. It was ONE candlestick with seven distinct channels of light within the Body of Christ. Whether they represented seven eras of the church or seven attitudes of Christians or something else is debatable. The fact is they were seven separate lights coming from one source.

-On the right was the table of showbread. It symbolized the Body of Christ that we are to partake of. Christ is the bread of life. We must partake of the Body of Christ to be in the Body of Christ.

-Directly ahead, upon entering the Holy Place, was the altar of incense that was to be filled with finely chopped incense and burned so the smoke of it wafted up through the curtain into the Holy of Holies. This symbolized the prayers of the righteous.

-Next, the curtain between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies was to be crossed only once a year so that the Holy of Holies was entered only once a year and only by the High Priest. This was the forerunner of

the curtain in the temple of David that was torn in half, from the top down, upon Christ's death. Symbolic of the fact that anyone could now go directly to God the Father through Christ.

-In the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant. It contained the tables of stone the commandments were written on.

-From the Holy of Holies emanated the law of God. It was a perfect cube...one of only two mentioned in the scriptures. The other is the New Jerusalem. This was the ultimate destination for one entering the tabernacle.

-The plan of God for mankind was symbolized in this structure.

The children of Israel would have recognized the symbols and the substance of Christ's gospel as fulfilling what they had been taught all of their lives. Without an understanding of the Hebrew scripture these things would be lost on modern Christians.

God used symbols that we can understand to teach us lessons about spiritual truths. Sometimes we don't make the connections between things that may seem mundane, like the details of the construction of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, and the truths they point to but everything in Gods word is there for a reason whether we understand it or not.

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

Terrell Perkins graduated from Ambassador College in 1981, and has been a Sabbath keeper for about 35 years. Terrell lives in Capitan, New Mexico, and works as an artist-blacksmith hand forging metal sculptures and architectural hardware and furniture. Terrell has been a freelance writer for over 20 years.

Church of God—The Most High

God Most High = The Ancient of Days (Daniel Chapter 7)
(A SOVEREIGN ASYLUM STATE—Scriptural Law)—Headquartered at the "Third Heaven"
Note the following Scriptures: Book of Isaiah, Chapter 14, 2 Corinthians, Chapter 12, Verses 1-4.
See also: Philippians, Chapter 1, Verse 12, Philippians, Chapter 3, Verses 20-21, Ephesians, Chapter 2

Publishing the Glad Tidings of the Kingdom of God
A Prophetic Work
(Matthew Chapter 24)

Note the following Holy Scriptures: Book of Isaiah Chapter 14, Book of Genesis Chapter 14, Genesis Chapter 17, Book of Psalms, Psalm 82, Book of Psalms, Psalm 91, Numbers, Chapter 24 (note: clearly identifies and reveals two distinct divine spirit beings—spirit personalities—not one or three), Book of Daniel, Chapter 7, Mark Chapter 13, John Chapter 10, Verses 34 and 35, Mark Chapter 16, Matthew Chapter 24, Matthew Chapter 26, Verses 1-13, Matthew Chapter 28, Book of Acts, Chapter 2, Book of Revelation Chapter 11, Revelation Chapter 13, Revelation Chapter 14, Revelation Chapter 19.

Note: God Most High = El Elyon, GOD ALMIGHTY = El Shaddai. The Bible reveals what the scriptural covenant requirements are, including but not limited to: The Seventh Day Sabbath of God as well as the Annual Sabbaths of God, and the Ten Commandments.

The Bible reveals that God Almighty, also known as The Word of God, and King of Kings and Lord of Lords—are one and the same person, who is revealed as Jesus The Anointed (The Son of Man)—will return in full glory with His angelic army and The Saints of the Most High, who will return to establish the Kingdom of God, as King of the Kingdom of God. This will occur after Babylon is destroyed following The Seven Last Plagues. (Revelation Chapter 15, 16 and Chapter 19.)

The Bible reveals to observe the Day of Pentecost (50th Gr. Pentekostos) annually. This day concludes on a Monday at even, after numbering to the 50th day—excluding Wave Sheaf Sunday. This day is also known as the Day of Firstfruits (Numbers 28), after numbering seven full weeks—not seven Sabbaths, in the count to Pentecost. This day is also called the Feast of Weeks, Exodus 34. The Bible alone contains all of the revealed will of The Creator God. (Sola Scriptura.)

Pillar of Truth—Publishing

Published by Ambassador Vincent Michael Ogorek for The Creator God = God Most High and God Almighty (Glad Tidings of the Kingdom of God)

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P.O. Box 929, Lake Forest, Illinois (under protest)

Put simply, when we examine the synoptic Gospels, an accurate portrait of the historical Jesus emerges. We can know what he taught, how he lived, and his place in 2nd Temple Judaism simply by studying closely these documents. The other documents in the New Covenant collection fill in the blanks. John interprets the story of Jesus theologically, not historically. Acts tells us of the beginnings of the apostolic community within Judaism – the “sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5) – and of the spread of the Gospel into the gentile world. It chronicles the journeys of the Apostle Paul. Other documents in the collection are letters circulated and copied among early believers. Some of them are apostolic in origin. In some instances, we have no idea who wrote them – Hebrews being a case in point. Together, these documents constitute a reliable picture or original or “primitive” Christianity.

The challenge for exegetes (those who critically interpret and explain the meaning of Scripture) is to bring those teachings forward to our time in appropriate ways for use and application in the believing community. This can be a daunting task.

Politicizing Exegesis

Like everything else in life, the interpretation, and application, of Scripture is politicized. In other words, the process is filtered through the lenses of “interests.” It either is, or it is not, in the interests of denominations to interpret given passages one way or another. A good example of this is the issue of tithing. Within Scripture, there are a finite number of passages that relate to the subject of tithing (tenting). How these are interpreted and applied depends on whether or not leaders *wish* their members to tithe.

Those of us who consume the output of scholars must be aware of denominational bias. Not all scholars are purely objective any more than all scientists are. For my money, the most helpful scholars who are good at popularizing their work for lay consumption are those associated with the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research in Jerusalem. A partial listing of some of their written works is found in the Hebrew Roots section of this web site.

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A TALE OF TWO CITIES

R. Herbert

In the final chapters of the Book of Revelation, the apostle John contrasts two cities – “Babylon the Great” (Revelation 17-19) and the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21-22). Much has been written on each of these biblical cities, but they are seldom compared. This article suggests that John intended them to be compared and contrasted in order to teach an important lesson.

The city of Babylon flourished between 608 to 539 BC as the capital of a large empire, and under the powerful king Nebuchadnezzar II it became one of the wonders of the world. However, the fact that the Babylon of Revelation is not the ancient Mesopotamian city of that name, but rather a later city of equal or even greater power and corruption, is clear.

The powerful ancient city of Babylon was no longer extant at the time John wrote, and no longer at the head of a great trading empire. John’s reference to “Babylon the Great” seems clearly aimed at Rome — the world-ruling megacity of his day. Revelation 17:5, 9, 18 tell us the “harlot” of this “Babylon” sits on seven hills; and Rome, of course, was built upon seven hills – as celebrated by the Roman festival called *Septimontium*, the feast of the seven-hilled — and on some imperial coins Rome is actually represented as a woman seated on seven hills.

Many have focused on the Babylon-Rome identity of the first century AD and have examined only aspects of the description of Babylon that seem to fit a continuation of its governmental or religious system. But many of the empire-cities of the ancient and modern world could probably be substituted for Babylon. We see this in the fact that John actually bases the list of luxury items flowing into “the Great Babylon” (Revelation 18:11-13) on Ezekiel 27:12-22 which recounts the fall not of Babylon, but of the ancient Mediterranean trading city of Tyre — though John slightly adjusts the list of Tyrian luxury items to include goods such as silk and ivory that were found in Rome in his own day.

Apparent Similarities

Whatever later city we may substitute for ancient Babylon, the two cities characterized by John clearly symbolize the contrasting ways of man and God — the archetypal center of human control and activity at any particular time versus the center of God’s future government and activity. As such, the two cities of “New Babylon” and New Jerusalem could not be more different. But before we look at the differences, we should notice that John mentions some apparent similarities between the two cities that are instructive. New Babylon, just like the New Jerusalem, is said to extend its power and influence over the whole world (compare Revelation 17:18 and Revelation 21:1) and to receive the wealth of all the nations (compare Revelation 18:11-17 and Revelation 21:24). Yet unlike the New Jerusalem whose power is that of God, Babylon’s power and wealth are brought about through human enticement and coercion (Revelation 18:3, 23B).

There also seems to be an echo of the similarity of riches in the gold, precious stones, and pearls accumulated by Babylon (Revelation 18:16B) and the gold, precious stone and pearl constructions of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:16-21), though the scale of Babylon’s glory is really only relevant to that of other human cities and is nothing compared to that of New Jerusalem. Revelation 18:12 mentions “fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth” among the chief luxuries of Babylon, but biblically these brightly colored clothes symbolize blatant sinfulness (Zechariah 3:3-4); whereas Revelation 19:8 tells us

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rich man asks that Lazarus be sent to his kin to testify, claiming that if they were to hear the witness of one who returned from the dead, they would repent, whereupon Abraham says, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:19-31).

This parable has caused much theological wrangling, and I am about to add to it. There really was a man named Lazarus, a friend of Jesus, whom he raised from the dead. You can read about him in John 11. And it was a very public resurrection. One would think that such an event would convince everyone of Jesus’ power. But if you think that, you would be wrong. The religious leaders of the day refused the sign just as Jesus said they would. In fact, they plotted to put Lazarus to death because many believed because of him (John 12:10-11).

Signs and miracles will not convince a world bent on unbelieving. But let’s forget the world for a while. Instead, let’s talk about you. Do you really believe the only sign that Jesus said he would give to an evil and adulterous generation, that he would be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights? Go to your calendar and count it out. Do you really believe it as he said it?

—Lenny Cacchio

You can catch all of Lenny’s latest commentaries on <http://morningcompanion.blogspot.com> and on the BSA Web site at <http://www.biblesabbath.org/>. Lenny is a member of the BSA board of directors.

Miracles and Signs Don’t Convince



If I were the devil, I would plant a seed of doubt. That would be easy to do in a skeptical age, for real miracles have an air of plausible deniability about them. Someone is healed of a disease? The body’s natural defenses did it. Someone crosses your path as an answer to prayer? Time and chance happen to all men. You’re in need of a few bucks to pay the rent, and the exact amount shows up in the mail? Somebody heard of your plight and wrote you a check.

Plausible deniability affects us today as much as it did the people in Jesus’ day. In spite of the great miracles Jesus performed, people still wanted a sign. The very day after he fed a multitude by multiplying a few fishes and loaves, the very same people demanded of him to perform a sign “that we may see it and believe you. What work will you do?” (John 6:30). “Big deal,” seemed to be their mantra. “So you fed us in the wilderness. Moses did the same thing.”

And when Jesus cast out demons, the Pharisees dismissed it out of hand. “It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons” (Matthew 12:22-24 NIV). Regardless of the signs and wonders that he worked, the skeptics of the day somehow could not be satisfied (vv. 38-40).

The only sign Jesus said he would give to a skeptical world was this sign, that he would be in the grave for three days and three nights. He would prove who he was by his power over death.

In one of his most enigmatic parables, known as Lazarus and the Rich Man, Jesus depicts a poor, despised man named Lazarus who eventually finds the joy of the Kingdom of God and a rich man whose self-indulgence costs him that reward. The

grounds of Chicago's St. Luke's Hospital on a hot August day. My dad in his hospital pajamas and gown sat with my mother and us four kids. I also remember roaming the corridor outside the hospital room where my mom and dad were talking. I now wish I'd asked my mom what they talked about in their last conversation. My main interest at the time was the little penny gum machine in the hallway with pull down levers for a variety of wrapped sticks of gum. My favorite in those days was *Black Jack*, but I can't remember if that machine had any.

My next memory was the funeral with all the flowers and the grownups tenderly patting me on my head. My father, Clarence O. Westby, was the first person I knew who had died. I now know many.

My father lies buried in Rose Hill Cemetery with six million other dead Chicagoans. Fifty-eight years later my mother, Margit, joined him in death and before too long I will join them both. And all too soon, you too will join the billions of humans who have moved from life unto death.

As God said to Adam, you will "return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."¹

No Escape

"Because I could not stop for Death; He kindly stopped for me," penned Emily Dickinson in the opening line of her poem by the same title.

"It is appointed for men to die once"² says Scripture, and then comes a resurrection—either to eternal life or to judgment, which could include what Scripture calls the "second death"³—annihilation forever.

Everyone who has ever lived is either dead or going to die. This should come as no surprise to any of us despite our reluctance to think about it. The "eternal life" of youth eventually gives way to the reality of an aging body, and try as we might to avoid it, we sooner or later must face head-on our own demise.

Frequently it is the death of a loved one that makes us consider our own mortality and ask questions about the state of the dead, and further inquire into the possibilities of future life.

We wonder, where is that loved one now? Is

he simply dead in the ground without consciousness? In heaven? Hell? Purgatory? Reincarnated into another person or animal? Will I see her again? And if there is life after death, will we recognize one another?

My experience tells me that most folks have only vague ideas about death and an afterlife. I've preached hundreds of funerals from one coast to the next and from north to south and conclude that among the grieving, ignorance and confusion are the rule, not the exception. Counseling with families, I've realized what a poor job churches have done in educating people on this most important topic.

People have bits and pieces of information they've picked up from preachers, relatives and the popular culture from which they've developed a general idea of what happens after death. But as the grieving try to express their beliefs they may as well be describing a fairy tale for they don't speak with conviction, nor do they have in their grasp hard evidence upon which to base their generalized notions.

At funerals we mortals often open up our hearts to honestly consider death and what follows. Such thoughts are heavy and uncomfortable. We push them aside as soon as possible. We close that momentary window of candor and openness to press on with the daily crush of activities. We table the question of what happens after we die to some future moment, perhaps to when we get older and have more time to think about it. Often that moment never arrives.

Anciently, the mythical Sphinx asked the mythical Oedipus to answer this puzzle: "What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three at night?" He correctly replied, "Man." We've each seen the bookends of life's sequence countless times; a baby crawling, an oldster on a cane. The sequence always ends in the grave.

Surviving Death

If you find the discussion of death depressing, you are not alone. I and any normal person should find it depressing. Death is an enemy to life—your life and mine. Life is the greatest gift we have and we must fight to keep it as long as we can. But fight as we might, we will ultimately lose.

Then what? The question before us: Is death survivable?

The Bible and history both testify that there is **only one way to survive death**, and that is by ***the resurrection of the dead!***

In all history there was only one person who died, went into a grave, and later came back to life—and remains alive today.

You know to whom I refer. Each year millions of professing Christians celebrate his resurrection at the Easter/Passover season. Jesus Christ was resurrected to eternal life almost two thousand years ago. He now sits beside his heavenly Father in heaven and has been given authority to rule over all creation. He will soon bring the Kingdom of God to earth and call forth millions from their graves to receive the gift of eternal life.

Are you and I offered the same kind of resurrection Jesus experienced? Will Christians be raised with new eternal bodies that can never die? If so, will non-Christians be resurrected to some lesser state of life, or left in their graves, or consigned to live forever in the fires of hell?

These are among the most important questions any human could ask. They get to the heart of our mortal state, our purpose in life, and our eternal future. These questions must be faced and answered with utmost diligence in the pursuit of truth.

Facing the Future

How we conceive of the afterlife can affect how we live life here and now. For those who believe there is no God and that nothing exists past the grave, life can be lived anyway they want: “Eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die” or whatever code they choose to live by. No God, no hope, no eternal standards of right and wrong, no future beyond the grave...nothing.

Islamic suicide “martyrs” believe their afterlife welcoming committee consists of attentive virgins in paradise. A Hindi might anticipate his reincarnation into a higher caste human, or into a lower life form, depending on his “karma” force.

Certain orthodox Catholic Christians believe purgatory may be in their future since they’re not good enough for heaven, nor rotten enough for “lower hell.” Protestants are divided over whether

heaven is guaranteed to the saved (“once saved, always saved”), or whether ones’ spiritual condition at the time of death determines the direction the soul flees the body—upward or downward.

Rather than survey all the various afterlife ideas in the religious marketplace and decide which one to buy, we will begin with the plain promises from the Word of God.

All Will Live Again

God made man in his own image⁴ for a grand purpose that is clearly disclosed by his own revelation—the Bible. The Creator, Yahweh, placed man in a paradise setting and in the middle of Eden he placed the Tree of Life, and nearby, The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil⁵. Man was forbidden to take of the latter for by so doing he would, as the Serpent said, “be like God,” that is, usurping God’s authority to decide what is good and what is evil. It was evil for man to disobey his Maker, which is the first sin mankind (and womankind) committed. Everything wrong in the history of the world can be understood as disobedience to a kind, wise, loving, eternal God.

The other tree, The Tree of Life, was not initially forbidden to the first couple. It was God’s grand purpose that mankind fully participate in the divine image by ultimately sharing eternal life with its Maker.

Adam and Eve were mortals already alive so the “life” referenced in the Tree of Life is symbolic of a dimension of existence beyond their present physical, mortal life. Since mankind’s parents chose to disobey God and chart their own way of living, God prevented them from partaking of The Tree of Life. They were not ready to receive God’s supreme gift. When their bodies wore out they both died.⁶ Like all humans who have died, including the righteous, they await the call of God to live again.⁷

But God’s plan for us didn’t die in Eden. His plan is and has always been to bring us fully into his image—including sharing eternal life with him. Jesus’ message is essentially the same as his heavenly Father’s: obey God and live. Jesus became a living, breathing “Tree of Life” so that all who would follow him, who was in the perfect image of God⁸, would receive eternal life⁹.

There is only one source—the Bible—that provides the history of man’s creation and the Crea-

tor's plan for him. It coherently presents God's plan from its first book (Genesis, *beginning*) to its last (Revelation) which pictures mankind finally united with its Creator in the everlasting Kingdom of God.

The entire plan of God is revealed in Scripture—that ancient, venerable record of God's dealings with mankind, his revelations about himself, his Way for us mortals to live, and finally, his spectacular revelation of his Son, Jesus Christ, who became the first of mankind to be resurrected to eternal life¹⁰. The life of Christ becomes for us our path to walk in taking on the divine image and, like Christ, to ultimately pass from death into eternal life with our God.

The Promises

You have seen “John 3:16” and “Romans 6:23” flashed before the TV cameras at football games and public events, or painted as graffiti on roadside objects. Sadly, the profound promise contained in those popular verses, and many other less popular ones we could cite, is missed because they are never actually read. Or if read, they are viewed as mantras evangelicals use to close the sale—to get the sinner “saved” and into a church.

Let's read them with fresh eyes.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that who ever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

These verses state that:

- God loves us and has a Gift for us—Eternal Life;
- There are only two choices before us—Death or Eternal Life;
- God's purpose is that we accept his gift of Eternal Life;
- That gift can be ours through God's Son, Jesus.

Jesus said,

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24).

“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (vss 28-29).

Jesus speaks of a time when all the dead will be raised, yet only the righteous will be resurrected to eternal life. We will discuss the resurrection to condemnation or judgment a little later.

Resurrection is not simply a New Testament doctrine that originated from the time of Christ. The concept of resurrection is evident from Genesis to Revelation.

Evidence of Life after Death—Old Testament

The doctrine of a future resurrection for the dead is not nearly as well developed or articulated in the Old Testament as it is in the New. This is to be expected as there had been no such resurrection until Jesus was resurrected to eternal life. This event (in about 30 AD) occurred during the lifetime of Jesus' contemporaries whose lives were forever changed by it, and they authored the books we know of as the New Testament. Paul wrote Timothy, “...our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”¹¹

That is not to say that the belief in a resurrection after mortal life was absent from OT faith and Scripture. There are many references to a belief in life after death. The writer of Ecclesiastes speaks of a dying man going to his permanent place, the grave, and his breath—the divine breath given to Adam and his children—returning to God who had loaned it¹². The ancient sage, Job, wrote of his hope and trust in God that following his death and time in the grave, “You will call and I will answer you; you will long for the creature your hands have made.”¹³ He wistfully spoke, “I will wait for my renewal to come.”¹⁴

The plainest OT resurrection passage is from Daniel's God-given vision, “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.” To Daniel himself, God said, “You will rest,

and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.”¹⁵

But the prime basis for the faithful, in the centuries before the birth of Christ, believing they would live again is found in their understanding of the very character of God himself. They knew God had made life and that God masters death as God masters life.¹⁶ God has created life and thus can re-create life.

The OT Patriarchs and faithful believed in God’s justice that sooner or later had to become manifest, and the resurrection allowed this very thing to happen. They knew God was good and that his mercy was full of faithfulness, loyalty, and solidarity toward his own. Thus belief in the resurrection of the dead is based on Yahweh’s power, on his justice and on his love—all of which was revealed in his dealings with Israel.

In the New Testament, that belief flowered into an actual prototype resurrection of the great resurrection at the end of the age of man. Perhaps it is better described as the “archetype” resurrection since it is the first of what will later follow.

Evidence of Life after Death—New Testament

By the time of the birth of Christ (2-3 BC), the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead had become firmly developed within Judaism’s leading sect. Its custodians were the Pharisees who together with the Mosaic lawyers defended the doctrine against challenges from a small, but politically powerful sect called the Sadducees. Jesus’ doctrine was quite similar to that of the Pharisees, though Jesus’ spiritual understanding and application of doctrine differed remarkably and occasioned the constant friction between them we find recorded in the Gospels.

Some Sadducees, “who say there is no resurrection,” came to catch Jesus with a hard hypothetical case that made the notion of a resurrection an unworkable and silly proposition. Jesus told them they were ignorant of the Scriptures and the power of God. After correcting their other false assumptions, he reminded them that God said, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Jesus interpreted that to mean, “He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”¹⁷ Clearly, God considers his sons and daughters as having already received the gift of eternal life though they yet “sleep” awaiting its

fulfillment. The living God commands a coming kingdom of dynamically living, glorified sons and daughters.

Paul captures that concept when he affirms that our “citizenship” is already divinely documented in heaven, “And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”¹⁸ Every Christian is said to have his name already written in a Book of Life at God’s side in heaven.¹⁹

Of course, the fullest understanding of the resurrection to eternal life was not possible until it was actualized by the man Jesus. Prior to his own resurrection he gave dramatic evidence that as the Son of Man, he was God’s agent for restoring life by resurrecting the dead. To the four-day dead Lazarus, Jesus commanded, “Lazarus, come out!” and immediately “the dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.”²⁰ During his ministry Jesus raised others from death to physical life (not eternal life) pointing toward his own coming resurrection to eternal life. Jesus could truly claim and offer this powerful hope,

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”²¹

A few days after raising Lazarus, Jesus was betrayed, beaten, crucified, and placed in a cave tomb and sealed with a huge boulder. It all took place on the Passover, the opening day of an annual festival which drew pilgrims from around the empire. Crowds packed into Jerusalem and flowed into its famous Temple of God, one of the architectural wonders of the ancient world and twice the size of Solomon’s Temple.

The recent movie *The Passion of the Christ* graphically and accurately pictured his suffering and death. The execution of Christ was not done in secret, or behind closed doors, or in a remote setting with few witnesses. It was the major event in the crowded capital city of Judea with thousands watching. Roman rulers, soldiers, temple guards, Jewish priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, lawyers, Jesus’ followers and thousands of common citizens attended the great uproar in Jerusalem. His death and resurrection is no mere myth invented years after the fact, but is manifestly a historically authenticated fact.

It was Passover when the rite of slaying the lambs took place. This annual sacrifice was done in commemoration of the spectacular salvation God wrought in saving an entire nation out of Egyptian slavery, delivering them into freedom, and ultimately into the Promised Land. At the original Passover in Egypt, the blood of the slain lamb was put over the door of each house and all inhabitants inside were spared the death of their firstborn, the final plague God visited upon an obstinate Pharaoh and his pagan nation. Those under the blood were “passed over” and spared from death.

Jesus, God’s firstborn son, died on the Passover and his sacrificial blood becomes our forgiveness and protection from eternal death. The symbolism is perfect and its theology was not missed by Jesus’ followers. Jesus died, was buried, his tomb sealed, and a crack Roman guard was set to deter any tampering. There he lay dead for three days and nights. Then, as Jesus himself prophesied before his death, he rose from the dead.²²

Consider it: A dead-in-the-grave human awakened by God, rising to complete consciousness, and possessing an eternal body impervious to death. This was a first—the first human in all history resurrected to eternal life! Jesus was a living, breathing man with bones and blood and subject to pain and death. He was like us. Yet he, through the power of his heavenly Father, defeated death, came forth from the grave, and now lives.

Two Resurrections

The First Resurrection

We saw earlier that Christ spoke of two resurrections; one to eternal life, and the other to judgment. The First Resurrection is rightly called “a better resurrection”²³ and is the substance of the Christian’s Hope²⁴.

“Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6).

This is not a resurrection for a few more years of physical life until one’s body would quite natu-

rally die again. Apart from the unique resurrections of Jesus, all other resurrections in the OT and NT (which could also be understood as resuscitations) were resurrections to mortal, physical life. All those resurrected later died natural deaths.

The First Resurrection is entirely different. It is precisely the same as Christ’s resurrection—a spiritual resurrection to eternal life with a new, eternal, glorified body.²⁵ The specific quality of the First Resurrection was described by Paul:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1Corinthians 15:51:54)

Our new body will be vibrantly alive, powerful, glorified (radiant, luminescent, having perhaps a burning phosphorescent white energy like the disciples witnessed at Christ’s “transfiguration” in Mt 17:1-9), and with capacities and abilities above even those of angels which now freely transverse the universe. The things God has in store for us are truly beyond our comprehension.²⁶

The resurrection of the righteous “dead in Christ” is the next major occurrence in the Creator’s Grand Plan. The rising of the righteous manifests at the precise moment Christ returns to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence (2 Corinthians 4:14).

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first (1Thes 4:16).

Jesus encouraged his followers to pray to the heavenly Father, “Your kingdom come, your will be

done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10). That is exactly what will happen; the kingdom is inaugurated by Christ and immediately God’s will begins to be realized throughout the earth. Resurrected Christians are Christ’s ruling administration to assist him in remaking this earth to the Paradise of God’s vision. Wars will end, peace will reign, and joy and laughter will begin to ring throughout the land. Children will safely play in the streets without harm or fear. These are the times God inspired the prophets to describe where even the violent nature of animals will conform to a new peaceful world.

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, and the calf and the lion and the yearling together and a little child will lead them....They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain [Kingdom], for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:6, 9).

We commonly refer to the first thousand years of the Kingdom of God on earth as the millennium. At its beginning the angels will sing of the resurrected saints, now given eternal life and rulership with Christ, with these words,

“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:10).

So far we have seen that the Scriptures mention a resurrection to eternal life, rulership with Christ on earth, and the glories the Kingdom of God will bring to earth. However, one can search the Scripture without success to find mention of souls going to either heaven or hell upon death. Rather, the dead wait in the grave, as if in a long night of sleep, until the Judge of all mankind calls the dead to rise—either for reward or further judgment.

The first resurrection occurs at the return of Christ and will include the righteous from all ages. People like Abel, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Israel, David, Elijah, Peter, John, and...you and me!²⁷

Another Resurrection: All Will Be Judged

We saw earlier that Jesus referred to another resurrection to judgment for those who have not “done good” (i.e. the unrighteous). Later Jesus makes clear the sequence of this secondary resurrection in his revelation to John:

They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6).

The secondary resurrection is here given but a brief postscript to the prime focus of this passage which is the first resurrection. The second resurrection is not one to eternal life, but to physical life. It is a time when people who have never truly known God (including babies, pagans, and virtually everyone who has ever lived) will be given an opportunity to learn of Him and His Way. They will come back to life into a world that for 1000 years had been progressing toward perfection and is as full of the knowledge of God as the sea is with water.

Truthfully, this will be the first real opportunity (not some “second chance”) most humans of all ages past will have had to grasp the reality of God and his plan of salvation. They will have the contrast of past experience in the kingdoms of men, blinded by the darkness of Satan, to that which their eyes will behold in the peaceful, beautiful, dynamic Kingdom of God on earth.

They will be given opportunity to choose which world they want and can then take the same path of moving Godward in mind, character and action that Christians in this age have taken. This period of new living is called a time of “judgment,” just as we are now being judged by God according to how we live, think, and act—our works. In fact, Christians are being judged today by the same standards that will be in place for these billions coming to life in the second resurrection.²⁸

You can imagine that virtually all will choose God’s way, receive eternal life, and the victory of God will be near universal. I say “near universal,” since God affords man freedom to accept or reject. Apparently some few—I suspect very few—will choose to rebel against God and reject his Spirit and his gift of eternal life. For them is reserved the “second death” from which there can be no resurrection. It is a merciful annihila-

tion—not a burning forever in hell—for those who have spurned God gift

Space does not permit an extended discussion of all matters relating to the coming resurrection(s). Scripture doesn't tell us all the details we'd like to know about the future, but it gives us the key events upon which we can base our hope. In the briefest way let me offer my thoughts on a few specific questions that I believe Scripture can answer.

Questions

- Will we be recognized by family, friends and others in the resurrection? Yes, I believe we will be the same recognizable person, possessing the same godlike character fashioned through our Godward Walk, same personality, but with a new, eternal, beautiful, glorified body.²⁹
- Will we have the same name? Probably not. We will be given a new name by our God—one that matches our unique personality, character and our new responsibilities.³⁰
- What will we do? We will be given a job of importance and rulership in his kingdom—one perfectly fit to our talents, interests and passions. Our overall job, in concert with the rest of God's sons and daughters, will be to remake the entire earth into a new Eden. This will be the largest enterprise ever attempted in the history of mankind and will involve an administration of millions directing innumerable multitudes in various worldwide intellectual, scientific, and building projects with budgets of a magnitude today's politicians could never imagine.³¹
- What happens after the Millennium? The first 1000 years of the rule of Christ's Kingdom is but the beginning of God's New Creation.³² The prophets spoke of this future Paradise world when peace reigns, war ceases, the deserts bloom, and prosperity overwhelms. God gave Daniel a vision in which he states: "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed....it will itself endure forever."³³

The millennium is but the first day of God's eternal kingdom. Beyond that we must behold the limitless universe as God's mysterious canvas upon which he will expand his Paradise king-

dom. Christians will be royalty, priests, sons and daughters of the Most High³⁴ joining the Creator in planning and bringing to pass the never-ending growth of his Celestial Kingdom.

What a high calling! Can we grasp it? The picture God presents to us of the future isn't a static scene of floating around heaven plucking harps, adoring each other's wings and eating cake. Rather it is a dynamic, active world full of challenge, excitement, learning, fun, and with never-dull building and beautification programs conceived and executed by God and his glorified sons and daughters. Supreme among all joys will be the continual fellowship with our Creator God, Jesus Christ, our loved ones, and the finest people ever to have walked the earth.

A resurrection awaits you and God is calling you to join him for eternity in his Kingdom of Light. The surest things in the universe aren't taxes and death, but God and life.

Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?

Death has been swallowed up in victory!³⁵

...The victory of the Resurrection of the Dead, through Jesus Christ, our Lord!

¹ Genesis 3:19

² Hebrews 9:27

³ Revelation 20:6; 2:11

⁴ Genesis 1:27

⁵ Gen 2:9

⁶ Gen 5:5

⁷ Heb 11:13

⁸ 2Cor 4:4

⁹ Jn 6:40

¹⁰ 1Cor 15:20-23

¹¹ 2Tim 1:10

¹² Ecc 12:7

¹³ Job 14:15

¹⁴ Job 14:14

¹⁵ Dan 12:2, 13

¹⁶ 1Sam 2:6; Dt 32:29

¹⁷ Mt 22:23, 32

¹⁸ Phil 3:20-21

¹⁹ Dan 12:1; Phil 4:3; Rev 21:27

²⁰ Jn 11:38-44

²¹ Jn 11:25-26

²² Mt 12:40

²³ Heb 11:35

²⁴ 1Pet 1:3-4

²⁵ 1Cor 15:49

²⁶ 1Cor 2:9

²⁷ For a short list of those included in the First Resurrection see Hebrews 11.

²⁸ 1Pet 4:17; Heb 9:27

²⁹ Mt 17:3

³⁰ Rev 2:17

³¹ 1Cor 6:2; Mt 19:28, and many others

³² Rev 21:5

“Fine linen, bright and clean” is given to the bride of the Lamb, Revelation 21:14 shows that “fine linen” is also worn by the hosts of heaven, and Revelation 21:2 states that the New Jerusalem itself is “prepared as a bride beautifully dressed.”

So, close as some of the similarities between the two cities may appear, we see that they reflect only surface likenesses. The differences are clear. Fundamentally, we should notice that all the desirable things about the New Babylon are limited to certain individuals. The gold, precious stones and pearls of the city, like the fine clothing, are limited to the few, the rich and powerful who can obtain them (Revelation 18:23B), and they are tainted by the sinfulness associated with the way in which they are obtained (vs. 23B-24). In the New Jerusalem the same good things are universally present and available for the enjoyment of all. They are part of the construction of the city itself (Revelation 21:18-21), and it is no coincidence that pearls – which are judged in value by their size – are said to be of a size to form the very gates of the new city (the origin, of course, of the expression “the pearly gates”). In these and other ways, John makes the point that the Babylon-city of humanity reaches for many of the same things, but in totally different ways and at a totally inferior level.

Irreconcilable Differences

The differences between the two cities are repeatedly underscored by John. Some are subtle, yet they are far-reaching in their importance. In Revelation 18:21 we read “Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: ‘With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.’” In the Near Eastern world in which John lived, the sea had long been a symbol of chaos and destruction, and New Babylon’s total submersion in the sea is symbolic of its total annihilation. It is interesting that in his description of the new heavens and new earth, however, John prefaces his description of the New Jerusalem with the specific comment

that “there was no more sea” (Revelation 21:1-2), indicating that the chaos and destruction which had overwhelmed the old world-city would be nowhere present for the new.

While Revelation 18:23 foretells of Babylon that “The light of a lamp will never shine in you again,” Revelation 21:23 contrasts New Jerusalem in that “The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.” Likewise, regarding Babylon, Revelation 18:23 tells us “The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again,” though the marital image of joy and happiness is used specifically of the very nature of the New Jerusalem – which is itself an eternal “Bride” (Revelation 21:2, 9-10). While the inhabitants of New Babylon “...will weep and mourn” (Revelation 18:16), those of the New Jerusalem will experience “... no more death or mourning or crying or pain ...” (Revelation 21:4). While Revelation 18:14 states “They will say of Babylon, ‘The fruit you longed for is gone from you...,’” Revelation 22:2 stresses that the New Jerusalem will have “...the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month....” One city is doomed to destruction (Revelation 18:21); the other is guaranteed eternity (Revelation 21:25).

So a close comparison of the imagery used to depict the cities of New Babylon and New Jerusalem reveals many differences throughout their descriptions, even where they appear to be similar. The differences between the two cities show that they are juxtaposed not only as symbols of sinfulness and righteousness, as is obvious, but also – in a less-obvious subtext – that Revelation consciously contrasts the direction and the way of life associated with each city – the ways of life that are responsible for creating their respective identities.

The Road to Babylon

Babylon clearly exemplifies a way of life based on exploitation, getting and pride. It may be a city, but it is more than a single city. It is as old as the first city after the Flood: “Then they said,

“Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves” (Genesis 11:4). It is greed and pride personified. Thus Babylon is given the judgment: “Give her as much torment and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, ‘I sit enthroned as queen’” (Revelation 18:7). Revelation 17:6 and 18:24 show her as a great city/woman forcibly taking the blood of the saints, but her way of *getting* is endemic among her “merchants” — all those who follow the system of Babylon: the merchants growing rich from her (Revelation 18:3), those who lament when they lose what they get through her (Revelation 18:11), the merchants who gained their wealth through her system (Revelation 18:15).

As we saw above, John’s list of the things amassed by the followers of Babylon is modeled on Ezekiel’s list of goods amassed by those trading with ancient Tyre, and the underlying way of life is the same. Notice Ezekiel’s description of the king of Tyre: “By your wisdom and understanding you have gained wealth for yourself and amassed gold and silver...” (Ezekiel 28:4). Note the stress on gaining, getting, wealth for oneself. This stress is heightened in verses 11-19 where Ezekiel’s imagery shifts from the king of Tyre to the figure ultimately behind this human way of getting and pride — Satan himself — and then back again to the human king (notice especially vs. 17 regarding the pride and splendor). These qualities form the backdrop, the basis of the very way of life exhibited by Babylon, Tyre, Rome, and every other later, greater “Babylon.”

A Better Way

In stark contrast, New Jerusalem exemplifies God’s way of life based on giving. At the most fundamental level the city is itself a gift, just as John tells us: “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Revelation 21:2). The good things of this city are explicitly said to be *given*, as we see in many verses in its description. For example: “To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life...” (Revelation 21:6-7); “the Lord God will give them light” (Revelation 22:5); “My reward is with

me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done” (Revelation 22:12); “Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life” (Revelation 22:17).

It can hardly be coincidental that throughout his description of Babylon the Great, John repeatedly mentions the concept of *gain* (getting, taking), while in his description of the New Jerusalem he continually mentions that the good things there are *given*. At the most fundamental level, “Gain” and “Give” might well be said to be the hallmarks of the ways of the two cities, and while we might seek for indications of specific cities and religions in the identity of the human city, we should not forget the fact that the description of Babylon itself says little about religion *per se*, and much about ways of life.

The two cities of Revelation represent then, not only a system that man builds versus what God builds, but also they convey a more specific moral — a tale that stresses two different ways of life — of self-centered getting and pride, versus God-centered giving and worship. The two trees which appear at the beginning of the Bible — the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life (Genesis 2:9) — are, in one sense, analogs of the two cities which appear at its end. The tree of knowing good and evil represented, in that same sense, the things mankind desired to take, while the tree of life represented that which God wanted to give. The new Babylon might be said to be built around the former tree, and the New Jerusalem is built, of course, around the latter (Revelation 22:2).

R. Herbert, Ph.D., was trained in the languages and cultures of the biblical world and the ancient Near East. He writes for a number of Christian publications and for his websites: www.TacticalChristianity.org and www.LivingWithFaith.org.



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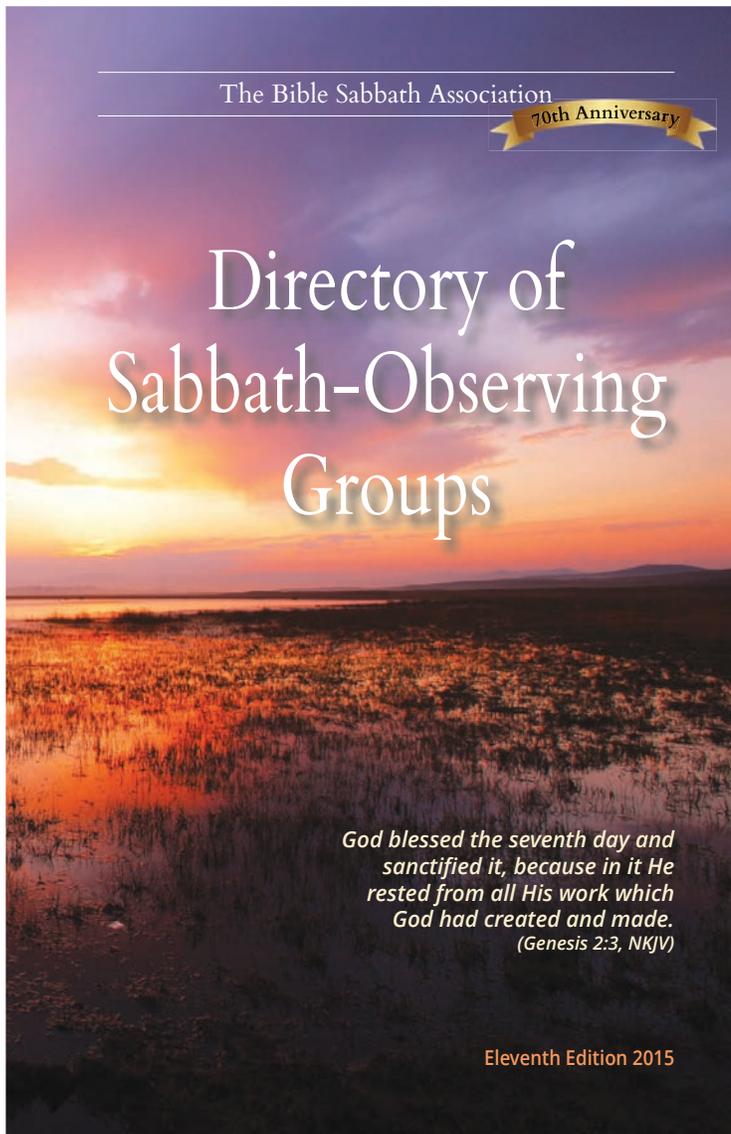
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