



The Sabbath Sentinel

Nov.-Dec.
2019

The Mark OF THE BeAST



BSA—The Bible Sabbath Association

"And he causeth all ... to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads."

The Sabbath Sentinel November –December, 2019

Volume 73, No. 6, Issue 599

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Subscriptions: Call toll-free (888) 687-5191 or write to: The Bible Sabbath Association, PO Box 7707, Bonney Lake, WA 98391. The Sabbath Sentinel is sent free of charge to all who request it in the U.S. If you live outside of the U.S., please send us a donation of \$25 (US) to cover overseas postage. **Voluntary contributions to the Bible Sabbath Association make publication of The Sabbath Sentinel possible.**

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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What is Our “Why?”

Why is it that we do the things we do? Do we ever stop and ask why it is that we take certain actions? That’s an important question, perhaps the most important question we should be asking ourselves.

For instance, why is it that we keep the Sabbath day? There are many possible answers to this question.

We might state that God commands Sabbath keeping, for us to keep it holy, in the Decalogue: Exo 20:1 *And God spake all these words, saying,*

...

“Exo 20:8-11 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.”

We might even draw upon other scriptures which make it clear that the Sabbath Day is to be kept holy as a sign of a covenant with God. Exo 31:13 *“Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you.”*

And, why do we *want* to keep it holy? Is it because we believe that God says we ought to do that as we saw in Exodus 20? Or, is there a greater reason? Can there be a greater reason than God commanding us?

Is it because of fear that we obey, because if we do not obey then our lives are forfeit in a future judgment? Exo 31:14-15 *“Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.*

“Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.”

The avoidance of eternal death is certainly one reason why we might keep the Sabbath in the way God wants it kept—holy.

How about all of the other commandments that God has left to us? Exo 20:7 *“Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.”* Do we refrain from using God’s name for a frivolous purpose because we want to do so, or is it because God commands it, or something else? Should there be another reason?

What about the commandments that tell us to honor our parents, or to refrain from stealing, or to not murder others? Do we walk in those commandments simply because God says to do so? Do we walk in them because to not do so is to incur a death sentence?

How many of us have stopped to think about this question in our lives? Do we subscribe to the “God said. I believe it. That settles it.” mentality? That certainly might work for us, but what about for those who have yet to receive their calling, who, perhaps, have not yet come to the conviction that God says what we claim that He said?

We are called to a higher standard. 1Pe 3:15 *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear...”*

How about when times get hard for us, as they invariably do? Will our “God said it” mentality give us the strength to stand during persecutions and trials that Jesus said would certainly come our way if we choose to follow Him?

Certainly, being ready to give an answer that is permeated with meekness and fear would lead us to a

better answer than “God said to do it,” despite the fact that this is not a bad reason at all. We all had to be convinced at one point that there is a God, and since there is a God we ought to do as He says.

But, is this what God really wants? Does He want serfs who obey because of His ability to do anything that He desires? Does He want servants who obey out of fear? Does He want unthinking obedience to His commands?

Notice this: Joh 15:14 *“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.”* A question to be considered is this, “Do friends do what they are asked to do out of fear of reprisal?” Would a friend even consider “pay back” for failure to do something the friend asked?

Consider what Jesus said in the same context: Joh 15:17 *“These things I command you, that ye love one another.”*

Jesus also said this in the same context: Joh 15:13 *“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”*

Isn't it more likely that there should be a higher, purer reason for our keeping God's commandments, including His Sabbaths? A perhaps overly-quoted but relevant scripture sheds light on this reason: Joh 3:16 *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

Consider this for a moment: God was willing to give Jesus, His only begotten son up to that point, over to death by the most efficient torture machine man had devised up to that point. Out of love for His future children, God was willing to let Jesus be brutally tortured for the healing of His children and then hung on a tree until He died of His injuries. God let His Son be spit upon and ridiculed because of His love for us.

Is it a great leap in logic for us to understand that God desires children who love Him? Do we love Him and our Savior? Consider this: 1Jn 4:16-19 *“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”*

“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in

this world.

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

“We love him, because he first loved us.”

We must then ask ourselves one very important question: “Do we keep God's commandments because He commands it, or out of fear of eternal damnation? Or do we keep His commandments because we love Him and all that He is doing for us? The difference is of vital importance to us and to the Father!

Imagine, instead, when we are asked why we keep His Sabbath Days that our answer is no longer “because God says so.” Instead, what if our answer becomes “Because it is a little thing to keep a day holy that He made holy and asked us to keep holy considering all that He has done out of love for us. You see, I love the Father because He has extended His loving mercy to me for my sins, allowing me to be washed in the blood of the Lamb, and figuratively clothed me in the white robes of righteousness. Because I love Him, I want to do those things He commands. They are not hard to do. One of them is to keep His Sabbaths holy.”

“I don't have to understand why the Sabbath is different from other days, although I do. I only have to understand that I was a miserable, sinful wretch of a man. Because God loved me He allowed His Son to be miserably tortured and murdered so that I could be forgiven. Keeping His commandments, including the Sabbath Day, is not a burden but a joy. It is not a hard thing He asks. Because He asked, and because I love Him, I want to keep His Sabbath Days holy.”

It's that simple. If we are keeping His Sabbaths holy out of fear or because we are ordered to do so, we are doing it with a wrong motivation. The real reason to keep His Sabbaths is because we love the Father and His Son, Jesus. If we have never realized this before, it is time to consider this so that our answers to “Why?” are convincing to those who ask.

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The President's Corner

With Special Thanks!

Kelly McDonald

I am writing this article in the month of September and the next BSA election is about to take place. I don't know what the outcome will be, but I trust and know that God is involved in the process. Whether I am re-elected to the board or not, I want to express my appreciation to every BSA member and our Sabbath Sentinel subscribers.

I first started writing for The Sabbath Sentinel in 2009. I was in my senior year of college and was encouraged by my Pastor Bill Shults to write for the magazine. I took his advice and gave it a shot. I was trained in the political science field, so I was accustomed to writing articles with highly technical language and very rigid structure. Needless to say, this meant that my first article submission needed a lot of work! It didn't make nearly as much sense to everyone else as it did to me.

Kenneth Ryland was the editor of the magazine at that time. He could have easily chosen not to publish that article. Instead, he helped me improve my writing tremendously. He took me under his wing and tutored me for the next few years so that I could become a better writer. Writing for the public is a much different thing than writing for school.

I can say with certainty that without his mentorship and kindness that I would not have kept writing for the Sentinel. I also would have never entered the election for the board of directors in 2015. I was prompted to become a BSA member in mid-summer of that year. Not long after this, Calvin Burrell asked me to run for the BSA board. I pondered the decision in my mind thoroughly. I was about as busy as I wanted to be at the time. But after much prayer

and counsel, I decided to throw my hat in the ring. I thought nothing would come of it, to be honest with you. So why not try, right? I didn't think anyone really knew me.

When the results came back, I was blown away! I received the second-most number of votes. During our first board meeting, I was nominated President of the board (in a very interesting way). It all happened so fast that I didn't really have a chance to initially process what was happening.

This past board had a daunting task ahead of us. We had to make significant changes to the way we conducted business financially and technologically. We had to re-establish the presence of the BSA in the Sabbath community. We were behind the curve. This was not anyone's fault. This past board was commissioned with the task of changing just that.

One of the great achievements of the previous board was to reduce the number of directors from 12 to 7. This was done so that business could be conducted faster. And it certainly happened the way that they envisioned it!

The amount of motions and accomplishments of the last four years would be extremely numerous and probably take up several pages to explain, but I will briefly review the highlights:

The organization established a better online presence chiefly through the creation of a public Facebook page called The Sabbath Sentinel. We now have 1,948 followers and reach as many as 10,000 people every week. Pursuant to this same effort, we created a blog page (www.sabbathsentinel.org) so that we could spread 1) fresh, insightful content for the Sabbath community, 2) articles from the Sabbath

Sentinel, and 3) BSA products. We have printed almost 500 blogs since August 2016.

Our current website, www.biblesabbath.org, was updated to accommodate more web traffic. We have received three times as many visitors on the site as we used to receive due to this outreach (over 60,000 reached in 2018).

We established a YouTube channel. We presently only have one video on there, but more will be placed there in the future.

We have begun the process of updating the website (special thanks to Corbin Rose for his phenomenal efforts). We hope that by the end of the year this project will be nearing completion.

We made changes to improve the efficiency and reduce confusion for internal operations. We also made significant headway in improving the financial state of the organization (there is still some work to do in this area).

We made meaningful connections with over 24 Sabbath individual congregations, groups, or organizations. This included re-connecting to the Seventh-Day Baptist Church (SDBC) and maintained it by re-printing one of their articles every year in *The Sabbath Sentinel* since 2017.

We conducted our first ever BSA fellowship meeting in Big Sandy, Texas. It was attended by members of several Sabbath keeping backgrounds. This event created enough momentum that we will likely host more in the future. I also spoke at several events including Winter Family Weekend (WFW) in 2018, the Feast of Tabernacles with the Common Faith Network (CFN) in 2018 and 2019. Moreover, I spoke at an interdenominational meeting at the headquarters of the Churches of God Seventh Day in Meridian, ID.

I also preached most Sabbaths of the year and traveled approximately 100,000 miles as BSA President across 15 different states from 2016 through 2019. Through these speaking engagements and online

outreach, the BSA has steadily become known as an authority on Sabbath history. To learn more about other accomplishments, I encourage you to read through past editions of *The Sabbath Sentinel* magazine from 2016 through the present.

As I reflect on the past four years, I know that it was all possible because of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. But I also recognize that God used the kindness and mentorship of Kenneth Ryland to start this process in me 10 years ago. I am reminded in this moment how the thoughtfulness and care of one person could later impact so many more people. Ken passed away earlier this year and is awaiting a glorious resurrection.

To this end, I encourage you all to take time to nurture the gifts of others around you, especially those who are willing to serve. You never know the long-term impact you can make through that special time of devotion.

In conclusion, I would like to thank everyone on the BSA membership roll who voted for me to have this opportunity. I would like to thank every Sabbath Sentinel subscriber for taking the time to read our magazine and spread its message to others. I would also like to thank every board member for your prayers and support the past four years. I could not have done it without you.

The past four years I have had the opportunity to meet and serve wonderful children of God from different church backgrounds. I have also been able to serve with six other great people on the board. Every board member worked hard the past four years and contributed in meaningful ways. Together, we made a great team and accomplished many things. We either met or made progress for nearly every goal we set. I am proud of you all: June, Royce, Calvin, Marsha, Bryan, and John. Through our work, future boards have been empowered to achieve even greater things. Thank you.

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Is keeping the Sabbath all that makes us unique?

Conclusion

Paul W. Syltje

Continued from the May 2019 Sabbath Sentinel:

Practicing the Law in the Spirit

What, then, are these evidences of God's spirit dwelling within us that make us shine like lights to the world around us, that give evidence that we are sons of the Most High God because we truly love one another ... and those in the world with whom we associate? Let us examine what Jesus and Scripture say about how we must keep the Law of God, to identify us beyond just keeping the Sabbath.

I. You shall have no other Gods before Me (Exodus 20:3).

This commandment is closely related to commandment II below, and reiterated in Jeremiah 25:6, "Do not go after other gods to serve them and worship them" Anything that comes before the true God in your life is a god, because it replaces the One who made all things and sustains your very life. A good example of someone putting a false god before the true God is the rich young ruler of *Matthew 19:16-24*. The young man asked Jesus what good thing he needed to do to achieve eternal life. He was told to "... go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." The man had great possessions and went away sorrowfully, unwilling to release himself from the worldly possessions he had amassed.

The fact that this commandment states that "You shall have no other gods before Me" implies that there are other gods — real spirits in the spirit realm — which do exist that a person might indeed follow. Indeed, Satan wants you to follow him and practice his carnal lusts. Such a reality is implied in *Deuteronomy 32:7-9*. Here the division of the nations within their appointed boundaries was carried by the Most High as a result of confusing the languages at Babel. Then He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the "sons of God" ... not the

"children of Israel" as many translations have it. (The Dead Sea Scrolls prove that "sons of God" is the correct translation.) These spirits, leaders of the 70 nations as outlined in *Genesis 10*, were not righteous, and to this very day continue to exert control under the auspices of the prince of these evil sons of god, Lucifer (Satan) himself (*Ephesians 6:12; I Peter 5:8*).

These spirits desire to be honored and worshipped, but we as sons of Yahweh must resist these imposters. There is one true God for us (*Deuteronomy 6:4*). Note that a correct translation reveals that this verse says Yahweh, or Lord, is Israel's only God, while not denying the existence of other gods. The Geneva Bible says, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is Lord only. We will be known to worship only the one true God of Israel, who is the Maker of heaven and earth."

II. Do not make for yourself graven images (Exodus 20:4-6)

Ancient societies, and some present-day societies as well, made gods of people, birds, fish, frogs, bulls, or other creatures, even the sun, moon, and stars, and believed that they could invoke spirits to inhabit these caricatures of God's creation made of gold, silver, brass, stone, or wood. We read of Nebuchadnezzar having made a great golden figure about 100 feet tall, which he required all people to bow down to and worship (*Daniel 3:1-5*). There were many images and worshipers of Baal throughout Canaan and surrounding lands (*Numbers 22:41; Judges 6:25-30; I Kings 16:31; 18:19-40; II Kings 3:2; 10:18-23, 25; 11:18; 17:16; 21:3; 23:4; II Chronicles 23:17; 24:7; 28:2; 33:3; 34:4/ Psalm 106:28; Jeremiah 2:8, 23; 7:9; 9:14; 11:13, 17; 12:16; 19:5; 23:13, 27; 32:29, 35; Hosea 2:8, 13, 17; 11:2; 13:1; Zephaniah 1:4*), as well as of Milcom, the god of the Amorites (*I Kings 11:5, 33; II Kings 23:13; Zephaniah 1:5*), Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians (*Judges 2:13; 10:6; I Samuel 7:3; 12:10; 31:10; I Kings 11:5, 33; II*

Kings 23:13), Tammuz (*Ezekiel 8:14*), and various gods of the Syrians, Philistines, Egyptians, and all nations. They oftentimes had many gods representing different aspects of the natural world, especially the sun. Thus we see people attempting to fill the natural void to worship something (*Ecclesiastes 3:11*), even if these are material things or represent Satanic entities.

As lights to the world, we resist these evil forces of the spirit world (*Ephesians 6:12; James 4:7-8*), and worship the true living God of all creation. One can make idols of most anything — cars, houses, ranches and farms, stamp collections, books, pets ... even one's own children, spouse, and friends if they are placed above the living Creator God.

III. You shall not take the Lord God's name in vain (*Exodus 20:7*).

The word vain here is the Hebrew saw, meaning "worthlessness, vanity, falseness." To use the Creator's name in a worthless, vain, or false way is an extremely serious matter, for God tells us the guilty party will not be "guiltless." Using God's several names — God, Lord, Yahweh, Jesus, Yahshua, Elohim, Father, Savior, Creator, Healer, or any other name — in a trite, grievous, or cursing manner (I cannot write them here) is forbidden, for His name is to be honored as the Creator and Sustainer of all that is (*Genesis 1; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2-3; Ecclesiastes 12:1, 6; Isaiah 40:28; Romans 1:25; I Peter 4:19*).

Note how serious a matter it is to blaspheme against the spirit of God, which is His power. *Matthew 12:31* states, "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy [Greek blasphemia, 'slander, railing, reproach'] against the spirit will not be forgiven men." Claiming that God's power is not capable of creating all that is — including mankind in His own image — and healing, placing kings in power, and guiding and protecting the saints is a horrible assault on the personage of the One who placed us here on the earth. Castigating one's own Maker is totally illogical and irredeemable. Therefore, God's people as lights in the world will not curse, using any of God's names frivolously, but will uplift and honor His name by using His Names care-

fully and obey what He says.

IV. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (*Exodus 20:8-11*).

This commandment has already been discussed.

V. Honor your father and your mother (*Exodus 20:12*).

This wonderful commandment is not just a platitude about being nice to one's parents, but it extends to defining one's very lifespan: "... that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you." Honoring one's parents therefore must have some positive impact on the physiology of the human body, but more than that such honor means "... that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you" (*Deuteronomy 5:16*; see also *Ephesians 6:1-4*). "May be well" refers to one's interpersonal relationships with others, one's family life, as well as prosperity in one's business. How can this all be?

Science has given us good indications of why honoring one's parents is so vital for a good, healthy, long life. According to S. Zeiger in "Parent-Child Relationship Problems" (www.kids.love to know. com), "The parent/child relationship plays a critical role in a child's development. When kids have dependable, reliable, consistent and stable relationships with their parents, they have a secure base from which they can explore and experience their world, leading to healthy growth and development Kids also use their relationships with their parents as models for relationships with others. If they do not have a strong, positive relationship with their parents, it will be much more difficult for them to develop strong, positive relationships as they interact with others."

Not having a positive relationship with one's parents leads to strife and stress, a matter so serious that God gave the command, "And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death" (*Exodus 21:17*). The son or daughter guilty of such an affront would be a threat not only to family peace and civility, but to the fabric of Israelite society as a whole if such attitudes were allowed to multiply.

Failing to honor one's father and mother obviously

brings stress and contention within the relationship, and it is well known that stress and anxiety cause a number of harmful, life-shortening effects on the body (from K. Cherney, www.healthline.com, July 20:2018):

Central nervous system. Long-term anxiety will cause the brain to signal the release of stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol, and if released regularly this will lead to headaches, dizziness, and depression.

Cardiovascular system . Blood pressure will likely be increased, as well as heart diseases.

Digestive and excretory systems. Nausea, diarrhea, loss of appetite, and various digestive issues can stress the body.

Immune system. With continual anxiety, hormones such as adrenaline flood the body on a regular basis and weaken the immune response, leaving the body more vulnerable to infections and illnesses.

Respiratory system. Asthma and pulmonary diseases may be increased.

Contrast these responses to a poor relationship with one's parents with the benefits of a positive relationship (from K. Cherney, www.healthline.com, September 7, 2018):

Positive thinkers face stressful situations more effectively by, rather than focusing on frustrations they cannot change, devising plans of action and asking others for assistance and advice.

Having optimism improves immunity to diseases, through the powerful body-mind connection.

Overall health is improved including less risk of cardiovascular diseases, less depression, and longer life.

Resilience in life is improved as the person faces a crisis with strength and resolve, rather than fall apart. In the face of a challenge, ways to fix a problem are examined, and rather than giving up hope, resources are marshaled to overcome it. In the face of natural disasters, positive emotions provide a buffer against depression.

We can now see how honoring one's parents culti-

vates hope, determination to overcome, and joy in life which leads to better health, immunity, and consequently longer life, just as the commandment promises. Moreover, a study by Andrew Steptoe at University College of London found that, while studying nearly 10,000 men and women from 2002 to 2013, and answering four questions that evaluated how they enjoyed life,

"Nearly seven years after their last answers, people who reported more enjoyment (or the highest satisfaction scores on all three occasions) were 24% less likely to have died than people who reported no enjoyment. Those who said they were happy on two of the occasions had a 17% lower mortality" (A. Park, "The First Real Proof That Your Outlook Affects Longevity," <http://time.com/4599529/to-live-longer-you-have-to-stay-happy/>, December 13, 2016).

VI. You shall not murder (Exodus 20:13).

We know well that killing someone is a heinous sin, whether done by intent or accidentally, and is discussed at length in the statutes mentioned in *Exodus 21:12-25* and *Numbers 35:6-22*. Yet it is made clear in *1 John 3:14-16*, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates [Greek *miseo*, "regard with ill-will, detest, abhor"] his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Even hating your brother is akin to killing him, so God's people will be known by their attitude towards those who might give a person every reason to hate them ... according to the world's standards. Notice what Jesus Christ said in *Matthew 5:38-48*: "You have heard it said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do

good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

We are to take on the attitude of Jesus when He said, if your fellow man sins against you repeatedly you shall forgive him not just seven times, but seventy times seven times (*Matthew 18:21-22*). Moreover, we are to ... "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse Repay no one evil for evil Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. Therefore, 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty give him drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (*Romans 12:14, 17, 19-21*).

By having this attitude of doing good towards one's persecutors, the carnal tendency to lash out towards perpetrators of evil will be quenched. You will not hate your fellowman but show mercy and love to him, identifying yourself as God's people even beyond the keeping of the Sabbath command.

VII. Do not commit adultery (*Exodus 20:14*).

Faithfulness within marriage is strenuously protected by God's laws, in several ways. Not only is a marriage partner not to defile the marriage covenant by committing adultery (*Leviticus 18:20; 20:10*), incest (*Leviticus 18:6; 20:11*), homosexuality (*Leviticus 18:22; 20:13*) bestiality (*Leviticus 18:23; 20:15-16*), or interacting with or marrying someone who is near in kinship (*Leviticus 18:6-18; 20:11-12, 14, 17, 19-20*), but even the priests were to marry only virgins of the priestly line (*Leviticus 21:13-15*). Israelites were to marry only within their own tribe (*Numbers 36:6-9*), and never a Canaanite, unless a soldier might desire a woman he found during a campaign, and then only under certain conditions (*Deuteronomy 21:10-14*). Only if a husband found some uncleanness in his new wife could he divorce her (*Deuteronomy 24:1*).

The marriage bed, defined and protected from the very beginning of this eon by Elohim's words to Adam (*Genesis 2:24*), forms the foundation of human society for every nation ... and nations cannot survive without its maintenance in purity and permanence.

Jesus Christ enlarged upon this seventh commandment by making plain the spiritual intent of the law.

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery" (*Matthew 5:27-28, 31-32*).

It is clear that we as God's people show our identity in Christ by not even allowing our minds to dwell lustfully upon someone who is not our spouse. It is the same as adultery, and this attitude identifies up as God's people, even beyond the keeping of the Sabbath.

VIII. You shall not steal (*Exodus 20:15*).

As for the other commandments, Moses related many statutes regarding stealing (*Exodus 22:1-15; Leviticus 6:1-5; 19:11; Deuteronomy 5:19*). Many other scriptures address stealing (*Proverbs 6:30; 9:17; 30:9; Jeremiah 7:9; Ezekiel 33:15; Hosea 4:2; Obadiah 5; Malachi 1:13*), and Jesus Christ and the disciples condemned stealing, such as Paul when he said, "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need" (*Ephesians 4:28*).

To not steal [Greek *klepto*, "to take away stealthily"] means to respect the property of one's neighbor, which Jesus related is one of the essentials of living when he addressed the rich young ruler (*Matthew 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-23*). He went on further in *Matthew 22:36-40* by saying that loving your neighbor as yourself, along with all of the other commandments, is the essence of the entire Law and Prophets. Thus, a servant of the Creator will be known for respecting the property of others, and

will not covet what he has, for coveting is the first step towards stealing.

IX. You shall not bear false witness (Exodus 20:16).

This commandment says a person is to tell the truth, to not give false or erroneous testimony regarding anyone or any thing. Such a command is especially important in judgments concerning death and injury, to both body and reputation, and is encoded in statutes throughout Scripture (*Exodus 23:1-3; Leviticus 5:11; Numbers 5:12-31; Deuteronomy 5:20; 17:2-11; 19:15-19; Psalm 27:12; Proverbs 6:19; 12:17; 14:5, 25, 19:5, 9, 28; 21:28; 24:28; 25:18*). Jesus had much to say about false witnesses and witnessing truthfully (*Matthew 15:19; 18:16; 19:18, etc.*), and during his mock trial in front of the Sanhedrin He had to face false witnesses (*Matthew 26:60; Mark 14:56-57*).

God Himself, and Jesus Christ, are perfect witnesses, and can never lie (*Jeremiah 42:5; John 8:14; 18:37; Revelation 3:14*). So a child of God will not bear false witness, even to his own hurt, which strength of character will become known to those around him as evidence that he or she is truly one of God's elect.

X. You shall not covet (Exodus 20:17).

Coveting [Hebrew hamad, "to covet, lust, desire"; Greek epithumeo, "to set the heart upon, to desire, to long for," or zeleuo, "to be zealous, earnest, eager"], or desiring something that belongs to someone else, is a grievous sin, for it leads to breaking the other commandments, such as stealing, and adultery; in fact, breaking one commandment breaks them all (*James 2:10*). Jesus Christ warned the people of the great danger of covetousness [Greek pleonexia, "an inordinate desire for riches, grasping, overreaching, extortion"].

"Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15).

Then He went on to relate the parable of the rich farmer (*Luke 12:16-21*) who desired to pull down his barns and build new and bigger ones to store his abundant crops and goods. Then he said within himself, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years, take ease; eat, drink, and be merry" (*Luke 12:19*). Jesus castigated this farmer by calling him a fool, for

his soul would be required of him that very night — he would die — and then who would be responsible for his great riches? Therefore do not lay up treasures for yourself, but be rich towards God.

Coveting precedes the breaking of the other commandments: worshipping false gods, lying, committing adultery, stealing, and in indirect ways breaking the others. It is a most insidious attitude that motivated Satan the devil to sin. He was "... the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty" until iniquity was found in him due to merchandising (*Ezekiel 28:12, 18*). He coveted the position and power of the Most High God, and said, "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High" (*Isaiah 14:13-14*).

More Than Sabbath Keepers

Thus, the saints, by refraining from coveting but instead loving one another in an attitude of service, like Jesus did when He washed the feet of the disciples at the last Passover (*John 13:5-17*), reveal themselves as God's people beyond being Sabbath keepers. While the Sabbath does identify us as God's "unusual people," that is only the beginning. We are recognized by the unconverted world around us as keepers of the total way of God in how we treat them and our families. We do not make idols of anything, use profanity, dishonor our parents, steal, murder, cheat on our spouse, lie, cheat, or covet what is not ours. Our lives are lived in purity, serving others in our servile work and in our aid to the widows, orphans, or anyone in need.

Our lights shine as beacons of hope and joy within a world of darkness and hopelessness. We savor the earth with the salt of our works, coming from a pure heart and a sound mind. We are the pioneers in waiting of a new Eden upon the earth, looking upwards towards the return of our Elder Brother to finally bring peace and renewal to this tired and broken earth.

§

The Mark of the Beast: Revealing the Naked Truth

Aubrey Duncan

It is perhaps the most frequently discussed Biblical doctrine today. Not only is this topic eminent in religious circles; but even the non-religious speculate and make determinations as to what is the Mark of the Beast and its ramifications on society. Regardless of whether you are religious or non-religious, Christian or of any other religious persuasion, you will be affected by the Mark of the Beast. The Holy Bible, the source which introduces the Mark of the Beast, clearly identifies what is the beast. It further portrays the beast most boldly proclaiming to the entire world what is its mark and what are the consequences for not receiving its mark. John the Revelator records: *"And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name"* (Revelation 13:16-17).

Many theologians and self-described prophets have attempted to identify the Mark of the Beast. Almost universally, they have concluded that it is some kind of micro-computer chip, sophisticated electronic device or tattoo that would be implanted in the forehead and/or on the right hand. Unfortunately, this is what most of Christendom and the rest of the world have accepted as 'truth'. But what does the Bible, the only source of Truth in which pages the Mark of the Beast is introduced, has to say about the matter?

In order to correctly determine what is indeed the Mark of the Beast, we must first discover from the Bible, what is the Beast. The prophet Daniel foretold of the nations that would, from his time in Babylonian captivity to the second coming of Jesus, rule the world and have an impact on God's plan for the redemption of human souls. In God-inspired prophetic vision, he outlined those nations in the the imagery of beasts. In the seventh chapter of his exposition Daniel plainly explained what is a beast. First he portrayed Babylon, the empire in which he was a captive, as a lion with wings like an eagle (Daniel 7:4). Of course the historical record testifies that

the Babylonian empire, under its leader Nebuchadnezzar, invaded and captured the Jewish nation in the year 606 BC. The empire that would wrest control from Babylon and then rise to world rulership was that of the Medes and Persians. Their dominance lasted for seventy years until 536 BC. This was in direct fulfillment of earlier prophecies given by the prophet Jeremiah who not only predicted how long Babylon would rule; but named the nation that would follow it (Jeremiah 25:11-12; 51:11). Daniel pictured that entity as a bear with three ribs in its mouth. Its conquest was to continue from 536 BC to about 331 BC.

Next, Daniel foretold of the nation of Greece using the imagery of a leopard with four wings on its back and having four heads. This aptly described the Grecian empire under the leadership of the young Alexander the Great who who defeated Darius III, king of Persia, at the Battle of Arabella in the fall of 331 BC. Alexander captured the then known world with unimaginable swiftness and amazingly unheard of military tactfulness only to have his kingdom, upon his death at the tender age of 33 years, divided among his four top generals: Ptolemy Lagus, Cassander, Lysimachus and Seleucus Nicator (Daniel 7:6).

What Daniel prophesied next is quite remarkable. He described a beast that is unlike any in the natural world. It was a dominating, seemingly unconquerable power that devoured and ruled the entire earth with determined ruthlessness. It was simply unstoppable (Daniel 7:7). This is a fitting characterization of the invincible Roman Empire which arose out of apparent insignificance to overtake Greece around 168 BC, thereby conquering and dominating all of the the previous empires. Rather than being conquered by another nation, Daniel related that it would disintegrate into ten divisions. Out of those ten divisions which he classified as horns, Daniel foretold of a little horn that will rise out of the divided ten and would develop into a political/religious entity that rule the world. This little horn was already growing in power and

influence by the time the Roman empire began to disintegrate around 476 AD.

Historian Will Durant writes of that little horn, "When Christianity conquered Rome, the ecclesiastical structure of the pagan church, the title and vestments of the Pontifex Maximus, the worship of the Great Mother goddess and a multitude of comforting divinities... the joy and solemnity of old festivals, and the pageantry of immemorial ceremony, passed like maternal blood into the new religion, and captive Rome captured her conqueror. The reigns and skills of government were handed down by a dying empire to a virile Papacy. The lost power of the broken sword was re-won by the magic of the consoling word. The armies of the state were replaced by the missionaries of the church, moving in all directions along the Roman roads; and the revolted provinces, accepting Christianity, again acknowledged the sovereignty of Rome. The church with the shadow of the ancient authority behind it, was the only symbol left of imperial Rome. Its bishop, the pope of Rome, was the city's only recourse for leadership and protection. The Roman Empire in Europe would be replaced by the spiritual empire, which came to be temporal as well, whose reigning seigneur was the bishop of Rome" (*Caesar and Christ*, page 672).

Daniel foresaw the successive rulership of the nations mentioned then declared, "These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth" (*Daniel 7:17*). He then focused on the fourth beast, the Pagan Roman Empire, emphasised its transformation into the massive European Ecclesiastical Establishment and the work it would do in opposing the work of God whilst claiming to represent God. He explained, "Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces... And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time" (*Revelation 7:23, 25*).

Not only does the Roman church deceptively, but boldly, claims to be God's representative on earth, thereby taking upon itself the prerogatives of God; it has persecuted and slaughtered more than fifty million souls who refused to accept her usurpation of the God of all creation. Primary among her blasphemous claims is that of changing God's holy Sabbath-day from the seventh to the first day of the



week. The God of all creation lovingly admonishes all humanity: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it" (*Exodus 20:8-11*).

But the beast (little horn) of end-time prophecy boastfully proclaims, "Perhaps the boldest thing, the most revolutionary change the church ever did happened in the first century. The holy day, the Sabbath, was changed to Sunday...not from any directions noted in Scriptures, but from the church's sense of its own power...People who think that the Scriptures should be the sole authority, should logically become Seventh-day Adventists, and keep Saturday holy" (Saint Catherine Catholic Church Sentinel, May 21, 1995). Then she makes it plain for all to see what is her mark of authority: "Sunday is our mark of authority...the church is above the Bible, and the transference of Sabbath is proof of that fact." (Catholic Record, Sept 1, 1923).

Jehovah declares that His Sabbath is His sign between He and His people: "Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed" (*Exodus 31:16-17*). Just in case you may be tempted to think that that was just for the ancient Israelites, do consider the apostle Paul's admonition to fellow Christians: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (*Galatians 3:29*). One cannot claim to be heirs to the promise and at the same time reject the terms of the covenant, the Ten Commandments which includes the Sabbath Commandment (*Exodus 20:8-11*).

**“And if ye be Christ’s,
then are ye Abraham’s
seed, and heirs
according to the
promise”**

Doing such is tantamount to supporting the beast and receiving its mark. Hence, Francis declared to the world in his recent encyclical, *Laudato SI*, as he proposed his solution for the world’s problems: “On Sunday, our participation in the Eucharist has special importance. Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, is meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world. Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, the “first day” of the new creation, whose first fruits are the Lord’s risen humanity, the pledge of the final transfiguration of all created reality. It also proclaims “man’s eternal rest in God” (Section, 168). First, there is no such animal as a Jewish Sabbath. It is the Sabbath of Creator God (*Genesis 2:2-3; Mark 2:27-28*). Francis most recently declared, “Preserving the special character of Sunday as the Lord’s Day — even civilly where possible.”

In other words, one will be punished for honoring the God of creation thus rejecting the Mark of the Beast (*Revelation 13:16-17*). And how does one receive this mark on the forehead and on the right hand? The forehead is the place where the frontal lobe is located. It is the part of the brain where, among other things, we make moral decisions. When the universal legal proclamation goes forth to honor Sunday, what will your decision be? It will then that the Mark of the Beast will be enforced. Will your decision be for the God of all creation and His Sabbath; or will it be for the man of sin, the son of perdition who seeks to take the place of God by prescribing Sunday? (*2 Thessalonians 2:3-4*). It is an issue beyond the days.

The apostle warns, “*What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. . . Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?*” (*Romans 6:16-17*).

This is the naked truth about the Mark of the Beast. Whether you agree or not, I encourage you to prayerfully consider the sixteenth chapter of the Revelation to understand the consequences of receiving the mark of the beast, and by God’s grace, know what it truly is and avoid it.

§

Did you know...?

that you can aid the BSA effort to promote the Sabbath and a Spirit of brother-hood among all who keep God’s Sabbath by becoming a **BRIDGE BUILDER** or a **PILLAR** with the BSA? Besides the monthly or annual membership dues which you can find inside the front cover, you can also help with various functions designed to help bring a fellowship of brethren across denominational lines. Some of the opportunities are: Advise and/or consult with the BSA Board of Directors; visiting and interacting with other Sabbatarian fellowships; speaking on behalf of the BSA; Promotion and/or distribution of BSA materials and services; and assisting with this magazine, the BSA Facebook page, Twitter and other social media on projects defined by the Board of Directors.

REVIVAL IN AMERICA!

PART 1

Darl Arbogast

The word revival implies restoring to a former state of being such as 'vigor, vitality or strength'. Some visualize revival as re-establishment of legal force and effect. To others it bears the connotation of awakening to a previous interest in religion and in truth or consequences.

Truth is essential to verification of fact, proposition, and principle etcetera, it is exact, precise and candid. Truth is the actual state of a matter even as it pertains to religion and Christianity. Truth is the absence of falsehood and error, this is where the problem is when we speak of revival in a religious or Christian sense we are speaking of restoring our churches and our lives to the faith once delivered; Jude 3 NKJ - *3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.* Also in Philippians 1:27 NKJ - *27 Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.*

What is gospel and what is faith? In the short answer, gospel simply means 'good news'; in scripture it implies good news of the Kingdom of God. Many people have struggled with the reality thinking that faith is a made up fantasy. Faith is found in Hebrews 11:1 thru 3 NKJ - *1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2 For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.*

Many heroes of faith are listed along with what they have accomplished.

Question: How do human beings attain to and possess this assurance of things hoped for and evidence of things not yet seen? Faith is a gift of God through His Holy Spirit as the following scripture verses will explain. Ephesians 2:8,9 and Titus 2:11 NKJ - *8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.* (In the person of Jesus and why He came here).

God calls those who He will when He is ready and all others must wait. God called John the Baptist before calling Jesus. John was baptizing men when Jesus came toward him. Matthew 3:13 thru 16 NKJ - *13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. 14 And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" 15 But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. 16 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.*

The custom and pattern of being baptized is carried forward from Jesus and John the Baptist to the first century Church, this is why and how it was called the 'Church of God'. This Church was not an organization of men but was called the 'Church of God' many times in the New Testament.

*Only let your conduct
be worthy of the
gospel of Christ*

THE WEEK OF CREATION

To keep things in proper order we are told in Genesis that there were two immortal spirit beings at the Godhead; they were of the same heart, mind and purpose, the key is 'Let us make'. Romans 1:20 and Colossians 2:9 NKJ - 20 *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse. 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.* The one Spirit who became Jesus was the Creator of the physical heavens and earth John 10:30 NKJ – (Jesus said), 30 *I and My Father are one.* (Jesus also created Adam, Eve and all living creatures.)

When Satan interfered and disrupted God's plan for mankind when Adam and Eve sinned Jesus became the sacrifice for the sins of men for all time. Hebrew 10:12 NKJ - 12 *But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.*

1 John 3:8 NKJ - 8 *He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.*

Revelation 22:13 NKJ – (Jesus said), 13 *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last."*

The Godhead has everything covered from the beginning to the end of this age and more!

...

When Jesus was baptized by John, God's Holy Spirit came down on Him like a dove. John had been baptizing the men Jesus would select for His Apostles. John had served God and when he baptized Jesus he was soon arrested and killed. It was now time for Jesus to call the twelve and begin His ministry. It is important to take a close look at how Jesus practiced His religion and how He lived His life plus the examples He gave us.

Hebrews 13:8 NKJ - 8 *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

God has not changed the order of things since He created Adam and Eve as the Commandments were

in force from the beginning and later they were written in stone by the finger of God. Exodus 31:18 NKJ - 18 *And when He (the One who became Jesus) had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.* God gave the tablets to Moses on the mountain, coming through the wilderness heading toward the promise land.

Because of the sins of the people Moses broke the tablets God had written in stone. God then had Moses write the Ten Commandments, and the Holy Days as they were to be kept and Moses gave them to the Levites to preserve and administer.

Jesus revealed His sacred calendar to Moses before Israel left Egypt. The Israelites were subject to the Egyptian calendar therefore this was when revealing God's sacred calendar became necessary to reeducate Israel to His calendar and His laws.

*Jesus Christ is the same
yesterday, today, and forever*

REVIVAL IN AMERICA?

The thought of a revival in our Country is mainly people thinking of showing up for church. Let it be known that people adapting to religion is not a revival unless they have been there before and dropped it for a while and then returned to it later on. Basically religion is a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature and purpose of the universe, the cosmos, and the earth; not necessarily Judaism or Christianity; these beliefs vary on every continent and sub-divide into divisions in the countries. Understand that they do not all entertain a deity or believe in a here-after or an afterlife. Most cherished devotionals and ritual observances adhere to a moral code for the conduct of their human affairs.

Many people of many nations are irreligious and unenlightened and some are barbaric and others give into worshipping idols. Many do not acknowledge the Bible or God, neither Christianity



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nor Judaism. For example some are Shintoism of Japan and they worship nature and their ancestors. The Hinduism as in India and the Islamic religions of the Arabs are very barbaric.

Primarily the white Anglo-Saxon race of people have carried the torch for belief in God Almighty and the Bible. Evangelism has carried it to the other races but it has not been well received by their majority and has been largely ignored or persecuted often to the death of those who taught them. A large percentage of these people of those nations will revert to their former beliefs after a while if left alone.

North America was founded by protestant people who had been at war for over one hundred years fleeing the tyranny of the Roman Catholic Church. This is the reason for writing our Constitution so that freedom of religion would be a big deal. They however have overlooked the fact that it opened the door for pagan religions to come here to live, gain citizenship, get elected to office and help write and amend our laws. This important fact automatically negates the notion that we are 'one nation under God' or a purely Christian nation.

Right now we are living through a time period when Atheists and people of foreign religions are tearing down our statues erected to honor the men of our past who sacrificed all they had and some died to make this nation great. We have many enemies, three of them are Socialism, Communism and Atheism.

§

Do You Want to Learn More About the Sabbath?

Are You or is Someone You Know New To the Sabbath?

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PONTIUS PILATE

Ray King

Articles in the public media about the history of the Bible commonly relegate the Bible to the back row of the class while everything else gets the front seats. For instance, the usual implication is that the first century Jewish histories written by Philo and Josephus are correct that the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate was ruthless, but that the Bible is wrong in claiming that Pilate was not. Modern Jewish and secular historians are eager to point to this claimed discrepancy in their ongoing disrespect of the New Testament in general and of Jesus Christ in particular.

I believe that all three histories are correct on this account. However, I believe that what some people are saying about the Bible history is wrong, the anti-Bible and the would-be pro-Bible spokesmen, alike. Some would discredit the Bible while some others would- in retaliation, discredit the historians, but then ignore parts of the Bible themselves. This is common. Neither side seem to have really considered the Bible accounts objectively. Sometimes I wonder if they have really looked. That is too bad because a simple harmonizing of the Biblical accounts with those historians is easy in this regard.

Josephus and Philo were right regarding Pilate's harsh demeanor toward perceived enemies of the Roman State. Pilate should be understood to be just as mean a dude as he decided he had to be whenever he perceived an occasion that required an extreme reaction. The Bible accounts do also show this to be an accurate assessment.

Joseph Caiaphas was the High Priest of Judaism during Jesus Christ's ministry. He had recognized those attributes of Pilate in his own erroneous assessment of Jesus as a political influence needing to be eliminated. By this reported strategy of Caiaphas, the biblical historical account of John 11: 47 -

51 does not disagree with the other historical accounts regarding Pilate. The High Priest Caiaphas was anticipating a future bloody Roman putdown of them all because of Jesus. He knew Pilate's capabilities. He was right about Pilate, but dead wrong about Jesus. A political threat of Jesus was never of concern to the Romans; it was always was to the Jewish leadership.

The High Priest's opinion of Jesus as a political threat has been falsely and carelessly attributed to Pilate ever since and the New Testament accounts have been either ignored or distorted to perpetuate it. The bloody Roman put down did indeed come. However, it was not caused by Jesus nor by the scattered Christians, but by the uprisings of the Jews themselves against Rome. The massacres were executed not by Pilate because he was gone. It was in 70AD by Roman General Titus.

The real Pilate of Biblical history obviously did not perceive Jesus of Nazareth as a political threat. He was indeed a tough governor and Judge, but he could also recognize a "frame-up" when he saw one. He did not become Procurator (Governor) and remain one because he was an incompetent. He knew what was going on including the various religious movements as they came and went because he knew all about these religious and rebellious people over whom he had been overseeing for several years in the name of Rome. And just like Pilate, so was King Herod Antipas aware of the previous and recent instances regarding the Jews. He also knew of this Jesus fellow visiting from that adjacent northern province of Galilee, his own region of jurisdiction. There was nothing for Pilate to be concerned about, otherwise he would have already done something. That was his job and he was often ruthless in doing it as the Bible accounts do show. Jesus also knew this about Pilate and had mentioned Pilate's deeds to his disciples just as (Luke 13:1-2) shows. So here there is

clear Biblical agreement of Jesus himself with the Josephus and the Philo assessments of Pilate, the tough, smart Roman governor of a rebellious foreign province of Rome.

But then from the unexpected political pressure brought about by the Jewish leadership and their followers when they thrust Jesus on him that Passover day, Pilate like a typical politician did respond accordingly. The first thing he did when presented with a tough situation was to pass the buck to Herod Antipas. He wanted nothing to do with this situation, but then when Herod, who already knew of Jesus laughed it off, Pilate was stuck with him, again. Then when cornered by those murderously fanatic and perplexing series of confrontations from the Jewish leadership coupled with the uniquely confident yet passive demeanor of Jesus, Pilate denied blame while yielding to reluctantly kill the innocent man. Pilate himself attested to the innocence of Jesus Christ of Nazareth not once, but several times. This is well summarized in Matthew's recorded historical account. It is also shown in John's first-hand eye-witness account as you can see in John 18,19 and in Mark 16 and Luke 23.

(Mat 27:11 -26) And Jesus stood before the governor and the governor asked him, saying, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And Jesus said to him, "You say." And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto him, "Hear you not how many things they witness against you?" And Jesus answered him never a word in so much that the governor marveled greatly. Now at that Feast the governor was accustomed to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would choose. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, "Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?" For he (Pilate) knew that for envy they had delivered him. When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him." But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask for Bar-



abbas and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, "Whether of the twain will you that I release unto you?" They said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" They all say unto him, "Let him be crucified." And the governor said, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they cried out the more, saying, "Let him be crucified." When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see you to it." Then answered all the people, and said, "His blood be on us, and on our children." Then he released Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

This is what Pilate did to prevent a worse riot which he would need to put down with force plus all that would have followed as a result. In that killing of one unpopular person, even though known to him to be innocent, Pilate had prevented a greater slaughter. Caiaphas had gotten his way. Pilate had been "had" and he probably knew it.

However harsh the Roman Governors were, they were not entirely free to act arbitrarily nor extraordi-

narily. They had to answer to Caesar. They were not put there to oppress and make trouble, but to assure a productive society in the name of and for the profit of Rome. They would also arbitrate. Pilate had previously accommodated the Jews and continued to keep order among these notoriously rebellious people. But Pilate, like any of these governors would also kill you to solve a problem. Even though reluctantly, this is what Pontius Pilate did.

Pilate condemned Jesus to get rid of the problem caused by the Jews. He did not see Jesus as a threat; he was convinced of His innocence. But the Jewish leaders were threatening to make false accusations against him to Rome involving Jesus which would be difficult to defend. So he was pressured to do what they wanted; he performed an assassination of one man with no explanation to anyone rather than to otherwise attack a riotous mob including most of the religious leaders of Jerusalem and have to answer to Rome for that. But even though he had been forced to do something he did not want to, he was nobody's fool. He had defused a personally serious political situation and unknowingly did what God had intended to happen all along.

What Pilate had avoided in Jerusalem did indeed happen to him. A few years later the use of a very strong military suppression of an uprising elsewhere in the province got Pilate into trouble with Rome. The resulting complaints and the politics of Roman led to his removal.

The practices of a Roman -style Christianity then demonized all Jews because, "The Jews Killed Jesus". The false ethnic accusation has persisted. But, in a way those particular Jews had brought it on themselves. (Then answered all the people, and said, "His blood be on us, and on our children.") The subsequent Jews counter by blaming Jesus for being a threat to Pilate. So amid all the finger pointing, who really brought about the death of Jesus of Nazareth? If the Bible is to be really believed, Caiaphas did, Satan did, Judas did, Pilate did, the Jews did, the Romans soldiers did, God the Father did, Jesus did. If John 3:16 is to be considered the list gets very long.

§

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Evil does not give up easily.

Lenny Cacchio

Jesus had commanded a Legion of demons to release their possession of a poor soul (Luke 8:28-29). Oddly, they did not immediately leave, but instead protested, using the half-truth excuse that it wasn't the time for their "torment" (Matthew 8:29). Eventually, of course, after some back and forth, the Legion did let go, being forced to leave by the power of Jesus Christ.

It seems to me there is a lesson here. When evil is confronted with righteousness, it's not an immediate win for the righteous. Evil resists. Darkness will fight the incursion of light. In John's Gospel Jesus says, "*The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil*" (John 3:19). In its panic it is not going to give up without a fight.

If you wonder in this world why those who are trying to set things to right have a difficult time, it's because of the vested interest so many have in the promulgation of ungodly thoughts and activities. They will do everything in their power to hang on. Note that when Jesus did cast out the demons and allowed them to enter into and drive to insanity a herd of swine, the people of the town were none too happy about it. An insane man restored to sanity was not enough to convince them that a change



in their culture might be a good thing.

Who knows the reason for this? Maybe they were afraid. Maybe they were angry about the monetary loss of their herd of pigs. Maybe they were so used to the world as they knew it that someone who was willing to drain their swamp of filthy swine appeared to be more of a threat than a savior.

Whatever it was, Jesus didn't argue with them. The people didn't want him around, so he left them and went home. That might be sobering, but do remember that he doesn't force himself on anybody, but he did leave a witness behind.

And he will always win in the end.

§

Whose Church is This, Anyway?

Ronald L. Dart, edited from sermon notes

I know it seems like a silly question. Everybody knows the church belongs to God. But bear with me for a few minutes while I explain.

Some time ago, I was chatting on the phone with a very dear friend and the subject of field churches came up. In the process of discussing churches in the area, my friend referred to a particular church as “Scott’s” church. I had to ask if it was really Scott’s church or if it was God’s church that Scott happened to serve.

Would it surprise you to learn that the only person in the Bible who uses the expression “my church” is Jesus Christ? In fact, there is not one possessive pronoun used of the church anywhere in the New Testament except those referring to God. It is not Paul’s church, Peter’s church, or John’s church. It is God’s Church which they are called to serve.

Consider Paul’s admonition to the Ephesian elders: “Take

heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

This is not a frivolous point I am making. The claim of ownership that God places on the church is nothing to be taken lightly. He is not staking a claim upon property for which He has not paid and to which He has no right. Nor did He merely pay for it in cash or trade. He paid for it in blood—His own blood.

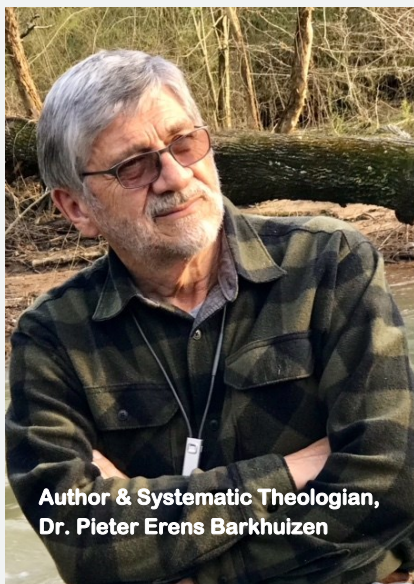
I can’t help wondering how much of the bickering that goes on in churches arises directly from our forgetting whose church it is. Why should people fight over something that can belong to neither of them?

I don’t have an answer to all church problems, but I do have a starting point. We can all stop speaking of the church as though it belongs to anyone except God.

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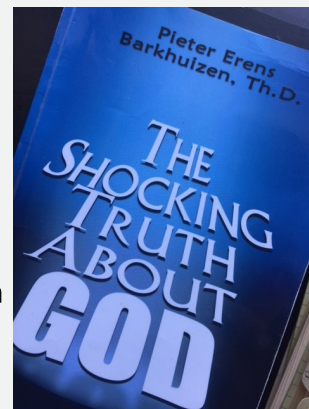
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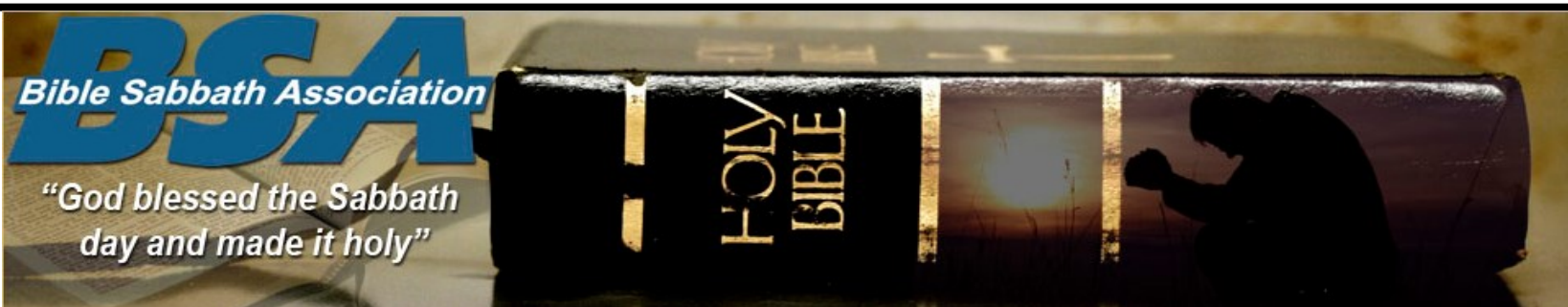
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*A Bi-monthly Publication of
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