

The Sabbath Sentinel

January–February 2013

**Waiting for the
promise of Spring**

A photograph of three small brown and white sparrows perched on a thin, light-colored branch. The birds are arranged in a diagonal line from the bottom left to the top right. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue and white, suggesting a snowy or misty winter scene.

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

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

The Sabbath Sentinel

January–February 2013 Volume 65, No. 1 Issue 559

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Our Cover: *Sparrows in Winter waiting for the promise of God’s renewal in Springtime.*

(Source: Fotalia — © Vera Kuttelvaserova)

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Top-down or Bottom-up Religion



Which model should we follow? This has been a question that the Church of God has dealt with from the very beginning. Of course, the top-down model has many advantages. And there are certain aspects of the top-down model that seem to be supported by the Bible. The Bible says that we are to honor those who “rule over us.” That is in Hebrews 13:17. Are we to take that one verse in Hebrews 13 to be the norm for all churches at all times? Or, are there other considerations that we need to be looking at in deciding whether the church is to follow a top-down model or a bottom-up model?

This has been a ticklish situation throughout the history of the Christian church. We all know the abuses of the Catholic Church. They not only dictate to their members how the Bible is to be interpreted, but they also exercise authority over the lives of their members. It was not until the Protestant Reformation that there was any chance of changing people’s perception of the Church’s authority. And yet, Protestants seem to have gravitated toward the same type of authoritarian structure that characterizes the Catholic Church. Sabbatarian churches have fared little better than most Protestant churches. The problem starts in the hearts of those who desire to exercise authority over the lives of other people in their congregations. This is a problem of human nature, and not one of understanding the Bible. In simple terms, people just simply want to tell other people what to do.

Paul Comes with Authority

In chapter 13 of Second Corinthians the apostle Paul uses his authority to discipline the people for their sins: “This will be the third time I am coming to you. ‘By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.’ I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare — since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God.

For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you” (vv. 1–4).

This seems to be an endorsement of top-down religion, but be careful how you analyze this passage. Though the apostle appears to use his apostolic authority to castigate the people for their failings, he is coming specifically to deal with the issue of sin in the congregation. His responsibility as an apostle was to lead the people to Christ — away from sin — a charge he took very seriously. His desire was for the Corinthians to leave their sins behind and be joined to Christ. They could not do that if there was sin in the body of Christ in Corinth.

If you read carefully the words of the apostle Paul, it is evident that he was always reluctant to take a heavy-handed approach toward people in the church. He seems never eager to exert his authority over the people; rather, he prefers to take a gentle approach in every situation. Even in the case of the church at Corinth he first looks for gentle ways to admonish the people and to inspire them rather than beat them over the head with a club of authority.

The Model for Pastoral Responsibility

Our model, of course, is Jesus Himself, the good shepherd (pastor). This is what Jesus said to His disciples, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves” (Luke 22:25-27, NKJV).

Although worded a little differently, Jesus makes a similar statement in the gospel of Matthew. “Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you.

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The Idols among Us

by **Kenneth Westby**



John Calvin described the human mind as a perpetual “idol factory” busily creating things and ideas to capture first place in our affections. There are religious idols and materialistic idols and our world is over-populated with both. We live in cities of idols just as given to idolatry as were ancient Athens or Rome or Babylon. Idolatry isn’t an antique sin from yesteryear or confined to the pagan worshippers of Vishnu in India. It is a challenge for each of us today.

In the great city of Athens, what did the evangelist Paul observe that got him so emotionally worked up?

“Now while Paul waited for them [his assistants Silas and Timothy] at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry” (Acts 17:16).

A city full of idols wholly given to idolatry! The sights bothered him. That humans would be ignorant of the One True God, the Father of all, and be caught up in superstitions and foolish ideas was disgusting and disappointing to Paul. Humans made in God’s image behaving like ignorant animals. He saw the contrast of the high glory of Hellenistic architecture and education against the cheap and degrading religious beliefs that prevailed. Contrasts I think we can observe in our lands today.

Athens was no backwater pagan pigpen of witchcraft like you might find hidden among some spooky

warrens in Haiti. Athens was the world center for creative thought, philosophy, and open debate on the deep issues of the day and the meaning of life itself. Athens was the vanguard of the scientific world of the first century. This was the place of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. How can it be characterized as full of idols? What were Paul’s eyes seeing that got his spirit so on fire that he immediately began to engage in debate with the Athenian intelligentsia.

Paul noted that as he walked about he found the city full of monuments and devotions of all sorts. On his way up Mars Hill, the Areopagus, to address the luminaries of intellectual light, he would have seen myriads of temples most notably those of Athena and Poseidon being worshipped among the gods of the Pantheon, Mars, the theater of Dionysus, and he would have seen

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We Need your Help

Every month the Bible Sabbath Association (BSA) runs a financial deficit. We are faced with continually rising costs for printing, mailing, and other services we provide. Fortunately, we have some reserves that keep the BSA afloat. The last thing we want to do is cut back what we have been doing for nearly 70 years.

Actually, we would like to expand our services to you and all our readers. We have plans to forge ahead with expansion into programs that will cost little and at the same time give us access to places that will attract more people to the BSA. If you can help us out financially with an additional donation, we would really appreciate it.

Also, please consider the BSA in your estate planning. This is not something that any of us likes to think about, but it is a reality for all of us.

Thanks you very much for your continued support.

Christians, Believers, or Disciples

by Daniel Botkin



Most people who believe in Jesus call themselves Christians. Some people, especially in the Messianic movement, prefer to call themselves “believers.” The term *Christian* is avoided by some people because the word no longer means what it originally meant. The word *Christian* appears only three times in the New Testament. Acts 11:26 says that “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” In Acts 26:28 King Agrippa said to Paul, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” Peter said “if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Peter 4:16).

From these three verses we can infer three things about the original meaning of the term *Christian*. From Acts 11:26 we can infer that originally a Christian was a *disciple* (which is something more than a mere believer, as will soon be demonstrated). From Acts 26:28 we can infer that people became Christians in New Testament times through *persuasion* (not by forced conversion, as was tried in later centuries, nor by merely being born to Christian parents in a predominately Christian culture). From 1 Peter 4:16 we can infer that Christians can expect to *suffer* in some way as a result of their faith (whether through persecution or by denying their carnal desires).

Ponder these three inferences and ask yourself how many professing Christians in 21st-century America fit the New Testament definition of a Christian.

What about the terms *believer* and *disciple*? Are they synonymous, or is there a difference? “As He [Yeshua/Jesus] spake these words, many believed on Him. Then said Yeshua to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed” (John 8:30). Apparently there is a difference between a disciple (one who continues in His word) and a mere believer (one who believes but does not continue in His word). Every disciple is a believer, but every believer is not necessarily a disciple. Being a believer is a prerequisite to being a disciple, but being a believer is not synonymous with being a disciple. To be a disciple, you must persevere and continue in His word.

Every single believer is in one of two categories. He is either among those believers who persevere and become disciples, or he is among those believers who do not persevere and do not become disciples. Why do some believers not continue in His word? Sometimes it is because they have had bad teaching. They have been taught by misguided ministers that the Lord expects nothing more from them than mental assent to the truth of the gospel. These believers are ignorant of the most

basic fundamentals of discipleship, and they remain ignorant unless they happen to read the Bible. Other believers are not ignorant; they just don't want to become disciples, because there are other things that are more important to them.

A believer might say that his faith is very important to him, and he might be very sincere. The problem is that his faith is a mere appendage to his life, something he has added to his life. His faith is *a part* of his life, and perhaps a very important part, but it is not the one thing that primarily defines who and what he is. His faith is a part of his life, but it is still *his* life. And right here is the crux of the problem. His life does not yet belong to the Lord, because he has not yet surrendered control of his life to the Lord. He calls Jesus (or Yeshua) “Lord,” but he is still the one in the driver's seat.

Your faith, your personal relationship with the Lord, your identity as a disciple of Yeshua — these are the things that should primarily define who and what you are. You may be many other things — a butcher, a baker, a candlestick maker, even a lawyer or a politician — but you should first of all be a disciple of Yeshua. Anything else that you are must take second place to being His disciple. Being Yeshua's disciple should be what one person described as a “Magnificent Obsession.”

Let's consider obsession. Some people are obsessed with certain aspects of their identity. Radical feminists are obsessed with their gender. “Gay” activists are obsessed with their sexual orientation toward perversion. Some politicians are obsessed with their political party. Some disabled people are obsessed with their handicap. Our relationship with the Lord should be our Magnificent Obsession. Just as a man views the world differently after he is disabled, so we should view the world differently after we take up the cross of discipleship. Before his accident, the disabled man had thought like other people. After his accident, he thinks in terms of his limitations (things he can no longer do) and his new rights (financial assistance, use of facilities for the handicapped, etc.).

When we take up the cross of discipleship, we are broken and become “handicapped” for a worldly life. The ungodly world system no longer holds the attraction that it once held for us. Like a disabled man, we have limitations (“Thou shalt not...”). We also have new rights (“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,” John 8:32).

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Beyond the Days

by Aubrey L. Duncan

Perhaps the best known and most quoted passage of Scripture of the entire Bible is John 3:16-17. It reads: *"...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...For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved...."* This passage is so simple, yet so profound, but grossly misunderstood. Most people, particularly Christians, misinterpret this passage to make it relate to people that came into the world after the birth of Jesus Christ. They somehow believe and teach that salvation since Jesus' first advent is obtained differently than salvation before Jesus came to earth. This is a grave misunderstanding of Holy Writ. It is from this perspective of salvation that most of the conflict and confusion in Christendom, including that of the true Sabbath, arises.

The apostles and members of the early church (the Way) had no such conflict or confusion about the Sabbath or about Christ and His mission. They understood clearly who He was and what His mission was about, *i.e.* God in the flesh, stooping to save all mankind, before and after His earthly sojourn. Jesus repeatedly pointed to the Old Testament Scriptures to help His followers and His enemies understand who He was and what His mission entailed. Here are two classic examples: *"...Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me..."* (John 5:39). *"...And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself..."* (Luke 24:27).

But how could Jesus save all humanity when He only appeared on earth some 2,000 years ago? Simply, because He is fully God and fully man. The learned apostle Paul calls it a great mystery (1 Timothy 3:16). The prophet Micah prophesied that He is from everlasting to everlasting: *"...But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting..."* (Micah 5:2). Jesus Himself declares: *"...I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty..."* (Revelation 1:8). The apostle John teaches us: *"...In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not*

anything made that was made. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth..." (John 1:1-3, 14). Matthew declares that He is "God with us" and that He shall save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21-23).

All of Scripture must be viewed within this context or erroneous conclusions will be drawn. Hence, one's understanding of who truly is Jesus is at the foundation of the Sabbath/Sunday controversy.

Essentially, this debate centers around whether the Seventh-day Sabbath is only for Jews and Sunday for Christians. The fact of the matter is that the Bible does not in any way support either of these views. Yes, the Bible is clear in that it states that the Sabbath, as part of the Ten Commandments, was given to the Jews. However, nowhere does Scripture say that the Sabbath or any other of the Ten Commandments were exclusively for the Jews. Quite the contrary, the Bible repeatedly states that God's commandments, including the Sabbath of the Ten Commandments, are for all mankind.

Jesus declared: *"...the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath..."* (Mark 2:27).

Jesus was born of Jewish ancestry, but He is the Savior of all mankind. Likewise the Ten Commandment Law which includes the Sabbath was deposited to the Jewish nation from God through the hands of Moses, but is for all humanity. The ancient Jewish sanctuary with its services and sacrifices is an object lesson in God's plan of redemption for all humanity. At the center of it was Jesus Christ. The priest, the sacrifices, the seven branch candlestick, the showbread, the door, the mercy seat, and all the accompanying ceremonies were figures and types of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. They thus prefigured God's plan of salvation by which all men are saved, before and after the cross. It is the only way of salvation for all humanity.

The Jewish nation had the high and holy privilege of not only being the recipients of God's Plan of Redemption, though in type, but they had the sacred responsibility to share it with the rest of the world. The prophet Isaiah declares: *"... And He (God) said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth..."* (Isaiah 49:6).

With specific reference to the Sabbath, its blessings and obligation rests upon all men. Isaiah further declares: "...Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil. Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant..." (Isaiah 56:2,6). The apostle Paul confirms: "...What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God..." (Romans 3:1-2). Please take note of Paul's definition of the real Jew in Romans 2:28-29.

The Creator's Plan of Redemption, which provides for the keeping of His commandments, through His grace, was not for the Jews only. It is for all humanity. It was not exclusive to the Jews any more than the resurrection of Jesus Christ is exclusive to Christians. Likewise, God's law, His Ten Commandments, is no more exclusive to the Jews than Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are exclusive to Christians. God's law, which includes His Sabbath commandment and His plan of Redemption, is for all mankind. They were both given before there was ever a Jew or a Christian. The Sabbath was established at creation (Genesis 2:2-3). The Plan of Redemption was prepared before the foundations of the earth (Revelation 13:8).

With regard to Sunday sacredness, one can search the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, but would not find such a concept. It is rooted in pagan practices of antiquity. It is all about worshipping the created, the sun, and has absolutely nothing to do with worshipping the Creator, the Lord of the Sabbath. God calls this practice an abomination (Ezekiel 8:15-16). This abominable concept has been passed on to the Christendom by the Roman Catholic Papacy.

This institution claims that their tradition of Sunday sacredness, derived from antiquity's pagan practices, is above the Bible. It asserts that it has the power to change the biblical command of God's Seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday. Further, it boastfully proclaims that anyone who honors Sunday is not following the God of creation; but rather doing her bidding. The Catholic Church boasts: "...Protestants accept Sunday rather than Saturday as the day of public worship after the Catholic Church made the change....But the Protestant mind does not seem to realize that in observing the Sunday, they are accepting the authority of the spokesman of the church, the pope..." ("Our Sunday Visitor," February 5th, 1950).

Jesus Christ, who is our example, (John 14:6) (1 Peter 2:21) kept all of His Father's commandments, in-

cluding the Seventh-day Sabbath (John 15:10) (Matthew 5:17-19) (Luke 4:16). All of His Sabbath experiences recorded in the Gospels showed that He kept the seventh-day Sabbath holy. He warned that after His death and resurrection that the Sabbath should be kept holy (Matthew 28:20). Even in death, he rested in the tomb on the Sabbath. His disciples regarded the Sabbath with such high esteem that they would not as much as anoint His body for burial on the Sabbath. The Scriptures state that they kept the Sabbath according to the commandment and came to his empty tomb on the first day of the week (Luke 23:56-24-1). No record of their keeping Sunday sacred is even vaguely alluded to.

Attempting to make Sunday holy in respect of Jesus' resurrection is based on man's tradition and not the word of God. Only a Holy God can make a day holy. The day He has made holy is the seventh-day Sabbath, today called Saturday. Nowhere in God's word does He vaguely suggest or explicitly command that His people keep a day in honor of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is a cunning tradition of men used to usurp the commandment of God to honor Him by keeping holy His blessed Sabbath day.

All Sunday sacredness arguments put forth by Christians are quite like the fig leaf garments that Adam and Eve concocted and wore after they sinned. They are worthless. God Has assured us through the prophet Isaiah that in the earth made new we will keep His seventh-day Sabbath. Anyone planning on being there would be well advised to begin practicing it now (Isaiah 66:21). God declares that those who will be blessed and would have a right to eternal life will keep all of His commandments (Revelation 22:14).

Finally, with regard to the Sabbath day, two calls are going out to the world. The first one is from the God of creation calling men to worship Him as Creator by honoring His holy and blessed Sabbath day (Revelation 14:6-7). The other is being stealthily pushed on men to honor Sunday, thus giving their loyalty and worship to the antichrist of Bible prophecy. It is an issue beyond the days.

Whom will you choose? My prayer is that you resolve, like the apostle Peter: "...We ought to obey God rather than men..." (Acts 5:29).

*The Aubrey L. Duncan is the author of the book, **God's Sabbath Truth**, from which this article is excerpted. The book is available from the Bible Sabbath Association. Aubrey can be contacted at aduncan@thesabbathtruth.org.*

Can a Sinner Be Used by God?

By Brian Knowles



The short answer to the question posed in the title of this article is, "Of course he or she can. We're all sinners (John 8:8, 10), so if God doesn't use sinners he doesn't use anyone." So the question changes: What kind of sinners does God use? The short answer: repentant ones.

Did God use Paul? Yes he did — mightily. Did he use him when he was living in his sins — i.e. persecuting the Church? No. God had to transform Paul into the kind of person he could use. He had to bring him to repentance. He had to make Paul see his world with fresh eyes. He had to anoint him for a new mission — that of preaching the Gospel to the *goyim* — gentiles — and then making lifelong disciples of them.

Paul, of course, was special. What about the rest of us? Can we be used of God? Some of us — myself included — have very reprehensible pasts. I became an atheist. I spoke against Christianity at Humanist meetings — in fact against religion in general. I lived by humanistic values. I lived as a "practical atheist" — as though God did not exist.

Later, I came to my senses and repented, but damage was done. Through sin I had etched deep scars in my psyche. To some extent, those scars continue to manifest themselves today. By indulging sin when I really knew better, I lost dignity. My "image" and my credibility as a minister were shot to ribbons.

Sin is never without effect. When we sin, we affect not only ourselves, but others. Take alcoholism for example. It's both a sin and a sickness (1 Corinthians 5:11). It involves a loss of self—control and a chemical dependency. Husbands, wives, and children are all profoundly hurt by living with an alcoholic. Sometimes that collateral damage is as hard to fix as the alcoholism itself. The cure involves repentance, healing and treatment. On the part of those who are damaged, it involves healing and forgiveness. It says in Ecclesiastes 9:18, "One sinner destroys much good."

Any form of addiction within a family usually does damage to the whole family. There are many kinds of addictions, all of them hurtful. The top ten are: alcohol, smoking, drugs, gambling, food, video games, Internet, sex, shopping and workaholism. Can a person who has been overcome by any one or any combination, of these addictions be used of God?

Can a divorced person serve in the ministry? Can a person who has murdered someone be trusted with responsibility?

The Case of David

David was guilty of two sins: lust leading to murder and adultery. In Judaism — the religion of the "Old" Testament — those are two of the worst four sins a person can commit (the worst is idolatry, and the fourth worst is slander). Yet David repented (Psalm 51) and never repeated those sins. God forgave him and David grew to become "a man after God's own heart." The king was instrumental in writing some of the most beautiful and compelling words of Scripture. He even became a type of the Messiah. In short, he was used mightily of God.

If David could be used following repentance, the rest of us can — at least in theory.

What About Divorce?

Joan Hunter is the daughter of Charles and Francis Hunter — both of whom were well—known for their healing ministry. She too is gifted with the ability to pray for the sick and see them healed. Some years ago, Joan was divorced. She writes, "People didn't believe that God could use me because I was a divorced woman. People marked me...The Word does not say that God cannot use a divorced person. The Word says you can repent of any sin in your life...[but] people sent letters to my parents and to me, saying I was a hypocrite and claiming that God couldn't use me because I'd been divorced," *Power to Heal* by Joan Hunter, pp. 31–32.

In the years since her divorce, Mrs. Hunter has been happily remarried. She has prayed for thousands who have been ill. Many have been miraculously healed. God has richly blessed her healing ministry. She points out that many of the people God used were morally dysfunctional (sinners). Noah drank too much. Jacob lied. Samson was a womanizer. Rahab was a harlot. Peter denied Christ.

God knows our frame. He made us of the dust of the ground. We're just animated dust. We're full of flaws, weaknesses and sins (Romans 3:23). Yet God loves us. He is not willing that any of us should perish. Jesus came to redeem us that we might have eternal life.

God loved us while we were yet sinners — not just after we'd repented. Look at the kind of people God calls to salvation — and to use in his kingdom, "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were," (1 Corinthians 6:9–11a).

Once "wicked" people like this are washed, sanctified, and justified, they can be used of God (verse 11b). Paul said that the formerly sinful Corinthians did not "lack any spiritual gift" as they eagerly awaited Jesus' revealing (1 Corinthians 1:7). The fact that some of them had been temple prostitutes in idolatrous cults didn't stop them from being used upon repentance. They had, like David, buried their old life. They were a new creation in Christ. All of us can be the same. If we repent, burn our bridges, leave our old lives behind, we can be used mightily of God to advance his kingdom, both now and in the world to come.

The old man — or woman — is dead. Long live the new one!

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

Huckabee: Schools "A Place Of Carnage" Because We "Systematically Removed God"

(*TMPLiveWire*) Former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee attributed the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in part to restrictions on school prayer and religious materials in the classroom.

"[W]e've made it a place where we don't want to talk about eternity, life, what responsibility means, accountability — that we're not just going to have be accountable to the police if they catch us, but one day we stand before, you know, a holy God in judgment," Huckabee said. "If we don't believe that, then we don't fear that."

He said those suffering from a crisis from faith should look to God in the community's response to the violence. But he added that "Maybe we ought to let [God] in on the front end and we wouldn't have to call him to show up when it's all said and done at the back end."

God Speaks to Ezekiel— A Message to Israel, Part 1

By Dr. Royce Mitchell, Jr.



When God spoke to Ezekiel and directed him to deliver a message to Israel, to whom was that message intended? Was it to the Jews in captivity? Was it to the people dwelling in the old land of Israel, or the current one? Your author will attempt to explore the above questions, and more, as well as arrive at an answer.

Before we can get into God's message to Ezekiel, we need some background information. When we look into the background given in Ezekiel 1, we find that Ezekiel was with the captives by the Chebar River. He states that it was in the thirtieth year, the fourth month and the fifth day of the month. Matthew Henry posits that this date could be Ezekiel's age or a date marked from the finding of the Book of the Law by Hilkiah.

We get a firmer fix on the date in Verse 2 where Ezekiel states that it was the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity. It's worth noting that Jehoiachin was one of the last Kings of Judah. We also know that Jehoiachin served Nebuchadnezzar for three years before he rebelled, which led to the captivity of Judah (2 Kings 24:1-2). An interesting point in Verse 2 is that YHVH, who I will call God from here on out, sent all of those armies against Judah to fulfill His prophecies from before.

The online *Catholic Encyclopedia* gives the date of 722 B.C. as when the Nation of Israel fell. It also gives the date of 597 B.C. when Jehoiachin surrendered Israel to service and in 592 B.C. the rest of Judah became captives of Nebuchadnezzar. As we can see from this, Israel was in captivity approximately 130 years before Ezekiel found himself on the banks of the Chebar River. This point will become important as we read what God told Ezekiel to proclaim.

To avoid confusion, we need to distinguish between two groups of Israelites. The House of Judah, those who became captives in 592 B.C. were a different group of people from those who were of the House of Israel, who went into captivity in 722 B.C. Many have believed that the nations became separate after the death of Solomon. But, 2 Samuel, Chapter 2, verses 1 through 11, shows us that the Houses of Israel and Ju-

dah were separate before the reign of David. At that time, David was King over Judah, and Saul was King over all of Israel. We find starting in Verse 12, and ending in Verse 17, that there was a war between David and Saul which ended up with all of the tribes being united under David. Why this is important will be demonstrated shortly.

Returning to Ezekiel (2:1-5), we find that the Entity which had appeared to Ezekiel on the Chebar River now gives Ezekiel a mission. The mission is to go to the sons of Israel, described as the rebellious one, which we find in Verse 3. Also, we find in Verse 4 that the one sending Ezekiel is God. Now we see the importance of the separate tribes because when Ezekiel is given this message the House of Israel had been gone for over 130 years, and the Scriptures do not record their being found again.

Moving on to Chapter 3 (Verses 16-19), we find that Ezekiel is made a watchman for the House of Israel and told that when God speaks to him then he is to warn Israel. The obvious problem that confronts this mission is that Ezekiel is sent to a people who are long gone, and there's no record that Ezekiel personally ever goes to where the House of Israel was moved after they were taken captive.

What was Ezekiel sent to tell Israel? We see God comes again in a vision to Ezekiel in Chapter 6, beginning in Verse 1. Ezekiel is told to prophesy towards the mountains of Israel. He is to tell them that God is going to bring a sword on them and will destroy their high places. We know from biblical verses such as Leviticus 26:30 and Numbers 22:41 that the high places are places of worship of the false god, Baal. Because a mountain can't worship Baal, it is pretty clear that God is warning the people of the House of Israel that He is going to subject them to war and destruction of their places of worship.

God goes on to say in Verses 4 and 5 that He is going to scatter those slain in the war around the idols they worship. Their bones will be scattered around the altars of worship of their false gods.

In Verse 6 we find that God is going to destroy the cities so that the worship of idols is stopped. Verse 7 shows us that God will do this so that Israel will know who is the real God.

But, Verse 8 shows that God is not going to destroy all of Israel but that He will leave a remainder to escape and be scattered among many lands. It is there that those of Israel who escaped the destruction will remember who is God (verses 9 and 10).

Remember, Israel had been gone for 130 years at that point. Whoever this prophecy was for, whoever it is for whom Ezekiel was made the watchman, they are called by a name that had disappeared long before.

Continuing, in Verse 11 we find stated that Israel will fall by the sword (war), famine (starvation) and plague (disease). Verse 12 indicates that it won't matter if one runs away or stays and is besieged. God will pour out his fury on those who have continued to rebel and worship false gods. This certainly can't be Judah because they are already captive and on the way to Babylon at this point!

Moving on to Verse 14 we find that the land where Israel is when this prophecy comes to pass will become desolate, a desert, all to make them know that He is God.

We all know that God knew all along where Israel was, and where those descendants would migrate across the years, and where they would be at the time the prophecy would come to pass. Also, this prophecy has never come to pass. It remains to be imposed upon Israel in the future, and Israel the people is not Israel the land located on the western shore of the Jordan River. In fact, those people settling there are remnants of the House of Judah, not Israel.

For whom, then, is this prophecy intended? There are those who say Israel is the nations of the United States and Great Britain. If so, this is a serious warning to those peoples to return to the God of Israel before He brings this prophecy to pass. It's important to note at this point that prophecy isn't given to us so that we know what is coming but so that we recognize who is the prophet when the sayings come to pass.

About a year later, God once again appears to Ezekiel and gives him a vision. But, that will be where we will pick up this article for part 2.

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A Different Path to Healing

by *Pauline E. Lewinson*

For more than twenty years I suffered from severe pain. For several months, I couldn't stand long enough to prepare a meal, do laundry, bathe and dress my baby, or even comb my hair. I barely managed to crawl out of bed each morning, and I struggled through my work each day.

The doctors' orders were always the same: more medication, which always caused adverse reactions. Finally, my family physician referred me to a rheumatologist, who informed me that I had a condition that caused sleep deprivation, chronic headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, tingling and numbing sensations, chronic muscular skeletal pain, and chronic fatigue: fibromyalgia!

My heart felt as though it were in my throat. With all the symptoms, I knew I fit the criteria of fibromyalgia. In response to my questions, the doctor said, "The cause is unknown. There is no cure, and it is degenerative." Tears ran down my face. I wanted to scream, *Why me Lord?* I had no idea what to think or where to look for answers.

Driving home, all I could think about was my family and how I would tell my husband and children. How would I ever take care of my three-year-old son? I didn't want him to grow up without his mother, as I had.

My pain management specialist prescribed aqua exercise, physical therapy, and sleeping pills. All gave temporary relief, but frustration mounted because I wanted complete healing. I had always dreamed of a great life with endless possibilities, but now the future seemed bleak. Pondering all the things I could not do if this condition worsened, I scrambled for answers.

Then I began to remember Jesus' words regarding health and healing: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28, KJV).

To me, this meant faith, hope, trust, and life. My prayers started increasing as I asked God daily for a miracle. I asked Him to send resources that would give divine healing. In remarkable awakenings, the Holy Spirit reminded me that He was there to help, teach, and guide. With more Bible readings, a process of spiritual, mental, and physical transformation began. I found the unlimited resources I'd asked for.

I considered this verse: "Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself" (1 Corinthians 6:19, NLT). I also remembered these words from Hippocrates, the Greek physician: "Let food be your medicine."

Stumbling onto Romans 8:28, I began to see life in an entirely different way. I became confident that all my sufferings are not meant to harm me, but to help me accomplish my assignment of fulfilling God's plan for my destiny.

As I ventured on a journey of renewal to health and total well-being, my husband was stunned by the changes. One day he said, "I am going to do some of the things you are doing." I told him that my main change was in my way of thinking. We have committed to daily lifestyle changes for ourselves that have led to transformations in others as well.

Wellness is not about regularly seeing a doctor. It is about preventive measures, like the right foods, common sense, and spiritual wisdom. It is about trusting and obeying God's Word: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (3 John 2, KJV).

For me to achieve optimal health, it is my responsibility to take care of my body. Consciously and consistently, I take measures to prevent illnesses. Thomas Edison once said, "The doctor of the future will give no medicine, but will interest his patients in the care of the human frame, in diet and in the cause and prevention of diseases."

I have followed biblical principles, combined with modern wisdom and technology. I have researched, read, studied, and applied God's health laws, plus the teachings of several experts on health and well-being, and I have surrounded myself with people who have the same desires and aspirations as I do.

I thank God for transforming my life, giving me divine health, and helping me dream again. My body is now free from fibromyalgia! "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26, KJV).

This article by Pauline E. Lewinson is an additional article offered online by the Bible Advocate, July-August 2012. (See baonline.org.)

BSA Vision for 2013

By Calvin Burrell, President
Bible Sabbath Association

The Bible Sabbath Association (BSA) lists the following among reasons for its existence:

1. To teach about the Sabbath
2. To bring Sabbath-keepers together for fellowship and goodwill
3. To make new Christians aware of the Sabbath
4. To develop strategies for any or all of the above

We can be grateful that the first and third of these reasons are done by most Sabbath-keeping churches these days.

My vision for BSA in 2013 is related to the second reason above, something we don't see other groups of Sabbath-keepers trying to do. I do not suggest that we quit working toward the other objectives, only that we specialize for the next year and beyond on #2: "To bring Sabbath-keepers together for fellowship and goodwill."

How can we activate this purpose of BSA in the next year? What steps can we take in 2013 to advance the sacred partnership of Sabbath-keeping followers of Messiah, who taught that people would know we are His followers by our love of one another (John 13:35)?

Here's my vision:

- Compile and cultivate a database of Sabbath-keeping Church leaders. Monthly messages between BSA leadership and the Churches' leaders will focus on how organizational walls might be lowered in an attempt to demonstrate the unity for which Christ prayed and died (John 17).
- Publish in separate issues of TSS, and post on the BSA website, articles that are supportive of all major branches of Sabbatarian faith:
 - Seventh Day Adventist
 - Seventh Day Baptist
 - Churches of God (Seventh Day)
 - Groups that came out of the Worldwide Church of God
 - Messianic Judaism groups
 - Sacred Names groups
 - Independents and emergent groups
- Post regular blogs to support this vision, written by the BSA personnel and others.
- Distribute and promote by all reasonable means this seven-fold Sabbath-keepers pledge (See page 13).

Sabbath-keepers Pledge

As a follower of Jesus Christ...

*I pledge to give my first love and loyalty to the true God who reveals Himself best in Jesus. As Savior of men and Lord of the Sabbath, Christ does for me what no one else and no day of the week can do.

*I pledge to be clear about salvation's source by confessing that my sins are forgiven and eternal life is promised me only by the grace of God through faith in Christ—not because I am a Sabbath-keeper.

*I pledge to agree that God's people may be in many religious organizations—or in none of them. No longer will I judge people's faith based on the church group they do or don't belong to.

*I pledge to emphasize that the seventh-day Sabbath is more than a law to be obeyed; it is also a unique gift of God to be enjoyed and celebrated with great benefit by all who receive it in faith.

*I pledge to remember that the primary need of persons is to know God's love and grace in the gospel, and that their need to know and observe His Sabbath is secondary to their need for Christ.

*I pledge to recognize Sabbath-keeping Christians as a valued and respected family within God's household of faith, and to use what opportunities I have to encourage and support this diverse family.

*I pledge to love my neighbors, my fellow-Christians, and my fellow Sabbath-keepers as myself, according to the second great commandment of the Lord.

I encourage every reader of **The Sabbath Sentinel** to join board-members and officers of BSA in taking this pledge. By God's grace, our combined efforts to celebrate the friendship of, and promote cooperation among, our fellow Sabbath-keepers can connect and energize thousands or tens of thousands of His people in ways we have not yet dreamed of.

Let it be, Lord Jesus, let it be.

Westby: "Idols among Us" cont. from page 4.

the unfinished construction of the great Temple of Olympian Zeus.

But Paul understood their idolatry was more than just marble temples; it was of their mind. It wasn't just idols *per se*, it included the philosophical idols their minds created. They had fashioned their own religion and declared who their gods were and trusted their philosophy as the source of truth.

Into this rarified setting comes Paul boldly warning these wise minds that they are practicing worthless worship of gods conjured from their own minds. He said further that they were ignorant of the most important truth: There is one God who created the world and everything therein, and he doesn't dwell in temples made with hands (vs. 24). Paul's words caused a big stir and some paid heed, but most did not, ridiculing Paul as a silly "babbling."

What would be Paul's take if he took a similar journey into one of our enlightened cities? Well, you say he would find lots of Christian churches and yes, that is a good thing. But remember, Athens had a synagogue which Paul attended, and there were "God-fearing Greeks in the city" (vs. 17), yet he still judged that "the city was full of idols."

What Is an Idol?

A physical idol is a representation of a deity, usually used as an object of worship. It was not regarded as the god itself, but as representing a particular god and if it was a proper, "official" idol, then it possessed some essence or spirit of the god within it. Yet idols and idolatry went beyond just molded images of stone, clay, wood, or silver to include the motives of the idol users and the purposes for which they were made.

It is understood in the New Testament that idolatry is putting anything in the place that God alone should occupy as the proper focus of obedience and worship (see Colossians 3:5). It is placing things, pleasures, addictions and the like as life's all-consuming desire. This New Testament (NT) expansion broadens out both the sins of idolatry and the reasons why it persists today as a major tool of the Adversary and temptation to Believers. More on this later.

The Biggest Idol on Earth—Belief in Undirected, Random Evolution

While we in the USA have a national motto "In God We Trust" and acknowledge the biblical God in our founding documents and on the walls of our great buildings of government, what is the dominant world view of the origin of everything? The Athenian elite set the table with what was permissible to believe. Today's intellectual elites also set the table for permissible, credible belief. They are largely the scientific commu-

nity, the educators and philosophers, the majority of whom are humanists, secular materialists, agnostics, and atheists.

But they are believers! Yes, believers in evolution as the source of everything in the entire cosmos including human life and mind. It is the prime article of faith taken to be fact. God is not to be worshipped as Creator, Designer, Sustainer, of the cosmos for by their theory He doesn't exist. He doesn't need to exist for our religion has a god sufficient to do it all: random evolution.

One must distinguish between true science (*to know*) which deals in the real world of laws, physics, chemistry, genetics, etc., and evolutionary science which is a belief system to explain origins without consideration of God or the supernatural. Evolution is the new god of the elite who propose to teach the rest of us. They are the ones entitled to meet on Mars Hill to weave a belief system that somehow undirected, random events produced a highly sophisticated and seemingly intelligently designed universe including the unsearchable mystery of life on earth.

To make that tall tale go down takes more faith than you'll find in any Christian church. Christian faith is based upon evidence. Faith that there will be a resurrection to eternal life is based on the historical fact there was one—Jesus—which was a point Paul presented to the philosophers on Mars Hill. Evolution has no such evidence, just belief and the coercive force of the elite and their control of much of the scientific and educational establishment.

Does the god of random evolution also have a temple system? Why yes, and a vast one. In America there are thousands upon thousands of attractive buildings on colleges and universities where evolution is taught. That's fine, teach it. But contrary teaching challenging random evolution's thesis of origin is not allowed in these "temples to evolution." Will Intelligent Design be allowed to be taught side-by-side with evolution and then let the students decide which is the more "scientific" and logical theory? No! Not over their dead bodies. Why not? Isn't the university the place for diversity of ideas and opinions, the place to learn of and test competing theories? Apparently not. Evolutionary science is the only product on the shelves. Only one theory allowed, and it is taken for proven fact.

Intelligent Design (ID) is a scientific theory with much more evidence supporting its theory than random, undirected evolution. The problem: ID allows for the possibility of an intelligent designer, for the possibility of a supernatural power to explain the origin of such a complex creation in every area it can be viewed. In the temples dedicated to the god of random evolution there is no room for other gods—including Yahweh, the Creator in the Book of Genesis account.

The problem of a “closed shop” on the most important topic of the origin of life and the origin of the cosmos is one of protecting ignorance by not allowing it to be challenged. This sad dumbing-down process starts in the educational pre-school and runs all the way through the university system. Science, distinguished from evolutionary theory, is a wonderful thing and is the product of the intelligent mind of sentient men and women.

But science is not a god, yet it seems many today see it as the pagans saw their idols. They expected the gods of nature to protect them, bless their crops, and bring fortune to their lives if proper allegiance were given. Science is everywhere heralded as the “savior” of man, such as that may be, but has proven itself unable to bring man happiness, peace on earth, and a utopian world. It is impotent to improve the character of human beings; it simply improves the vehicles they travel in.

Sad facts sour the happy scientific “savior” idea. The past one hundred years witnessed science reaching its highest achievements in human history and also the bloodiest period of human history with approximately 150-200 million killed in wars all over the globe—some of them originating in Germany, the most “scientific” nation in Europe. Science didn’t cause the wars, but had no positive effect upon the moral character of those who did.

Clearly, science is not the answer to what ails mankind. But a scientific community that bends the knee before the false god “evolution” is undermining the concept of right and wrong—of sin. Science, by embracing evolution, is teaching there is no God, which in effect is saying we are our own god and can do what we want without an opinion from the God of Scripture. If there is no God, then everything is permitted. Is this the golden age of the scientific man? God have mercy!

Above our centers of learning sits the illogical theory that random, undirected chance events produce the highest order of organization and intelligence. Like a big fat Buddha, evolution squats atop science, suppressing the obvious truth of a Creator under its rolls of worthless fat, yet demanding proper allegiance from all who teach the origins of the universe and life. Evolution is the biggest and most dangerous idol ever to slither out of the pit of Hell.

Paul warned that when the Creator is rejected in favor of foolish theories or images or created things, a process of degradation sets in, a moral cancer that leads to depraved minds and depraved actions (see Romans 1:18-32). A day is coming when the smart fools and the dumb fools will be judged for their actions; judged, Paul told the elite in Athens, “by the man he [God] has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead”(Acts 17:31).

About the Second Commandment

The first commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me” merges with the second commandment “You shall not make for yourself an idol...” (Exo 20:3-4). Whether the commands acknowledge the existence of other gods is not in view in these commands. They simply state that Yahweh is absolute in power and does not share his sovereignty with any gods that people invent. There is no God beside him: “I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God” (Isaiah 44:6). Yahweh’s authority is absolute. There is no way to represent His Majesty, clothed in glory and sun-like brightness, by images of any sort.

The second command is against making idols for worship, but does not really prohibit artwork of other “heavenly” things. Consider the artwork of the tabernacle and also Solomon’s temple which was replete with representations of the creation with images of bulls, cherubim, lions, palm trees, and pomegranates (1 Kings 7:18, 25, 36).

Idols are disparaged by the prophets as dumb pieces of worthless wood. Yet, Deuteronomy 32:17-21 identifies idol worship as bowing down to demons. “They sacrificed to demons, which are not God [*lo-lohim*, ‘no-God’].” There exist malevolent angelic powers (demons) which invite god-worship for themselves, but these are not to be compared to the Creator who at one time made them. These vanquished “powers” face annihilation by their Creator at the time of Judgment—they will all die (Psalm 82:6-7).

Paul said that “an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ...” (1 Corinthians 8:4-6).

The subjective reality that the second commandment addresses is the perpetual idol factory that is the human heart. The commandment assumes the depravity of the human race to create and worship their own gods. It reflects the reality of the human condition and is not a theological statement about the existence of other gods. Many other passages plainly teach the core truth of monotheism.

Abraham—Former Idol-Manufacturer

Speaking of an idol factory, did you know that Abraham was in the family business of idol making? We get the back story of Abram’s early life from Jewish tradition conveyed in the commentaries based on the so-called Oral Torah. The Mishnah, Talmud, and Midrash, by ancient and medieval commentators give much detail about Abraham not included in Genesis. How much is true is impossible to know, but there is real

value in this extra testimony carefully preserved and passed down from generation to generation.

This bit is included in Scripture: Joshua said to all the people,

“This is what Yahweh, the God of Israel, says: Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods” (Joshua 24:2).

This account later was included in the story-creed of Israel. Abram grew up in a polytheistic family and later, amazingly, became the world’s first apostle of monotheism. Is there anything God can’t make out of us if we but do what he says?

Abram worshiped other gods and his father was an educated well-known merchant in Mesopotamian society. Terach sold clay figures of human and fantastic animal shapes, lime-washed and colored. David Klinghoffer writes in his fine book (*The Discovery of God, Abraham and the Birth of Monotheism*) that these idols had value and were sold to be treasured and used.

“They were set in the doorway or buried under the threshold of one’s home, where they protected the inhabitants from the malign influence of demons and other harmful spirits. They were worshipped in private family chapels and set alongside the family’s bodies in the grave” (p. 11).

Terach had a license or franchise to make these idols, much like official licensed NFL or NBA gear is protected. People purchasing them could be assured it was the real thing. During the manufacturing process a ceremony of inviting the spirit of the particular god, unique to that idol, into the thing made it a functioning idol.

One of the stories of how Abram broke out of idol worship has him working in his father’s shop and some of the clay idols accidentally fall to the floor and break. This contributes to his reasoning that these things cannot have any power, and he begins to doubt. About that time the true God calls him to leave his family and begin a journey with the One and Only God and head toward the land of Canaan.

His father, who held a position in the court of Nimrod, was embarrassed and upset. A bounty would be put on the head of the errant son of Terach. The rest of the story we read in Genesis of how Abram fled and how God tutored him to become the father of the faithful, spiritually, and the father of Israel, the nation. From an idol-making polytheist to a man of towering faith serving the invisible God of creation, what a story!

Century Twenty-One Idols

I mentioned earlier that the New Testament broadens the sin of idolatry to include a lot of things people

don’t recognize as being idols. It is time we do. To the Colossians comes this forthright demand:

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature; sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (3:5).

Greed = idolatry? The Greek word for “greed” (*pleonexian*) is a compound from a root suggesting a desire to have more. This is not a casual desire, but a driving passion for more, a ruthless desire and seeking after material things. In its rapacity it disregards the rights of others in pursuit of pleasure, of owning, of feeding pride with the juicy fruits of goods. The attitude is identified as idolatry because it puts self-interest and material things in the place of God.

We accumulate and have, and then we end up serving and protecting our things at great effort and expense. We become emotionally invested in homes, stocks, cars, properties, businesses, toys of all sorts, luxuries, etc. Things can own us. We can become their slaves. This can be sin on a small budget or on a large. One does not have to be a millionaire to be greedy, not that all millionaires are such. I’ve seen good old poor boys who put their piece-of-junk pickup truck and hunting cabin as number one in their lives.

Whatever captures prime affection in your heart can become an idol, for it leaves no room for God to be the Lord of your life. The thing, passion, or pursuit sucks up all attention, resources, time, and energy.

The Ephesians got the same message from Paul:

“For of this you can be sure; No immoral, impure, or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (5:5).

How much stronger can it be stated. Idolatry is real, and it will keep one out of God’s kingdom. Becoming too attached to things, pleasures, ambitions, escapes, freedoms to do what you want regardless, can be idolatry. Let a man honestly examine himself.

For many abortion, the freedom to kill the helpless innocent unborn, is like a religion. It is an idol. A greedy putting first of personal convenience regardless of the evil it causes. For others homosexuality is an idol, the biggest thing in life, the source of identity, and it too has become a doctrine of secular religion.

Millions are addicted to various things: pot, hard drugs, prescription drugs, pornography, booze, gambling, the stock market, crime, politics, etc. In many cases these addicted souls are captured and not able to function normally. There are a million stories of how a craving, a lust, a quest for power and wealth got out of hand and led to a truly sad state. When you put something other than God as first in your life, you are due for disappointment or worse.

We have about us a neo-pagan twenty-first century world where we praise the right to choose to kill babies and bow before the demands of deviants who pervert the Creator's order for marriage and family. Let's not throw rocks at those stupid pagans of yesteryear as our own sins pile higher.

American Idol

The name fits more than just a silly talent show. People are so craving of their things, they will wait in line for days for the newest, latest, and greatest electronic gadget. They will trample people under foot in malls to get to the buying counter first. People get shot dead fighting over a pair of designer this or that or a simple pair of trendy tennis shoes.

Where does God rank in the affections of people compared to their allegiances to their sports team, politics, music, hobbies, entertainments, boats, cars, guns, homes, etc. The appetite for goods and for more of them is increasing, not decreasing. It seems all would somehow make us happy and make life good, but the opposite is often the truth.

The counsel of God is that contentment and Godliness produce both peace and happiness. The journey Godward should dominate our passions. Seeking the Kingdom of God first, as Jesus advised, is the secret to eliminating all idols.

Keeping God and his way as priority number one allows no room for idols to lead us off the path. Yet it also leaves us abundant space to enjoy the beautiful world God has given us, including the wonderful things available to enjoy.

When it is all evaluated, the only thing that survives this world is your Godlike character — bricks and boards gone, cars gone, jobs gone, jewelry gone, adulation from others gone—everything gone.

Abram saw the little idols break in pieces on the floor, worthless things. Later God took him outside his tent at night and showed him the starry array. He realized this was his future and God would bring it about. Paul shocked the Athenian thinkers by saying he was revealing the one God about whom they were ignorant, yet was also the only God there is.

Jesus had no idols. He worshipped God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. He asks us to follow him as he follows his heavenly Father. To the disciples he said, "If any of you does not give up everything, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). Jesus wasn't taking up an offering or asking them to end up on the street, but he was asking them to be willing to put every material thing and passion in life second to being his disciple. That leaves no room for idols. Then idolatry is not a problem.

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Kingdoms in Conflict

by Lenny Cacchio

Luke's account of the birth of Jesus has a specific reference to the most powerful man in the world. "And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered" (Luke 2:1).

Thus we are introduced to two kingdoms, the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Caesar. And they were — and are — rivals. An inscription from about 9 B.C. illustrates just how much these two kingdoms encroached on each other's territories.

The most divine Caesar...we should consider equal to the Beginning of all things...; for when everything was falling [into disorder] and tending toward dissolution, he restored it once more and gave to the whole world a new aura; Caesar...the common good Fortune of all... the beginning of life and vitality...All the cities unanimously adopt the birthday of the divine Caesar as the new beginning of the year....Whereas Providence, which has regulated our whole existence...has brought our life to the climax of perfection in giving to us [the emperor] Augustus, whom it [Providence] filled with strength for the welfare of men, and who being sent to us and our descendants as Savior, has put an end to war and has set all things in order; and [whereas,] having become [god] manifest (*phaneis*), Caesar has fulfilled all the hopes of earlier times ...in surpassing all the benefactors who preceded him..., and whereas, finally, the birthday of the god [Augustus] has been for the whole world the beginning of good news (*euangelion*) concerning him [therefore let a new era begin from his birth]. (Quoted in *The Jesus of Suburbia*, by Mike Erre, from Richard A. Horsely's *Jesus and Empire*)

Here it said of Caesar that he is divine, equal to the Beginning of all things, a restorer, a Savior, a bringer of peace and order, a manifestation of God, fulfiller of hopes, the greatest of the benefactors, whose birthday is celebrated as that of a god which is the harbinger of the gospel (good news) for the whole world, and that a new era has now begun.

Is it any wonder that Christianity became a threat to the Roman Empire, and that one of the beasts of Revelation is depicted as a two-horned lamb that speaks like a dragon? (Revelation 13:11)

Claims to divinity might not be as blatantly stated in today's world, but many of the governments of this world act like they are modern-day Caesars, promising the things that only God can bring, claiming to be the beginning and end of all things, restorers, saviors, bringers of peace and order, fulfiller of hopes, benefactors, and bringers of a new world order. How's that working out?

Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God those things which are God's.

You can catch all of Lenny's latest commentaries on <http://morningcompanion.blogspot.com>. Lenny is a member of the BSA board of directors.

Editorial: "Top-down or bottom-up..." cont. from page 3.

Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28, NIV).

One of the most dramatic examples of what Jesus expected of those who follow Him is found in the gospel of Matthew 25:35–40. In this passage the Lord lays out his example of what he expects of his followers particularly of those who serve in the ministry. He said these things to those who were destined to be the leaders, his disciples, his future apostles. "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.... Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

Church Hierarchy

Is there authority within the Church? Yes, there is, but it is different from what most people believe. The apostle Paul lays out that line of authority in his first letter to the church in Corinth. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 12:28: "God has appointed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then those who perform miracles, those who have gifts of healing, those who help others, administrators, and those who speak various kinds of languages." Notice that nowhere in this passage is the local pastor nominated as dictator over the lives of the people in the congregation. The pastor, *i.e.* the local shepherd, is supposed to be the servant of all. Of course, when someone is designated as "God's apostle," either by himself or by others in the congregation, there is not much that the people in the congregation can do that is not interpreted as either "according to the will of God," or "opposed to the will of God." And the will of God is whatever the designated apostle says it is. No one wants to be seen as opposing God. If a self-designated apostle speaks, then his words, unfortunately, carry the same weight as those of God himself.

This has posed a very difficult problem for many Christians who have been subjected to this heavy-handed authoritarian approach. Do I go my own way or stay with a group of people, many of whom are very dear friends and companions as well as the friends of my children? This is a real dilemma. The only thing that I can counsel to people in this situation is to go before God, pour out their hearts, and

seek His counsel as to whether they should stay or go.

Have you ever had someone tell you, "God told me?" I have. That puts any Christian in a terrible bind. After all, who are you to argue with God? Of course, we have to be careful to confirm the words of God by the mouth of two or three witnesses. If we cannot do that, then God has not spoken. And, God does say that he will do nothing that he has not revealed first to his servants the prophets (notice the word "servants," not "head honchos"). Where are the prophets today in the churches of God? After all, prophets are listed second in the church hierarchy. That's just a question I have, but I don't have a good answer for that one.

The apostle Paul makes some additional comments about the hierarchy of church authority in the fourth chapter of the book of Ephesians. In verses 11 and 12 he states the following: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:"

In the passage above the apostle Paul states basically the same thing that he outlined in First Corinthians, but he adds some essential elements to his comments. The purpose of the hierarchy within the church is for the "perfecting of the saints and for the edifying of the body of Christ till we all come to the unity of the faith." The whole purpose of the Church is to prepare the bride, the Church, for the return of the bride's Savior.

Paul, a Consensus Builder?

Was the apostle Paul trying to build consensus as so many preachers, teacher, pastors, and evangelists do today? Certainly not. Rather, the apostle wanted the people to understand the true nature of life in Christ. That is, he wanted them to understand that their lives in Christ were grounded in solid principles of love and looking out for the welfare of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Certainly there are many occasions when building a consensus is justified. For example, people working to create a budget need to be in agreement on what will work and what is practicable. Or, when a church is trying to outline policies on how to handle certain

situations, there needs to be a consensus on the church board on how they will handle those situations. However, when it comes to matters of the truth, the gospel, and Christ, it is not a matter of building a consensus, but building a foundation based on the truth of the Scriptures. Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" That is probably the most important question that any of us has to answer. What is truth? For the Christian, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." So, Paul was not trying to build a consensus, but rather he was trying to get the people to understand the nature of their inheritance in Christ. People are inclined to view their lives in Christ from a purely human point of view. That will not work for the Christian because we are supposed to look at life through a new lens — to see others and deal with them the same way Christ would deal with them. We have to look at them through a spiritual lens.

In some ways we have been dancing around the subject, so to say it more directly, we have to have authority within the church, but it has to be the kind of authority that Jesus was talking about when he said that those who desired to lead needed to be the servants of all. That is bottom-up religion, that is, the pastor is the one at the bottom lifting up the members of his congregation. He has to be the one who sets the example of service for the entire congregation. He must not be a people pleaser or a compromiser; he has to lead on the basis of truth, not on the basis of consensus. We see in the apostle Paul the nature of a true pastor. His desire was for the gifts of the spirit to flourish within the congregation and in the lives of every member of the congregation. That's why we often see the apostle Paul appearing to be weak when, in fact, he was attempting to elicit a spiritual response to the problems of the local church that did not require his being involved. He wanted the people to recognize and use their own gifts. He did not want the people to rely on him to tell them everything they needed to do. He counseled, he cajoled, but he was very reluctant to dictate how people should respond to the problems in their congregation. The apostle Paul had the authority to exercise top-down religion in the congregations he served, but he chose to inspire rather than dictate. In a nutshell that was the ministry of the apostle Paul. If we need an example to follow, that should be our example: authority without compromise, yet a reluctance to lord it over God's people.

—Kenneth Ryland



In the Days of Noah *by David Rives*

In biblical history we learn that there came a time when wickedness filled the land. Even so, there was a righteous man who found grace in God's sight. He was given instructions on the building of a ship which would preserve the lives of everyone on board. God revealed that He would send a flood to destroy everything that was not sealed in the ship.

Noah built the ark as commanded, and prepared for the coming flood, while the rest of the world continued as they were, too caught up in their daily lives.

The deluge that came wiped the earth clean, and after the waters had receded, the ark was opened, and life began anew.

We read that God "spared not the old world, but saved Noah...a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly" (2 Peter 2:5).

In Matthew, Jesus stated: "As in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe [Noah] entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:38,39).

When that day comes, will we be as those outside the ark in the day of the flood, or will we be like Noah, counted as righteous, who followed God's instructions, and prepared for the coming flood?

I'm David Rives...

Truly, The Heavens Declare the Glory of God.

David lectures around the country on Creation and biblical astronomy. He publishes a weekly video commentary on WorldNetDaily. For more information, visit www.davidrives.com.

Perhaps you do not like to see discipleship compared to disabilities, but let me give you a biblical illustration. After Jacob wrestled with the Angel of Yahweh, he had a permanent limp. His handicap brought limitations.

Jacob now had to lean on a staff. It also brought Jacob a new opportunity to worship Yahweh in a renewed relationship, no longer as "Jacob" but now as "Israel." Both his opportunity (worship) and his limitation (a staff) are stated in Hebrews 11:21, which says that Jacob "worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff." In order to experience a transformation like Jacob experienced, we must continue in Yeshua's word. We must persevere in our pursuit of Him and become His disciples.

What about those believers who are content to be mere believers and have no desire to persevere and become disciples? I am not the judge of such people, but I sure wouldn't want to be in their shoes. Read the rest of Yeshua's conversation with "those Jews which believed on Him" in John chapter 8, and you will see why. "They [those Jews which believed on Him] answered Him, 'We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?'" If a professing believer is presented with the opportunity to be a disciple indeed and to be free indeed, but rejects that offer, he may actually turn against Yeshua, as did some of "those Jews which believed on Him."

Some professing believers do not go on to be disciples simply because they do not want to; others do not go on to be disciples because they do not understand what it means to be a disciple indeed and free indeed. I was blessed from the beginning of my walk with the Lord with an understanding of the general concept of discipleship. In 1970, when I was 21 years old, I started reading the New Testament. I read about the birth of Jesus and realized the holiness of His conception and birth. I read about John the Baptist and understood that John was preparing the way for the arrival of Jesus. I read about Jesus' baptism and temptation in the wilderness and saw that He was stronger than Satan. I read about Jesus calling Peter and Andrew and James and John to follow Him, and I understood that following Jesus — if a person was going to follow Him — had to take priority over the common routine of an ordinary life. Then I read the Sermon on the Mount. Wow! I saw that following Jesus — if a person was going to follow Him — would mean a complete overhaul of one's life. A person's ordinary outlook on life would have to radically change, and his lifestyle would have to radically change.

From reading just the first seven chapters of Matthew, I understood that if I was going to follow Jesus, this decision would bring God into every aspect of my life. My faith could not just be some peripheral part of my life; it could not be a mere appendage; it could not be just one more neat thing to add to my life and my identity. It would have to become my life and the very core of my identity, the main defining factor of my identity. I had not even read John chapter 8 yet, about continuing in His

word to be His disciple, but I understood the concept. If I was going to follow Him, it would have to be all or nothing. If I wasn't determined to finish the course, I had better not start. I didn't make a quick, impulsive decision to follow Jesus. I spent another year and a half reading the Bible and counting the cost before I finally made my decision to be a disciple of Jesus.

Living the life of a disciple does not mean a life that forbids all earthly joys and pleasures. There are plenty of legal, permissible joys and pleasures. Discipleship does not *forbid* all earthly joys and pleasures, but it *filters* all earthly activities and decisions. Discipleship filters your actions and decisions by asking questions about the choices you have: How will this affect your spiritual health and your relationship with the Lord? Will it harm or endanger your spiritual well-being, or help you and strengthen you?

Being a disciple does not exclude all earthly joys and pleasures, but no earthly joy or pleasure should be excluded from the filter of discipleship. Decisions should be based on how your choices will affect your relationship with the Lord, because your relationship with the Lord is the most precious and valuable thing you have. As you continue in His word, let His word continue in you. Let His word sanctify every area of your life. Then you will be disciples indeed and free indeed.

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Palin: Put Your Faith in God Not Politicians

(Newsmax Wires) In the wake of the recent killings at a Connecticut school, people must keep in mind the importance of faith in God rather than in media elites or politicians, says former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin.

"Unspeakable evil slammed America in the beautiful little town of Newtown, Connecticut," she writes on her Facebook page. "No words can express the collective shock and sorrow shared by Americans who know the murder of innocent children is the most horrendous crime imaginable."

The Connecticut state motto, "Qui transtulit sustinet" comes into play here, because it means that "only God can sustain us," Palin says. "Though still insufficient and unfulfilling for the grieving families of these beautiful babies in the Lord's arms now, perhaps those words are all the inconsolable loved ones can hold on to at this time. May God show His sustaining love to them right now. Please Lord."



Could 2013 Be the Year of our Lord?

by Lori Godfrey

Two thousand years have come and gone since Yeshua (Jesus) left the earth with the promise to return in power and glory. We have all seen the headlines through the years of someone falsely predicting His arrival or the earth's demise by some scientific phenomenon, only to wake up the next morning to find that all is well in the world—another false prediction leading to another false hope.

As children of God we can be assured our Lord's return will be just as He said. He will "Come as a thief in the night." As we look toward the Middle East, we can't help but to ask ourselves, "Could 2013 be the year of our Lord?" in spite of the fact that another catastrophic prediction set for December 21, 2012 has just passed. My question to those who claim such catastrophes is, Why continue to set dates for the Messiah's return when you know that such a time is only known by the Father? Since the time of His ascension until now, men have believed they know the time of the Second Coming. It would behoove us to realize even if the date of such a wonderful event was revealed to us, it goes without saying, unless we are truly His children and we are doing what He commanded, it will be of no consequence to us. Yeshua commanded in Mark 12:30-31, "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and love thy neighbor as thyself."

Could this be the time when He arrives in power and great glory? Well, yes, it could be, but most likely it is not. Remember, one of the signs to the end of the age is, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

When people start setting dates, as they did for December 21, we would do well to remember what our Lord said: "The hour in which you think not, the Son of Man cometh." It doesn't matter when He returns, but rather what are we doing to assure ourselves a place with Him in eternity. The Bible says that no man is promised tomorrow because our days "are as a vapor."

Whether we meet Him in the air or we enter glory through death, we will never know the times or the seasons because that knowledge belongs to the Father Himself. No, not even Lucifer knows when the great and terrible day of the Lord is.

So the question remains, if he is unknowing of the day, how can we who are mortal know of such a day?

Lori is a freelance writer who lives in Arkansas.

God's Way and Our Way

"You say: 'The Lord isn't being fair!' Listen to me, O people of Israel. Am I the one who is unfair, or is it you?" (Ezekiel 18:25, T.L.B.)

When God does not act in the way some people think He ought to act, they become angry and accuse Him of being capricious and unreliable. They may not express such thoughts in words, but this is the way they think or feel down deep in their hearts.

When Naaman, the heathen commander of the Syrian army, came down to Israel to be healed of his leprosy, he thought he knew how God's prophet, Elisha, ought to act, and when Elisha did not act the way he expected, he "was furious and went away, saying, 'I thought he would at least have come out and stood, and invoked the Lord his God by name, waved his hand over the place and so rid me of the disease'" (2 Kings 5:11, N.E.B.). Instead, God, through His prophet, simply instructed Naaman to dip himself seven times in the Jordan. He grumbled, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" (verse 12, N.E.B.). Perhaps they were, but they were not involved in God's plan. Naaman apparently needed to learn a lesson in humility, and this was God's way of teaching it to him. Fortunately Naaman's servants had better sense than he did, and fortunately he listened to their advice.

Have you ever heard of someone's becoming rebellious because God did not answer his prayer in the same way He answered someone else's prayer? I remember one case of a man stricken with cancer who heard how the Lord had healed another man of the same disease in answer to the united prayers of his fellow church members. So, our man sent word to his pastor, asking him to set aside a day in which the church would fast and pray for his recovery. The church did that, but, he was not healed, and when he realized he was not going to be healed, he became bitter. He felt God was being unfair.

If this man had the wrong attitude, what is the right attitude? Just lie down and die? Not necessarily. We should have a humble, submissive, cheerful attitude, of course. But God also expects us to do all we can to cooperate with our prayers. If there is something within the physical or the spiritual realm that we ought to do, we ought to do it. Then, having done everything we know we can do and should do, we should leave matters in the hands of the all-wise God. He knows what is best for us.

Remember, when God does not answer our prayers in exactly the way we think He should, we should not charge Him with being unfair. After all, in His infinite wisdom He ordains only that which is for our eternal good.

*Donald Mansell, **New Every Morning**, page 23. Review & Herald Publishing Association. 1981.*

The Church in the World

Likely to lose constitution vote, Egyptian Christians gird for long struggle

Religious freedom will have to be won within Islamic system of laws

CAIRO, Dec. 13, (World Watch Monitor) — Politically connected Christians in Egypt give credit to the Muslim Brotherhood for one thing: they can win elections. The Brotherhood got 13 million ordinary Egyptians, many of them poor, rural and illiterate, to the polls in June to vote for their presidential candidate, Mohamed Morsi.

Governing has been a different matter.

“What is helping us today is that the Muslim Brotherhood and political Islam are not always clever,” said Hassan Ismail, secretary general of the Egyptian Union of Human Rights Organizations. He has been networking among Christians, moderate Muslims and secularists to assemble a political counterweight to the more numerous supporters of the Brotherhood and the fundamentalist Salafis.

“Average people are starting to be against them because they don’t see anything helping them,” Ismail said, passing a sultry autumn afternoon at a Cairo café table. “Our bet is on the stupidity of the Muslim Brotherhood.”

Since the January 2011 revolution that toppled former President Hosni Mubarak, economic growth has slowed and Egypt’s unemployment rate has been running at 12 percent. Prices are up by 20 percent, and likely would be higher if not for the central bank’s raid on its foreign cash reserves to prop up the value of the Egyptian pound. Textile workers and doctors alike have staged walkouts for higher wages. Tourism is moribund. The day after he was enthroned, new Coptic Pope Tawadros II said he and Egypt’s 10 million Christians would reject the proposed constitution, drafted by a committee dominated by Islamists, if it retained language establishing a religious state.

“The Muslim Brotherhood, they don’t know politics. Every day they provide us with proof,” said Dr. Ehab El Kharrat, a psychiatrist, member of Egypt’s upper house of Parliament, and a Christian member of the country’s constitution-drafting committee until he walked out in protest. “They are not the underdog any more. Now they are making one mistake after another.”

This was the view several weeks ago, when growing public exasperation with the impotence of the Morsi government appeared to open a plausible path for Christians to secure some space for themselves along-

side Egypt’s widely popular Islamist political movements.

But it also was before Morsi made his late-November lurch for power with a series of decrees — since rescinded — that expanded his authority and shielded him from court oversight. It was before he ordered the committee drafting the constitution, already deserted by frustrated Christians and the object of widespread protests, to finish the job in a single night, and scheduled a popular vote for Dec. 15.

Cairo streets filled with tens of thousands of protesters, and with even more Morsi supporters, in sometimes violent confrontations. Tanks lined up in front of the presidential palace. In the streets, the dividing line has become a largely religious one: The Brotherhood and Salafis on one side chanting in support of Islam and majority rule; and opponents on the other chanting in support of a constitution without religious preferences and that protects minorities.

Article 2 of the proposed constitution establishes Islam as the state religion. “Principles of Islamic Sharia are the principal source of legislation,” it states. Article 219 spells out those principles as “general evidence, foundational rules, rules of jurisprudence, and credible sources accepted in Sunni doctrines and by the larger community.” Article 44 outlaws blasphemy.

Now that the national vote is nigh, ordinary Christians told World Watch Monitor through an interpreter that their way forward likely will be a longer, harder grind under a system of laws tilted against anyone who is not Muslim.

A Christian history professor in Cairo, speaking anonymously to protect his position, said believers will have little option but to confront injustices directly, and loudly.

“The oldest and best way is continuing our resistance and exposing it to the whole world,” he said. “Go publicly to the international society, while resisting on the inside.”

“We are preparing ourselves for a long, long struggle and battle with Islam,” the professor said. “What is happening with Islamists in the streets is one part of that. We win some of these small battles. We have some of the rights we fought for.”

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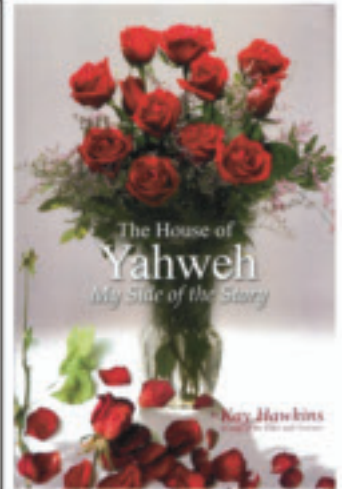
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