

The Sabbath Sentinel

July–August 2014



**The future of energy or
a blight on the landscape?**

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

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

The Sabbath Sentinel

July–August 2014 Volume 65, No. 4 Issue 568

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Is this the future of energy?

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Are you Balaam or Balaam's Ass?



The old radio preacher, J. Vernon McGee, once stated "It was a miracle when an ass spoke in the Bible. Now you can't get them to shut up." Dr. McGee certainly had a way with words, and he was always quite perceptive.

One thing about the ass is that it is very surefooted over rugged terrain, probably more than any other domesticated animal. When Balaam was whipping his donkey to make it go forward, the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, but Balaam did not see the angel. The angel would have killed Balaam were it not for the donkey. We can learn a lot from a donkey.

This editorial is about seeing and hearing God's intentions for our own lives. Sometimes God does things that we do not understand, but if we were able to see Him and his intentions for us then we would be able to understand much better.

Let's take a closer look at the life of Balaam:

"Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the Lord took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. Now the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road. Then the Angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on this side and a wall on that side. And when the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she pushed herself against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck her again. Then the Angel of the Lord went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. And when the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam's anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff.

Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"

And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have abused me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!"

So the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since I became yours, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?"

And he said, "No."

Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face. And the Angel of the Lord said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because your way is perverse before Me. The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live" (Numbers 22:22-33 — NKJV throughout).

Israel's Harlotry in Moab

"Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the Lord, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel."

So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor."

And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand; and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel. And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned

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Interpreting the Torn Temple Curtain

by Doug Ward, Ph.D.



The Gospel of Matthew records that at the time of Jesus' death on the cross, "the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51, NIV).

The tearing of the temple curtain, or "veil," always has been viewed by Christians as symbolic and highly significant. However, Matthew does not pause in his narrative to discuss the meaning of this event. Neither do Mark or Luke, who also mention it (Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45).

Because the Gospels do not provide explicit interpretations of the curtain's rending, there has been room for plenty of speculation, and many possibilities have been proposed over the centuries.¹ In this article I will survey some of the leading proposals, with the goal of describing as much as possible of what Matthew 27:51 has to teach us.

Torn Body and Torn Tunic

The most familiar interpretation of the torn curtain is one that appears elsewhere in the New Testament, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The author of Hebrews encourages his readers based on the implications of this event:

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, ..." (Hebrews 10:19-22).

The author of the epistle identifies the torn curtain as the one at the entrance to the temple's Most Holy Place and sees the curtain as symbolic of Jesus' torn body. According to this symbolism, the tearing of the curtain points to a key consequence of Jesus' sacrificial death: Christians, no longer cut off from God, can come freely before God's throne of grace in heaven (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Viewing the curtain as representing Jesus' body is not the only possibility, though. Further symbolism is suggested by the wording of Matthew 27:51. Scholar David Daube² observes a connection between Matt 27:51 and 2 Kings 2:12, where the prophet Elisha rips apart his cloak in mourning when his mentor Elijah is taken away from him in a whirlwind. Daube notes that the Aramaic word for the Temple curtain can also denote a tunic, giving a linguistic basis for associating the curtain with a garment.

A connection between Matthew 27:51 and 2 Kings 2:12 makes sense in the context of Matthew 27. Matthew relates that when Jesus quoted from Psalm 22:1 on the cross (vv. 45-46), bystanders thought he was calling for Elijah. Someone joked, "Let's see if Elijah comes to save him" (v. 49). In this context, the tearing of the curtain could be saying, "Here is a prophet even greater than Elijah. Elijah's departure was mourned by the tearing of Elisha's cloak. But Jesus, who will soon depart to his Father in heaven, is mourned by the tearing of the very curtain of the holy temple."

Daube shows that additional meanings are suggested when we consider the ancient custom of tearing a garment as a sign of mourning. A rabbinic tradition based on 2 Kings 2:12 and 2 Samuel 1:11-12 says that it is appropriate to leave a torn garment unrepaired when it is ripped for certain special reasons. According to the Talmud (b. Mo'ed Qatan 26a),

"These tears on the garments are not to be sewn up again: he who makes a tear for his father or his mother, his master who taught him wisdom, a patriarch, a principal of the court, for having bad news, for having heard blasphemy, when a scroll of the Torah has been burned, for seeing the ruined cities of Judea, the holy house, or Jerusalem."

Several of the items in this list can be connected with the crucifixion. The torn temple curtain can be seen as mourning the death of a great teacher of the Torah who conveyed wisdom to his disciples. Since Jesus prophesied the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the tearing could also be a confirmation of that prophecy. One document from the early centuries of Christianity, the *Clementine Recognitions*, gives such an interpretation. Book 1, Chapter 41 of this document states that "the veil of the temple was rent, as in lamentation for the destruction impending over the place."

Daube also mentions the possibility that the tearing of the curtain was an answer to the high priest Caiaphas, who tore his clothes in response to what he saw as blasphemy by Jesus (Matthew 26:65-66). According to this interpretation, the torn curtain was responding, "Here is the real blasphemy, that the Messiah was put to death."

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Slapping the Savior's Face

By Dr. Daniel Botkin.



For centuries, Christians persecuted Jews and called them "Christ killers." But who killed Christ? Who is really to blame for His death? Was it the Roman soldiers who did the actual bloody work of scourging Him and nailing Him to the tree? Was it Pilate, who had the power to release Him but instead condemned Him to be crucified? Was it the Jewish religious leaders who persuaded Pilate to condemn Him to crucifixion?

All of these people share part of the blame for Yeshua's death, but none of them can be singled out as the only ones to blame. As a matter of fact, Yeshua said these words about His death: "I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father" (John 10:17f).

No one single man nor one single ethnic group is to blame for killing Christ. We are all "Christ killers," because He willingly chose to lay down His life to pay the penalty for our sins. It was our sins that made His death necessary. It was our sins that killed Him.

Every single individual who has ever committed a sin shares part of the blame for the Savior's death. Certainly the Roman soldiers who drove the heavy nails into His hands and feet and then hung Him up to die a slow, excruciating death share part of the blame. Certainly the Roman governor Pilate, who sentenced Him to be scourged and then condemned Him to be crucified, shares part of the blame. Certainly the Roman soldier whose hand held the Roman whip, which typically had sharp bits of metal, bone, or glass tied to the cords to cut the flesh, shares part of the blame. Certainly the Roman soldiers who pushed the crown of thorns down on His head and mocked Him and struck Him after the scourging share part of the blame. And certainly the Jewish leaders who pressured Pilate to sentence their Messiah to crucifixion share part of the blame.

Have you ever wondered about the Roman soldier who drove the first nail into His hand? Have you ever wondered what it will be like for that man on Judgment Day, when he stands before his Maker to give an account for his sins? What awful terror will go through his soul when he looks up into the face of his Judge and sees the face of that Jew that he nailed to the cross?

Or have you ever wondered what it will be like on Judgment Day for the Roman soldier whose hand held the whip that scourged Him? What awful terror will go through his soul when he looks up into the face of his Judge and sees the face of that Jew whose back he cruelly shredded to ribbons?

Or have you ever wondered what it will be like on Judgment Day for Pontius Pilate, who testified "I find in Him no fault at all"? Pontius Pilate, who was afraid when he heard that Yeshua claimed to be the Son of God, who knew that the chief priests had delivered Yeshua for envy, who received a message from his wife, warning him, "have nothing to do with that just man, because I suffered many things in a dream because of Him." Pontius Pilate, who knew all these things, yet to please the people ordered Yeshua scourged and then crucified. What awful terror will go through Pilate's miserable soul when he looks up into the face of his Judge and sees the face of that Jew that he condemned to scourging and crucifixion, knowing He was innocent?

Or have you ever wondered what it will be like on Judgment Day for the Jewish religious leaders who had Him arrested, put Him through a mock trial with false witnesses, then pressured Pilate to crucify Him, even though Pilate was willing to let Him go, and then came to mock Him as He hung on the cross, suffering and dying for the sins of the world? What awful terror will go through the souls of these men when they look up into the face of their Judge and see the face of their Messiah whom they rejected and sentenced to die?

Judgment Day will be an awful day of abject terror for all these men who carried out the details of the Crucifixion of the Son of God. But did you know that the very first act of physical violence inflicted on the flesh of the Lord was not the scourging ordered by Pilate. There is someone else in the Bible who bears the guilt and the shame and the ignominy of being the very first individual to inflict physical violence on the sinless Son of God.

A mob with torches and weapons came to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Yeshua, but no one used a weapon against Him there, because it was not necessary. He went with them willingly, like a lamb being led to the slaughter. They took Him to the high priest to be

interrogated. This was when the first act of physical violence was inflicted on the flesh of the Lord:

“The high priest then asked Yeshua of His disciples, and of His doctrine. Yeshua answered him, ‘I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou Me? Ask them which heard Me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said.’ And when He had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Yeshua with the palm of his hand, saying, ‘Answerest thou the high priest so?’ Yeshua answered him, ‘If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou Me?’” (John 18:19-23).

I would hate to be in the shoes of this unnamed officer on Judgment Day. Can you imagine the fear, the horror, the absolute terror that will fill the soul of this man? This was the first man to inflict physical pain on the Son of God, the first to strike the Son of God. Can you imagine how his knees will turn to jelly when he looks up into the face of his Judge and sees the face that he slapped, and realizes that the slap of his hand was the beginning of the physical suffering of the Son of God?

The words that his Judge spoke to him on that long-ago day will be replayed as they echo in his mind. “If I spoke evil on that day long ago, bear witness of the evil. But if I spoke well, why did you slap Me?”

Before the Roman soldiers nailed Me to the cross, before they scourged Me and tore My back to shreds, before the Romans inflicted any physical harm on Me, you slapped My face. You were the one who first initiated physical violence upon Me. Why did you slap Me?”

You might be thinking, *Daniel, why are you making such a big issue over a slap on the face? Sure, it's going to be bad news for that man on Judgment Day, but a slap on the face doesn't draw any blood or leave any permanent scars. Getting slapped on the face is bad, but it's minor compared to being scourged with a Roman whip and being nailed to a cross.*

That's all true, but I'm focusing on this slap for three reasons. One reason is because this man's slap was the first physical violence inflicted on the Savior.

A second reason is because a slap on the face is more than the infliction of some mild, temporary physical pain. A slap on the face is an act of defiance, a challenge, an insult that says you are a worthless piece of trash. In past centuries, a slap on the face often resulted in a duel to the death, even if the challenging slap was administered with a soft, flimsy glove. I view a slap on the face as more of an insult than a punch with the fist. I have been both slapped and punched in the face. The punches brought more physical pain and long-lasting bruises, but the slaps were more degrading, more insulting, and more humiliating.

A third reason I want to focus on this slapping of the Savior's face is to point something out, namely, that sin is a slap in the Savior's face. Every time you sin, you are in effect slapping the Savior's face, like the unnamed officer of the high priest did. Every time you sin, in effect you are saying, “I don't need Your commandments. I don't need to obey You. I don't need to take orders from You.”

The Bible defines sin as “the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). Every time you transgress God's law, you are slapping the Savior's face. Yeshua said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Every time you transgress the law and disobey one of His commandments, you are saying, “I don't need Your law. I don't need Your commandments. This is about relationship, not rules. I have a personal relationship with You, so I don't need Your rules. To hell with Your rules. I can love You without keeping Your commandments.”

Yet 1 John 5:3 says “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous.” And 1 John 2:4 says “He that saith, I know Him, but keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” And 1 John 3:24 says “And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him.” Yet in spite of these Bible truths stated in 1 John and in many other verses, some Christians think they can love the Lord as they continue to habitually break His law.

That sort of attitude toward God's law is a slap in the Savior's face. “For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know Him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:26-31).

On that day when “the Lord shall judge His people,” I do not want to hear my Judge ask me, “Why did you slap My face? Why did you disobey My commandments and transgress My law?”

I want to hear Him say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

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“An Eye for an Eye:” A Law of Revenge or a Law of Restraint?

R. Herbert

The principle of “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” is one of the most well-known laws in the Bible, but is it understood? Known legally as the *lex talionis* or the “law of retaliation,” and referenced by Jesus Himself in His teaching, most people see this law as an ultimately fair, though almost barbarically cruel, principle of revenge and exact restitution. But is this really what this law of “retributive justice” is all about?

It is often said that the underlying concept of the *lex talionis*, equal restitution, is the basis of most modern law — that the punishment must fit the crime. But this is something of a misunderstanding. Biblical Israel was not the only culture of the ancient Near East to have such laws, and their purpose is well known. In the ancient Babylonian Law of Hammurabi (c. 1780 BC), for example, we find exactly the same legal principle that individuals should receive as punishment the same injuries and damages they had inflicted upon others:

“If a man has destroyed the eye of another man, they shall destroy his eye. If he has broken another man's bone, they shall break his bone” (Code of Hammurabi, 196-97).

Babylonian law was complicated by the fact that crimes against those of different social classes required different punishments (something Biblical law forbade, Leviticus 19:15), but the legal principle of the *talion* itself was obviously identical in both cultures.

In the Mosaic law, the principle of an eye for an eye is commanded in three separate and slightly different situations:

Collateral Injury: If a pregnant woman is hurt by others' struggling and her child miscarries, the law of an eye for an eye is to be applied (Exodus 21:24).

Crime of Passion Injury: If men fight and one is injured in the struggle, the law of an eye for an eye is to be applied (Leviticus 24:20).

Premeditated Injury: If a witness testifies falsely against someone, the law of an eye for an eye is to be applied and the punishment is the penalty the accused would have received (Deuteronomy 19:21).

Notice that the first example given shows that the law is really intended to indicate an *equivalent* punishment rather than an *exact* restitution. A man who caused a woman to miscarry obviously cannot be made to miscarry himself as punishment, and the Law of

Hammurabi makes it clear that an equivalent is intended: “If a man struck another man's daughter and caused her to have a miscarriage he shall pay ten shekels of silver for her fetus” (Hammurabi 209). The Jewish Rabbis commenting on the biblical examples always understood that an approximate equivalence was intended, citing, for example, that a blind man who blinded another cannot be punished with exact restitution. So normally, in ancient Babylonia or in Israel, the law was applied in equivalence — financial or other remuneration equivalent to the loss caused by the injury. It is certainly possible that the law was literally upheld in some cases, but this does not seem to have usually been the case.

This much is commonly understood. What is less widely understood is the underlying reason for the existence of the *talionis* laws and their real application. Although they are usually presumed to have allowed equal restitution revenge, these laws were actually intended not to exact, but to restrict revenge. They are not encouraging retribution, they are restraining it.

In most ancient Near Eastern cultures, crimes of injury were usually regarded as private matters of family concern and retribution. For serious offenses the retribution might be handled at the tribal level, and this type of vengeful justice frequently led to blood feuds between families and whole tribes which only grew as time went on (there are many biblical examples of this, beginning with Genesis 4:24). It is clear that the various expressions of the *lex talionis* originated to limit these destructive spirals, and once that is understood it is clear that the purpose of these laws was not to prescribe revenge, but to limit it. Each “eye for an eye” law allowed what we would call government control of what was otherwise usually a private matter, but the consequences of which could affect much greater parts of society through ongoing and uncontrolled blood feuds. The intent of the laws was to “cap” retribution at no more than the level of the original problem.

When we understand that the purpose of these laws was one of restraint rather than revenge, we can better understand the application of the laws in their original setting, but the understanding goes beyond that of interesting ancient legal trivia.

Jesus and the *Lex Talionis*

The importance of proper understanding of the *lex talionis* becomes apparent when we consider Jesus'

mention of the law: "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well" (Matthew 5:38).

Although these words of Christ are frequently cited as being an example of Christian pacifism (the view of Leo Tolstoy and many other writers and theologians), understanding the proper context of the law shows that Jesus' words may well have intended something different. First, notice that the direct context of what Jesus said here was a clearly legal, not a confrontational context. Not only does Jesus cite the earlier law, but He counters its maximum application with two examples, at least one of which is taken directly from legal proceedings, a situation where someone might want to sue another.

If we presume that the *lex talionis* was a law allowing full and complete revenge, it is easy to think that is what Jesus is primarily talking about here. But revenge does not really fit the meaning of the law as we have seen, and it does not really fit the example Christ gives of someone who might want to sue us for something we have done — there is no issue of revenge involved on our part. When we realize that the "eye for an eye" law was intended to restrict the degree of retaliation employed, we see that Jesus was going a step further and restricting retaliation even more.

Remember that Jesus' statement on this matter occurs as one of several linked and similar statements made within the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). After reminding His hearers that He did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17), Jesus then gives several examples of this "filling full" the underlying meaning of the law. In each case he shows an earlier instruction in the law, then shows how the principle can be fulfilled even better by exercising even more restraint.

Where the Law said "you shall not murder," Jesus shows we should not even curse others in anger or we would be in danger of legal judgment (vs. 21), adding another legal context reminder by saying "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court" (vs. 25). He then shows that while the Law says we should not commit adultery, we should be yet more restrained, not lusting in our hearts, (vss. 27-28) even referring here to "gauging out an eye" (vs. 29). Next he shows that while the law allowed divorce for many reasons, He urges us to more restraint by allowing divorce only for adultery (vs. 31). After showing the same principle of restraint regarding oaths — of saying only a simple "yes" or "no" (vss. 33-37) — Jesus then addresses the *lex talionis* directly (vss. 38-42). He does this, as we saw, by saying that even though the Law

allowed for restitution *up to* "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," He instructs his listeners to be much more restrained.

The first example He gives is that of not resisting or retaliating for evil that has been done to us: "If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also" (vs. 39). A detail here may be important. Jesus specifically mentions being slapped on the right cheek, not just a cheek, meaning that this would normally have to be a backhand slap from a right-handed person. The Rabbinic writings show that this kind of slap was a great insult in the world of ancient Palestine, and Jesus uses it not as an example of being attacked (which is rarely done by means of backhanded slaps), but more likely as an example of an insult (vs. 11) liable to be later countered in court, just as His next example of someone suing for a person's garment might also be legally countered — and in both cases He urges Christians to refrain from retaliation.

The context throughout this section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in which the *lex talionis* is mentioned is, then, clearly a legal one, with courts, suing, judges, prison, certificate of divorce and other legal terms being mentioned over a dozen times in these few verses. There is actually no direct context or reference to warfare, immediate conflict, or principles of pacifism. Most all of the issues Jesus discusses in these verses are in the post-event context of restraint in later legal retribution.

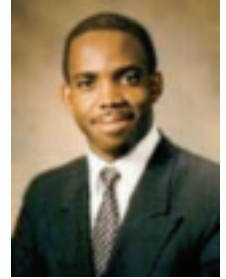
Toward the end of the sermon, Jesus also urges us to even go beyond restraint to more positive responses such as "If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles" (vs.22), and "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (vs. 44). While these cases can be said to involve restraint they clearly go even further, actively seeking the best for the person who has harmed or insulted us. This seems to be the ultimate goal to which Christ points us just as the sermon itself ends with the words "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (vs. 48).

The biblical *lex talionis* of "an eye for an eye" was, then, a law of restraint, limiting the amount of reciprocal damage done after (usually) accidental injury, not a law encouraging revenge. Jesus used this law in the Sermon on the Mount — along with other examples — as an example of how even when the law allows us to do certain things, the principle of further restraint can and should be utilized wherever possible — and even exceeded by active love for the offending party.

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A Culture of Excellence

by Whaid Rose



Ironically, it was also during the month of May back in 1787 that delegates to the US Constitutional Convention began to assemble in Philadelphia to establish the ground rules for our peaceful co-existence as a nation.

May 2014 is nearing its end, but the reshaping of the landscape is sure to continue. The cover story in the June issue of *Time Magazine* (to be released next week) is titled, *The Transgender Tipping Point*. The term “tipping point” has been used to reference that moment when the domino effect is triggered, when a movement or idea gains enough momentum to shift the tide from one point to the other. In this case, the transgender revolution has now reached its tipping point, with enough momentum to crush those who oppose it. *Time* has been called America’s “cultural barometer,” and seeks to send a clear signal through this cover article. This calls for a well-thought-out response from Bible-believing Christians, one that recognizes the fact of sin’s eroding effect on our country, and rises above the Christian America illusion to truly become the salt and light to the culture Jesus calls us to be. This is our task, this is our moment.

Much is celebrated during the month of May—mothers, those who died while serving in the US military, and in many parts of the country, graduates. May is therefore the month of controversies over commencements speeches, taken to a new level this year at Rutgers, New Jersey’s State University. Former Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, rescinded her invitation to deliver the commencement there amid protests (from students and faculty alike) over her role in the Iraq war and Bush administration. They accuse Rice of being a “war criminal,” among other things.

This recent incident is a stark reminder of our nation’s rapidly changing moral and political landscape. Regardless of our position either on war in general or the Iraq war in particular, our discussions of such matters are to be kept above the fray of disdain for our opponents and intolerance of all opposing viewpoints. This is especially important in institutions of higher learning, a major role of which is to encourage critical thinking and diversity of thought and opinion. The sobering reality is that such diversity is encouraged in these institutions, with one exception—the biblical-Christian worldview. A classic case in point is Michael Sam’s intimate kissing of his gay partner during the NFL draft, which hit the news around the same time as the Rutgers/Rice incident. Sam was loudly applauded by the same liberal media which not too long ago considered Tim Tebow’s public expression of his Christian faith woefully inappropriate. This is hard evidence of what is called “the intolerance of America’s new tolerance.” Read more about this in [The Intolerance of Tolerance](#), by Christian Apologist, Dr. D. A. Carson.

Yours for cultural engagement,

Whaid G. Rose

Whaid Rose is the president of the Church of God, Seventh Day.

What is the Spirit of Antichrist?

By Brian Knowles



In connection with some popular movies that are currently making the rounds—the remake of “The Omen” being one of them—there is a renewed interest in the prophetic figure known as “The Antichrist.” This apocalyptic personage has long been subject to interpretation by Hollywood. Movie after movie, including some Christian-made ones, have sought to depict this end-time character in various ways, all of them malevolent, most of them inaccurate.

The fact is the term “antichrist” occurs only five times in the entire Bible, all of them in two letters written by the apostle John. The purpose of this article is to analyze these five instances.

I John 2:18–22

“Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

“But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist — he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”

In these five verses, we see three of the five instances in which the term “antichrist” is used in the Bible. Let’s analyze these verses in order.

“Dear Children”

When John uses the term “dear children” to address the recipients of his letter, he is indicating not only his relationship with congregants, but perhaps his great age. It is generally agreed among scholars that John wrote these epistles late in his life, perhaps toward the end of the first century. When you consider that John had been a contemporary with Jesus, who had died more than 50 years earlier, it is clear that by this time, John was quite elderly.

“You have heard that the antichrist is coming...”

Though this is the first use of the term “antichrist” in Scripture, John refers back to earlier warnings of an anti-Christian figure that would ultimately arrive on the scene. He may well have been referring to some of Jesus’ own words in which he warned of “false Christs.” He said that many would claim to be the Messiah himself (Luke 21:8). Jesus warned his disciples not to follow such people (same verse).

The apostle Paul, who wrote much earlier than John, and before the Gospels had been compiled, also warned of a “man of lawlessness” who would appear just before the return of Christ. Of him Paul wrote: “He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thessalonians 2:4). This man will function in opposition to God and to Christ—therefore he is anti-Christ—against Christ. Perhaps this is a reference to the same individual.

It is Paul’s reference to this man sitting in the Temple of God that has led some to believe that a new Temple will be constructed prior to the return of the Messiah. The one that was still standing when Paul wrote was destroyed in 70 AD. Many Jews believe the third Temple can only be built after Messiah returns.

Like John, Paul believed that the prophesied antichrist was already on the scene, but that he was being held back in order to accommodate God’s timing: “Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so until he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming” (2 Thessalonians 2:5-8).

It seems that it was generally understood within the first century Christian community that the return of Christ would be preceded by the arrival of a series of counterfeit messiahs, a “man of sin,” an antichrist. They believed that they lived in the time during which

these events would happen. So they looked for them in what was going on around them. Even though Paul seems to have abandoned the belief that Christ would return in his lifetime when he got older, John may have clung to that belief well into his own old age.

“This is the last hour”

Returning to John’s account (1 John 2:18), we find the aged apostle expressing his belief that it was indeed the “last hour.” The arrival of antichrist was imminent. In fact, many “mini antichrists” were already on the scene. For John, these events pointed to the fact that he and his contemporaries were indeed living in the last days. God did not see fit to disabuse John of this notion. He probably died believing the return of Christ was at the door. Among the very last words John wrote were, “*He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus*” (Revelation 22:20).

By human reckoning, Jesus did not come “soon.” Nearly 2000 years later, we are still waiting for his arrival. Nor have we yet seen the prophesied antichrist.

John said that even in his time there were “*many antichrists*” (1 John 2:18). Where did these people come from? John answers: “*They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us*” (verse 19). Individuals who now opposed Christ had actually emerged from the Christian church. Though they had fellowshiped with true Christians, they really never belonged. They were misfits—tares among the wheat. At some point they were separated. The very fact that they had left the fellowship of the believers indicated to John that they had never been a true part of the body.

[**Note:** Some in our time have used this idea to suggest that individuals who have left denominational fellowships are also counterfeit Christians who were never really a part of the Body of Christ. However, the situation today is quite different than that of Paul’s day, or John’s day. In those days, the true Church had a continuity based on the presence of original apostles that it does not have today. It is quite possible that John and the other apostles would not even recognize some of the teachings of “true” churches today. Certainly many of these teachings are not found in their writings.]

In our time, theological truth is an elusive chimera. Nearly 2000 years of scholarly machinations and denominational warfare have resulted in a chaotic situation in which it is not all that easy to identify “the true church” denominationally or doctrinally. Consequently, pointing to the simple fact that someone voluntarily left a given fellowship as proof that they never really were converted or a true Christian is bogus.]

The antichrists of John’s day espoused certain ideas that gave them away.

“The man who denies that Jesus is the Christ...”

Denying the Messiahship of Jesus is a dead giveaway to the spirit of antichrist. The term “Christ” is not a name but a title. It is the Greek form of the Hebrew *Meshiach* which means “Anointed One.” The arrival of an anointed one was alluded to in more than 400 passages of Scripture in the Old Testament. A complete listing of these can be found in an appendix in Vol. II of Edersheim’s “*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*.” Part of the apostle’s message was that in Jesus these verses were fulfilled. In Acts 18:28, for instance, we read the following: “*For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ*” (Anointed One).

There was no doubt in the apostle’s minds that Jesus was the one of whom the Scriptures had spoken when they prophesied of an anointed one who would be God’s redemptive agent on earth. All of the hopes of mankind are tied up in the Messiah, whether mankind knows it or not. Yet some in Paul’s day and later in John’s, were denying that Jesus was indeed the Messianic “Son of Man” written about in Daniel 7:13-14.

To deny that Jesus was and is the Messiah is to become an antichrist.

“He denies the Father and the Son...”

To deny that Jesus is the Messiah is to reject what God himself has done in Jesus. If we reject God’s Anointed One, we have rejected God himself (1 John 2:23). To accept Jesus as Messiah is to accept God (verse 23b).

Jesus the Messiah is the centerpiece of God’s Redemptive Plan. Without him, there would be no plan. The apostle Peter, standing with John, had once said under inspiration to the leaders of the Jews: “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). Jesus is the means by which God chose to save mankind. To reject him, is to reject salvation itself.

[**Note:** Just how the sacrifice of Jesus is appropriated for any given individual is up to God. God can apply it to anyone he chooses, even if they have never heard of, or accepted, the name of Jesus. In this light, consider the implications of Matthew 25:31-46.]

Later in the same letter John returns to the theme of the antichrist.

Continued on Page 20

back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel'" (Numbers 25:1-13).

So, what are we to learn from these passages of Scripture? One thing is: When God says "don't go," you don't go. When He says "go," you go. When you hear an ass speaking, it's really not the ass, but God trying to tell you something through the mouth of the ass. We need to listen to the voice of God and not do whatever we want.

The apostle Peter has something to say about Balaam: "They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet" (2 Peter 2:15-16).

It's interesting that Peter calls Balaam a prophet, but he was a madman because of his desire for financial gain instead of serving the Lord. He found a way to make the Israelites sin, and he was rewarded financially for it. In the end, however, it cost him his life. "Then Moses sent them to the war, one thousand from each tribe; he sent them to the war with Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, with the holy articles and the signal trumpets in his hand. And they warred against the Midianites, just as the Lord commanded Moses, and they killed all the males. They killed the kings of Midian with *the rest* of those who were killed—Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. Balaam the son of Beor they also killed with the sword" (Numbers 31:6-8).

Balaam's problem was that he wanted to find a way around what God told him specifically to do. How different are we from Balaam? We want our way regardless of what God wants for us. This is often to our own detriment. We see our immediate need, but we ignore the long-range consequences. My wife and I have experienced this in our own lives. A little over three years ago when I had my heart attack, my wife was teaching at a local high school. She teaches English-language learners. She was told that the following school year she would be teaching at several elementary schools. We fought very hard against that decision, but to no avail. She wound up teaching at the elementary schools in spite of our opposition to this decision. God, however, knew better than we did what was coming. When my heart attack came at the end of November of that year, my wife was able to take the entire month of December off to take care of me during my recovery. If

she had still been teaching at the high school, that would not have been possible. There was a powerful lesson that God was teaching us, and we haven't forgotten it although we are sometimes tempted to do so. There is a hymn that goes something like this "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

How do we hear the voice of the Lord? There are a couple of ways, but they always involve a lot of Bible study and prayer.

"Whom will he teach knowledge?
And whom will he make to understand the message?
Those just weaned from milk?
Those just drawn from the breasts?
For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept,
Line upon line, line upon line,
Here a little, there a little" (Isaiah 28:9-11).

"These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men" (Acts 17:11-12).

So how do we hear the voice of God and see Him? I have three suggestions. In this instance we need to be like the ass and not like Balaam.

First, I would say that we must focus on what's best in the long term and not on our immediate desires or goals. There is a term that I don't hear used very often anymore, but it is called "praying through" a situation. We keep praying and studying the Scriptures until we know what God wants for us, and that may take months. Patience is always a virtue, especially in dealing with God and His plans for us.

Second, we can't follow the crowd. I know that sometimes puts us at odds with our brethren in the church and possibly with family members, but it is important that we seek God's counsel and not rely on the opinions of others, no matter how well intentioned their opinions might be. God first, everybody else second, third, or even fourth. The opinions of others matters little if it is not what God wants for you. It's important to remember that.

Third, this goes along with the second item. Don't be carried away by your emotions. That is deadly for us spiritually. We make a lot of mistakes when we succumb to our emotions, so check your emotions at the door. Seek to know God's will for you and those around you. However, if you need to make suggestions to others about their behavior or their actions, just remember that they may not take kindly to those suggestions. It's impossible to force your opinions or suggestions on others, so don't even try. Let God and Jesus do their work. Just stay in prayer for the person if you are certain that what you think the person needs to do is correct.

—Kenneth Ryland

About Those Blood Moons

By Lenny Cacchio



The Blood Moon Prophecies have become somewhat of a topic in many prophetic circles. The main biblical text used to explain this astronomical phenomenon can be found in Joel 2:30-31:

“And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fires and pillars of smoke.

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood before the coming of the great and awesome Day of the Lord.”

Commentators read this and conclude, not without reason, that this passage refers to solar and lunar eclipses. They then refer to astronomical charts and look for unusual alignments of solar and lunar eclipses while lining up those arrangements to significant events in the history of Israel. They then postulate, based on the wording in Joel, that one such future alignment of eclipses will pre-announce the return of Christ.

This was born the discussion around what is known as “the tetrad.” A tetrad is a series of four consecutive lunar eclipses, each with six full moons in between. The tetrad which occurs in 2014 — 2015 is unusual because all four of those lunar eclipses occur on the on annual High Days (Passover in the Spring and the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles in the Autumn) and the period also coincides with solar eclipses (“the sun turned to darkness”).

To those interested in prophecy the coinciding of eclipses with Holy Days suggests a portent of some kind of divine intervention, and they note that the founding of the State of Israel and the Spanish Inquisition seem to coincide with similar line-ups of the sun, moon, and Earth.

But as some researchers have pointed out, many of the purported events prefigured by High Day blood moons actually occurred before the sighting of the blood moons. Are we to conclude that the events were precursors of the blood moons instead of the other way around? And we need to ask whether the biblical phrases “sun turned to darkness” and moon into blood” are in fact the same things as eclipses of the sun and moon?

Let’s take a look at specific event in the New Testament where the Scripture mentions a unique astronomical event that was associated with a turning point in history. It’s in Luke 23:44-45, and it refers to moment of Jesus’ death:

“Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two.”

The “sixth hour” refers to the sixth hour of daylight (noon), and the “ninth hour” refers to three in the afternoon. Question: Was this three hour period the time of a solar eclipse?

We can be 100% confident that it was not. Remember that Jesus’ death occurred just before the onset of a High Day, specifically, the first Day of Unleavened Bread, which always occurred on the 15th day of the first month. In the Hebrew calendar, that would be the time of month of the full moon. The only eclipse that could possibly happen at a full moon is a lunar eclipse. There can never be a solar eclipse at that time of the month.

What, then, can we make of an apparent solar eclipse at the time Jesus died? The easiest explanation would be to conclude that this was not a solar eclipse but some other phenomenon, and if that’s true, then there is reason to question whether the darkening of the sun and blood moons really refer to eclipses at all.

The astronomical signs we read about in scripture have more to them than simple, predictable revolution of heavenly bodies. Here is how Revelation 16:12-13 describes it:

“And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casts her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.”

Jesus describes it this way (Matthew 24:29): “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.”

Finally, in the context of the passage in Joel (Joel 2:10): “The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble. The sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness.”

Earthquakes, stars growing dark and even falling from heaven: more than a phenomenon caused by predictable conjunctions of heavenly bodies. I don’t know exactly how all this will unfold, but the lesson to take from this is one that so many need to learn over and over again. Prophetic interpretations are many. Don’t order your life around the latest New York Times bestseller.

For a more in depth analysis, read:
<http://bibleprophecytalk.com/bpt-blood-moon-theory-debunked-and-more/>

—Lenny Cacchio

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

Symbolism of the Curtains

Daube's analysis is impressive, but it turns out that much more can be said about the message of Matthew 27:51. More recently, Daniel M. Gurtner has carried out an in-depth study of this subject in his doctoral dissertation.

Since the curtains at the Jerusalem temple were patterned after those from Israel's tabernacle in the wilderness, Gurtner begins his investigation with a study of the tabernacle curtains, first described in the book of Exodus.³ There were three such curtains:

1. One curtain was placed at the entrance to the courtyard of the tabernacle (Exodus 27:16-17). The courtyard could be entered by any Israelite who was in a state of ritual purity and brought a sacrifice.
2. A second curtain separated the courtyard from the Holy Place (Exodus 26:36-37). It could be crossed only by priests, not by ordinary Israelites.
3. A third curtain stood between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies (Exodus 26:31-33). It could be crossed only by the High Priest, and only on the Day of Atonement.

All three of the curtains were carefully constructed from beautiful materials of the highest quality. The third, inner curtain was the finest of all. Sewn into it were pictures of cherubim, a detail of symbolic significance. Cherubim traditionally are guardians and protectors, going back to the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24). As cherubim restricted access to the tree of life in Eden, the inner curtain restricted physical and visual access to the presence of God.

Dr. Gurtner notes that *katapetasma*, the Greek word for the curtain in Matthew 27:51, is used in the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures five times for the curtain at the courtyard entrance, twice for the curtain between the courtyard and the Holy Place, and thirty one times for the inner curtain. When the word appears in the Septuagint without any qualification, it always refers to the inner curtain. Taking into account this data and the symbolic importance of the inner curtain, Gurtner concurs with the traditional view that the curtain referred to in Matthew 27:51 is the inner curtain.

Gurtner goes on to investigate the meanings attached to this curtain in Second Temple Judaism. He shows that the curtain came to be associated with the "firmament" of Genesis 1:6. In this connection the curtain was seen as a barrier between heaven and earth, behind which were hidden divine secrets. The idea of temple curtain as firmament is based on Psalm 104:2 and Isaiah 40:22, which picture God spreading out the heavens like a curtain. In describing the curtain, the

first-century historian Josephus wrote, "On this tapestry was portrayed a panorama of the heavens, the signs of the Zodiac excepted" (War 5:214/v.4).

According to Gurtner's findings, the inner temple curtain served to restrict access to God's presence and to heavenly secrets. Presumably, the ripping apart of the curtain would indicate that the curtain could no longer carry out those functions. Therefore, the torn curtain may be proclaiming that the death of Jesus brings increased access to God's presence and revelation of heavenly secrets.

Hints from Matthew 27

Gurtner demonstrates that these insights are confirmed and extended when we take into account the additional signs that accompanied the rending of the curtain. In Matthew 27:51-54, we read that at the time of the crucifixion (a) the earth shook; (b) rocks split; (c) tombs broke open; (d) saints were restored to life; and (e) Roman soldiers recognized Jesus as the Son of God.

Gurtner asserts that Israelites who witnessed these events would have been reminded of two passages from the prophets. One is Zechariah 14, where rocks split and saints are resurrected at the coming of the messianic age (Zechariah 14:4-5). So the signs accompanying Jesus' death can be taken as a statement that the messianic age had begun.

The second scripture connected with these signs is Ezekiel 37, which pictures the earth shaking (v. 7) and graves opening (v. 12). Ezekiel 37 predicts a national resurrection of Israel in the messianic age, with the nation saved, cleansed from sin (v. 23) and living in the presence of God (vv. 24-28). The signs of Matthew 27 are thus saying that the fulfillment of Ezekiel 37 is brought about by the work of Jesus on the cross. Verses earlier in Matthew's Gospel state that Jesus "will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21) and that his blood "is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). These verses connect well with Ezekiel 37:23. The torn curtain promises increased access to God's presence, as pictured in Ezekiel 37:24-28.

Gurtner notes that other passages from Matthew support the idea that the torn curtain symbolizes the possibility of closer fellowship with God. For example, Matthew 5:8 says that the pure in heart will "see God," and it is Jesus' work on the cross that brings forgiveness of sins and thus purity of heart.

Moreover, the signs in Matthew 27 suggest that heavenly secrets are being revealed. Specifically, Matthew 27:53 says that the resurrected saints appeared in "the holy city," a designation for Jerusalem previously used in Matthew 4:5, where the devil calls into question Jesus' identity as the Son of God. In Matthew 27:54, a centurion who sees the signs accompanying

the crucifixion confirms that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. He has been shown an important secret.

The tearing of the curtain, with its pictures of cherubim, may also predict the reopening of Eden. Revelation 2:7 and 22:14 promise access to the Tree of Life for the saints.

Conclusion

The findings of Daube and Gurtner suggest that the torn temple curtain of Matthew 27:51 has multiple meanings, corresponding to the manifold implications of Jesus' death on the cross. The curtain is a garment, torn in mourning that a great prophet and teacher has died, and that Jerusalem and its Temple will soon be destroyed. It is sewn with pictures of cherubim that guard Eden and God's presence, so that its tearing indicates a reopening of Eden and an opportunity for closer fellowship with God. (Note that this aspect of the curtain's symbolism backs up the message of Hebrews 10.) It represents the heavenly firmament, so that its tearing announces the revelation of divine secrets. With the other signs of Matthew 27 it announces the inauguration of the messianic age, bringing the restoration of Israel and resurrection of the saints.

Generally speaking, "more is better" in the world of biblical symbolism. Since biblical symbols teach spiritual truths, it is a good thing if a symbol points toward multiple truths. On the other hand, not all proposed meanings for a symbol are necessarily valid. A valid meaning must be supported by the text of scripture.

In the case of the torn curtain, I do not believe that all meanings that have been proposed over the centuries are valid. For example, I do not believe that the torn curtain necessarily announces the obsolescence of the sacrificial system. On the contrary, Gurtner (*The Torn Veil*, chapter 5) shows that in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus gives a positive portrayal of temple worship, although he strongly corrects those who are in charge of the temple. The early Jerusalem Christians were active participants in temple worship, as the book of Acts shows. Prophecy also suggests a future role for worship in a new temple (e.g., Ezekiel 40-48).

Footnotes:

¹ Dr. Daniel M. Gurtner compiles and classifies a number of these possibilities in the first chapter of his book, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

² *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, University of London, Athlone Press, 1956, pp. 23-26.

³ See *The Torn Veil*, chapters 2 and 3.

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Book Review

Plato's Shadow, The Hellenizing of Christianity

by Gary Petty

I was impressed from the beginning of the book to the end at how thorough Gary Petty is in tying together the steps that lead to the Hellenizing of Christianity. For example, he discusses the line from Sabbath and Holy Day observance ended up in Sunday observance accompanied by a whole host of pagan observances.

An issue that Mr. Petty covers quite well is the Quartodeciman Controversy which was basically the desire of the Bishop of Rome to keep Easter and reject the Passover, which was being kept in the overwhelming majority of the churches in the Eastern Mediterranean. As we know, Easter won the day in the Christian world, but this issue continued to fester for centuries in many churches in the East.

One very interesting fact that I learned from the book was that both Josephus and Tacitus wrote of many miraculous signs that occurred during the siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. It was these signs that inspired the Christian church in Jerusalem to flee the city.

According to Josephus a comet blazed across the night sky for an entire year. Another star, which appeared as a sword, stood over the city. One day the massive eastern temple gate, which took twenty men to open and shut, opened by itself. Supernatural chariots and soldiers were seen massing in the clouds. Josephus records the following: "Moreover, at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of the temple] as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound of a great multitude, saying 'Let us remove hence.'"

The book is fascinating as Gary Petty takes you through the ways that Christianity was converted to paganism.

The Gospel of Christ

by Terrell Perkins



Those that truly accept Christ as their savior must accept His authority in their lives and live by His commandments. That's the covenant they enter with God. It should go without saying that one who accepts Christ as their savior accepts His message...His gospel (good news).

Many churches will tell you they teach the gospel but few seem to fully understand what that means. Some churches teach that the Gospel of Christ is the coming Kingdom of God. Christ did preach that the Kingdom of God is coming but we don't see that expounded on in the scriptures. What is expounded on is that Christ is the Way to enter Kingdom of God. One simply has to read the epistles of Paul to see what the gospel of Christ is. Paul preached Christ. Christ IS the gospel! This doesn't simply mean the person of Christ taught in the scriptures. It means who Christ really is to us. He is the way, the truth and the life. He is the way into the Kingdom of God...period! Anyone who truly understands this should find new life in the Hebrew Scriptures. They are just as relevant today as they were when they were first penned. To accept Christ is to accept the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament — OT) because He *IS* the OT. He is the logos, the Word of God, made flesh.

To rightly divide the Word of Truth is to understand the coming of Christ would happen twice. The Jews of His time didn't understand that. They knew that the Messiah would come as a conquering king but they missed the prophecies of His first coming as a savior to mankind. When Christ came the first time He was born as mortal human being to walk among us. He would go on to live and die a sinless life. The world of Christendom celebrates His birth and His resurrection. While the facts of those events have been distorted by human traditions over the centuries, what has been the most distorted is what He did in His first coming; what He preached and what He's doing now. These things are the heart of Christ's good news to man.

One can roughly break down Christ's ministry into several functions. The first was as a Rabbi or teacher.

As a Rabbi or Teacher:

The first word Christ is reported to have spoken when He began His ministry was "Repent." The meaning of repentance is to turn from your way of life and follow God's way. Remember that Christ came to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Most of the people He

preached to knew what God expected of them from the scriptures, but their religion, Judaism, was not the faith delivered to their forefathers. Judaism was NOT the religion of the Israelites. Judaism is what the people turned the faith, once delivered to them, into. It was the religion of the tribe of Judah dominated primarily by Pharisaical traditions. It was that religion that had gotten off track. A part of Christ's ministry was an attempt to restore it.

He pointed out the errors in Pharisaical thinking, as well as other errors that had entered into the various sects of Judaism. He tried to put the faith once delivered back on track.

The second function that Christ served was, what we may call, His Levitical function.

In His Levitical function:

He filled the written moral law to the fullest. He didn't do away with the law. He expanded the law to include its intent. What had been "Don't commit Adultery" was expanded to "Don't even allow yourself to sexually lust after another." What had been "Don't commit Murder" was expanded to "Don't hate your fellow man." What had been "Remember the Sabbath to keep it Holy" was expounded to mean it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. He taught that all the extra rules and regulations the Pharisees had tacked onto the Sabbath were contrary to the intent of the law.

What Christ did away with was the penalty for breaking the law for those who accepted Him.

This brings us to His role as our Savior:

He took the place of animal and other sacrifices. He paid the penalty for the sins of anyone willing to accept His sacrifice and take that sacrifice to God the Father.

He filled the need for a high priest by becoming ours. He made it possible for us to go directly to God the Father.

By His life He showed us the plan of salvation that the tabernacle in the wilderness foreshadowed.

Christ took the religion of the Israelites and made it universal. When one accepted Christ one no longer needed an animal sacrifice, a priest or a tabernacle because those things are all complete in Christ. He ful-

filled all the requirements of the priests, sacrifices and tabernacle. All the ceremonial laws contained in the Torah were made complete in Christ. When we ask whether we still need sacrifices, a high priest and a tabernacle the answer is YES! We **need** Christ to fulfill those functions. That is His continuation of the faith once delivered to the Children of Israel. We take His sacrifice when we go before God the Father every day. Christ, as our High Priest, intercedes for us to God the Father every day.

Think of the excitement it generated among believers when they learned the truth of Christ. Now the faith once delivered was no longer bound by the temple, the only place on earth where a sacrifice could be offered. The faith could now be practiced anywhere...through Christ! The Jews have never proselytized but the early church developed a burning desire to do so. Through Christ they could live God's way anywhere!

We take the belief in Christ into our hearts, not just in our actions, because He offered those called a new covenant, one which has the law written in our hearts. One could say that the Hebrew Scriptures, the so-called Old Testament, are primarily about Right Actions. They were primarily addressed to the nation of Israel. The Greek scriptures, or New Testament, are primarily about Right Attitudes. They are primarily addressed to individuals.

In Judaism one can be a good Jew and still believe anything as long as one does what is expected in the community. One can be an atheist and still be a good Jew. Early Christianity changed that by requiring one to believe in its tenets. (Modern Christianity has gone so far the other direction that many now think the only thing that matters is what one believes...what one does no longer matters to such believers.)

So What Now?

Since it is clear that Christ made the ceremonial laws complete, Christians throughout the centuries have asked what parts of the law are still relevant today.

The careful Bible student will turn to the epistles of the apostle Paul for an answer. Paul seems to rail against the law at the same time that he is saying we should no longer sin. Here again to rightly divide the Word of Truth we need to understand that Paul was addressing TWO bodies of law. Paul was a Pharisee before his conversion. The Pharisees believed that their oral law was on the same par with the written law of the Torah. Christ, in a carefully worded statement in His first sermon in Matthew 5 said the written law would not change. Not one jot or one tittle. (These are Old English terms used in the King James translation referring to written language.) Christ went on in the scriptures to condemn the oral law of the Pharisees because much of it was contrary to the intent of the written law that God had revealed. Re-

member the laws the Pharisees had added to the Sabbath made its observance so restrictive that they violated the intent of the law.

Paul later used the example of an obscure written law that said the ox that treads the grain should not be muzzled. The oxen doing the work were allowed by law to eat of the grain they trod on. Paul pointed out that the law was not written for the benefit of oxen...it was written for our benefit. The apostle Paul applied the principle of that law to paying the ministers who spread the gospel. The principle of the law is still relevant today. This sheds a great deal of light on how Paul and the early church saw the law.

Remember that God gave us His law out of His love for us. His laws are for our own good. If one accepts the truth of that assertion then one can't now claim the law is a burden. God wasn't trying to be restrictive or tyrannical the way some modern Christians would have us think. They confuse the oral law Paul was referring to with the written law revealed to us for our benefit. Christ said not one jot or one tittle of the written law would change. That means ALL the law is still relevant today. The PRINCIPLES of all the law are still relevant today even if the letter of the law no longer holds the same relevance for us. For example: Leviticus 19:27 commands us: "**Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard.**" Modern Judaism takes this law literally so we see modern Hasidic Jews wearing curls above their sideburns. This law had the intent of instructing God's people not to adorn their heads the way people who followed other gods did. That PRINCIPLE is still valid today! We are not to adorn ourselves the way people who follow false gods do. Just as the physical nation of Israel was to be separate from other nations...spiritual Israel, the Body of Christ, is to separate itself from the practices of the world.

What is Christ doing now?

The last thing Christ did on earth was conquer death. He is alive and sitting at the right hand of God the Father in Heaven. He works as our High Priest to intercede for us to God the Father every day.

His offer to us... **Whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.**

That is the culmination of Christ's gospel... "**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**"

Amen

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Sabbath Keeping Basics

By Chris DeWeese



Once we come to the conclusion that the Sabbath is for Christians then come the questions about how to keep it. This article takes a comprehensive look at the scriptures supporting the Sabbath and explains how it is kept in plain terms.

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy (Exodus 20: 8–11).

The first word to key in on is “holy.” In this context “holy” means to be “set-apart, dedicated, hallowed, or consecrated.” This is a serious word. Think about the fine dishes or silverware that only come out for special occasions. Think about a special suit or dress you have that you only wear to the most important events. This is the same concept in which God has placed the seventh day of the week. It is a very special day that we are to treat specially. The opposite of “holy” is common. In other words, the clothing or silverware you use from day to day are commonly used, not set aside for special purposes. At the extreme opposite of holy is profane, which is something reprehensible that one would not consider using for anything. To keep the Sabbath holy is to treat it as something very special and precious.

The next concept in the commandment is working. We are commanded to work for six days a week. For the vast majority, we use Sunday for our household chores and then work at our secular jobs for five days. The Sabbath starts at sundown on Friday wherever you are. It ends at sunset on Saturday night. The contrast is that for six days a week, we must work, but on the seventh we must not work. Six days are common, one day is holy.

The next concept broadens out the Sabbath about who can work and who cannot. In this respect, the Sabbath is completely comprehensive. God listed out every possible person or thing that could work on Sabbath and made sure that we know it means “nobody.” Not even cattle can work.

The last part is the “why.” There are many reasons for us to keep the Sabbath. Principally, it is because God said to. Other benefits are for the purposes of rest, recuperation, and a de-stressing from the challenges of the world. But the specific reason given in the commandment by the voice of God is because He rested after creating the heavens and the earth on the seventh day of the week. This means nothing was done by the Creator of the universe to honor His creation. From the New Testament:

He (Jesus or Yeshua) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all

things have been created through Him and for Him (Colossians 1:15,16).

In case there was any doubt, it was Yeshua and His Father who rested on the universe’s first Sabbath day. To call ourselves Christians, we mean that we emulate Christ or The Messiah. Therefore, why wouldn’t we want to follow His example set forth from Creation? If He rested from his works on Sabbath, who are we to do otherwise?

Now comes the nitty-gritty. What is acceptable to do on Sabbath and what is not. This is an individual’s decision to make. While the Rabbis and clergymen have written extensively on what they deem is legal or not to do on Sabbath, our relationship is with God and His Son. No Rabbi, Priest, or Pastor is going to stand in our place at the Judgment. Only Yeshua can do that and only Yeshua and His Father know our hearts. It is up to us to study to show ourselves approved.

From the 4th commandment, it is clear that we do not work and we do not make anyone or any beast do any work on Sabbath. This requires preparation and planning. We need to plan to keep the Sabbath in advance. Cleaning the dishes, gassing up the car, getting the laundry done, catching up on email, etc., etc., all should be done on Friday before sunset.

Now while the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering wood on the sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation; and they put him in custody because it had not been declared what should be done to him. Then the LORD said to Moses, “The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.” So all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, just as the LORD had commanded Moses (Numbers 15:32–36).

Ouch. This verse comes to my mind each time I have to do something on Sabbath that I should have done ahead of time. Yes, it happens. We plan and plan, but inevitably something happens once in a great while that requires our attention on Sabbath. We are not perfect and can’t remember to do everything. And there are always emergencies, both small and great. This, however, is addressed in the New Testament:

At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, “Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.” But He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? “Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? “But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. “But if you had known what this means, ‘I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. “For

the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” Departing from there, He went into their synagogue. And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”—so that they might accuse Him. And He said to them, “What man is there among you who has a sheep (or an ox or a son in Luke 14), and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? “How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” Then He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand!’ He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other” (Matthew 12:1–13).

Yeshua does not actually say the people working on Sabbath aren’t sinning in these scenarios. He even pointed out that David sinned when he ate the consecrated bread. What Yeshua is saying is that emergency situations arise and need to be attended to. If you have an ox or a sheep in the ditch, of course you are going to save that valuable asset on the Sabbath. You will surely not let your son rot in a hole waiting for sunset. Rescuing an ox requires using more than a couple people. But if you have an ox in the ditch each Sabbath, you are not following the commandment to work the other six days. Fill in the ditch or build a fence.

With respect to picking the grain, the disciples were not feasting or making a feast on the Sabbath. They were taking the food and eating it, which is really not much more than what they would do if they were in a house eating a meal prepared the day before. For the Pharisees to even bring that up is rather petty in my opinion.

With respect to healing on the Sabbath, well, that’s a no-brainer. Children are born on the Sabbath. Male children are (or were depending on your perspective) circumcised on the Sabbath. The Seventh Day Adventists, strident keepers of the 4th commandment, own several hospitals across the world. Those hospitals are open for emergency procedures and to care for the admitted patients on Sabbath. To not heal someone on the Sabbath would be cruel. The same applies as to not putting out a house fire, to not rescue someone in physical peril, or to not heed the call to arms on a Sabbath day in defense of your nation or your neighbor. Yeshua says it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath but I regard it as a requirement. Yahweh wants us to be compassionate and empathetic. We must be merciful and ready to serve our neighbors 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Next up is the topic of doing commerce on the Sabbath day, particularly that of eating out. The 4th commandment does not allow for any work to be done on Sabbath. In a perfect world, one that we will experience, nobody will work on Sabbath so there will be no opportunity to buy or sell anything, let alone to temporarily hire a waiter and cook to prepare food for us. In the millennium, no business will be open from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. We have a specific scriptures that addresses this. The set up is that those who were going to return from the Babylonian captivity had recently done so. They were in the middle of reconstructing Jerusalem when Nehemiah recants the Sabbath being profaned:

“In those days I saw in Judah some who were treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sacks of grain and loading them on donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs and all kinds of loads, and they brought them into Jerusalem on the sabbath day. So I admonished them on the day they sold food. Also men of Tyre were living there who imported fish and all kinds of merchandise, and sold them to the sons of Judah on the sabbath, even in Jerusalem. Then I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, ‘What is this evil thing you are doing, by profaning the sabbath day? Did not your fathers do the same, so that our

God brought on us and on this city all this trouble? Yet you are adding to the wrath on Israel by profaning the sabbath.’ It came about that just as it grew dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and that they should not open them until after the sabbath. Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates so that no load would enter on the sabbath day. Once or twice the traders and merchants of every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem. Then I warned them and said to them, ‘Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will use force against you.’ From that time on they did not come on the sabbath. And I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come as gatekeepers to sanctify the sabbath day. For this also remember me, O my God, and have compassion on me according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness” (Nehemiah 13: 15–22).

The text here is easy enough to understand. Nehemiah is not introducing new law but rather reinforcing existing law. I would like to place emphasis on two sentences. The first is that they were selling food specifically. This is unacceptable to God. The second is that Nehemiah would not permit the vendors to sleep outside the wall. He wanted to push the temptation out of the sight of the people. This is a great lesson! We need to get the temptation to sin out of our sight as well!

There is another aspect of the Sabbath that is not covered in Exodus.

The LORD spoke again to Moses, saying, “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘The LORD’S appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations—My appointed times are these: For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings’” (Leviticus 23:1–3).

We have already covered what holy means. Convocation means a public meeting or an assembly. This is the same as the word that is translated “church” in the New Testament which is the Greek “*ekklesia*.” Here in Leviticus 23, the sabbath command is expanded to include having a called out assembly of believers. To most believers, this means to attend a church service. That church service can take many forms and be anything from a small group meeting in a home to a large group meeting in an official church building. Whatever form it takes, the command includes having an assembly so like minded believers can fellowship, share their testimonies, teach, learn, network, etc.

The Sabbath is an easy commandment to keep with immense value and benefits. It is not meant to be a burden, but a liberating time where the called-out believers can commune with each other and, most importantly, with God. It can even be construed as a weekly glimpse at the future, when the called out believers will commune with the Almighty forever. We are supposed to plan and prepare in advance to set-aside this 24 hour period for a holy purpose, just as God did in the beginning. As you start to observe the Sabbath as the scriptures outline, you will likely find traditions to keep that help enhance the experience for you, your family, and your fellowship. Just remember, we do it all for the glory of God!

Chris came to the Sabbath through is wife Diana who is a third generation Sabbath keeper. He is a speaker at the Northland Hebrew Roots Fellowship <http://www.hebrewrootsgroup.com> and maintains a blog at <http://www.firstcenturychristianity.net>.

I John 4:1-3

John wrote, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God. Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world."

John now focuses our attention on the spirits behind the prophets. Behind every person who claims to be a prophet is a spirit—either the Spirit of God, or a spirit of falsehood. A prophet, by definition, is one who "speaks forth" on behalf of God. A false prophet is one who speaks forth for a false or lying spirit. God has his mouthpieces and Satan has his. It behooves us to know which is which.

In John's day, false prophets were already abundant. They denied the Messiahship of Jesus. They did not acknowledge that God's prophesied Messiah had now been manifested in the form of human flesh (verse 2). They rejected Jesus and so became anti-Christ. John then elaborates on the points he has been making:

"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood" (1 John 4:4-6).

John is saying that he and the other apostles represented, and were sent forth from, God. God and Christ dwell in Christians through the Holy Spirit. Because they do, we do not have to be duped by messages from false spirits given through their mouthpieces.

The longer one lives as a Christian, and the more one has his senses exercised to discern between good and evil (Hebrews 5:14), the easier it is to discern unspiritual messages. The spirit of the world is anti-Christ and anti-Christian. The natural human mind, uninfluenced by the Spirit of God, is at odds with God (Romans 8:7). It is anti-God and anti-Christ. No matter the technicalities and politics are involved, it is easy to identify those elements in society who oppose the Christian faith, denigrate the Bible, and are cynical about God. Just read a day's paper and ask, "Who is for God and who is against Him? Who promotes Jesus, and who opposes him, his teachings and his redemptive Messiahship?" Which organizations seek to expunge the influence of

Christianity from our society, and which ones promote it? AntiChrist simply means "against Christ."

When an influential individual, a group, or an organization consistently seeks to knock the props out from under Christian churches and organizations, it ought to be clear which side of the spiritual fence they are on. It ought to be obvious which spirit animates them. As Paul explained, our real enemies are not flesh and blood, but wicked spirits in high places — spirits who have mouthpieces!

The Spirit of Deception

There is one more reference to antichrist in John's writings—in 2 John 7: "Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist."

This is a reiteration of the points made in the earlier letter, except that here John adds the element of deception. Those who are influenced by the spirit of antichrist seek to deceive people about Christ—about who he was and is, and about what is his role in God's redemptive plan. They reject him as God's Anointed One. They reject his virgin birth. They reject his Davidic ancestry. They reject his resurrection, apart from which Christianity means nothing (1 Corinthians 15:14-19).

The antichrists of our day seek to remove Christ's name from public prayers, from public discourse, from American history, from symbolism, from our schools, and from discussion on any government property.

Modern antichrists seek to denigrate Jesus, his name, his offices, his roles and his future kingship, in every possible way. They take the stories of the life of Christ as depicted in the Gospels and distort them to create a revisionist picture of the one who holds their salvation in his hands. They diminish our Lord, trivialize the accounts of his life and teachings, turn him into a liar and a fraud (i.e. *The Passover Plot* and writings of that genre), and generally demote him the ultimate Prophet to no prophet at all.

Ask yourself this simple question: Who, in our world, promotes Christ, and who attacks him? Who is not ashamed of him, and who is (cf. Mark 8:38)? Who seeks to live by his words and teachings, and who dismisses them?

It's as simple as this: We are either for Christ, or we are against him. Of course there are many people who have never heard of him and who wouldn't know whether to accept him or reject him if they did. In Western, post-Christian society however, the former statement is largely true.

Not long ago, I e-mailed a copy of an *LA Times* article summarizing the apocalyptic views of many groups to a Hebrew roots scholar who happened to be in Israel at the time. The article spoke of those who are seeking to hasten the return of Christ by supporting Israel and the Jewish people. The idea here is to speed up the fulfillment of the conditions the Bible says will precede the return of Christ. In his reply, this scholar, whose work I hold in great esteem, said, "You know the old saying, 'Be careful what you pray for—you might get it'? I am afraid most of these religious groups will be real surprised to learn that the messiah is not going to be at all happy with them when he does come."

When the Lord returns, he will not come "meek and riding on a donkey." He will come as King of kings to wreak judgment on a rebellious planet. He will come baptize with the fires of judgment. It will not be a good time to be antichrist.

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Power to Do All Things

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Philippians 4:13).

Paul was not making a vainglorious boast when he wrote these words. We can more fully appreciate the spiritual significance of his statement when we remember that it was written by a helpless prisoner in the Mamertine dungeon in Rome. Chained to the prison wall, with only a small opening covered by an iron grill through which a few rays of daylight illuminated the darkness, there was little that Paul could do in a physical way but await the day of his trial and execution. It is evident, therefore, that the "all things" he referred to were the all things that God requires of a Christian. If this meant escaping miraculously from his cell he could do it by the same power that delivered Peter from prison; if it meant enduring suffering and privation with patience, then he could also do this by the power of Christ.

In the verses that precede this statement, Paul declared: "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Philippians 4:11,12). Paul had learned that every circumstance in life, whether seemingly fortunate or unfortunate, could be the means of instructing him in the development of a Christlike character. Learning this lesson did not come suddenly or easily. But as he daily renewed his total surrender to Christ, Christ's mighty strengthening power enabled him to meet any circumstance of life.

God's power is available to all who are willing to receive it. The trouble is that few of us are willing to meet the conditions for receiving it. During His earthly ministry Christ demonstrated that it is possible for one to receive divine power without measure (John 3:34) for carrying out the will of God. The same power in the same measure is available to you and me today.

To believe in the power of God, to take Him at His word—this is the faith that Jesus had, this was the faith that Paul had, and this is the faith that you and I must have to meet successfully every circumstance in life, whether it is favorable or unfavorable. Christ "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20). When we fail to experience this strengthening power the fault lies not with God but with us. It is not God's unwillingness to impart it, but our unwillingness to receive it. But even here God can help. He can make us willing, if we will let Him.

Donald Mansell, New Every Morning, page 351. Review & Herald Publishing Ass'n. 1981.

The Church in the World

KIM JONG-UN “ORDERS 33 PEOPLE TO BE EXECUTED” BECAUSE THEY MADE CONTACT WITH A CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY

by Dan Wooding
Founder of ASSIST Ministries

LONDON, UK (ANS) — According to Britain's *Daily Mail* newspaper 33 North Koreans face execution after being charged with attempting to overthrow the repressive regime of Kim Jong-un. “Kim Jong-Un is fast gaining a reputation for brutality and destroying those closest to him.”

Kim Jong-Un handling weapons

“The Koreans have landed themselves in hot water after it emerged they had worked with South Korean Baptist missionary Kim Jung-wook and received money to set up 500 underground churches. It is understood they will be put to death in a cell at the State Security Department,” wrote Mark Shapland in a story for the paper.

“Experts believe the North Koreans are being punished more harshly than usual as North Korean leader Kim Jong-un combats a wave of dissatisfaction at the regime’s isolationist ‘Juche’ doctrine.”

Shapland said that Missionary Kim Jung-wook was arrested and jailed last year for allegedly trying to establish underground churches. Last week he held a press conference at which he apologized for committing “anti-state” crimes and appealed for his release from North Korean custody.

He told reporters that he was arrested in early October after entering the North from China and trying to make his way to Pyongyang with Bibles, Christian instructional materials and movies.

An execution in North Korea

Kim Jung-wook said he had received assistance from South Korea's intelligence agency.

“I was thinking of turning North Korea into a religious country, and destroying its present government and political system,” he said at the time.

“I received money from the intelligence services and followed instructions from them, and arranged North Koreans to act as their spies. And I also set up an underground church in China, in Dandong, and got the members to talk and write, for me to collect details about the reality of life in North Korea, and I provided this to the intelligence services.”

Kim Jung-wook, a South Korean Baptist missionary, says the following: “During Kim Jung-wook’s press conference, North Korean officials also showed video of North Koreans who confessed to coming into contact with the missionary,” he said.

“The North Korean newspaper Chosun Ilbo reported that they said that Kim told them to build a church on the site where a massive statue of North Korea’s founder, Kim Il-Sung, stands in Pyongyang whenever the regime falls.

“North Korea continues to hold Korean-American missionary Kenneth Bae, who was detained while leading a group on a tour of North Korea in 2012 and later sentenced to 15 years of hard labor. Bae was moved to a hospital last summer in poor health, but said at the news conference that he was being transferred back to prison.

The journalist stated that there have been reports that North Korea’s number two leader Choe Ryong Hae’s had disappeared and there are fears that he is the latest to be purged.

“Choe is said to have displeased the leader by taking management of several state-owned industries. It is understood that Choe is in jail and being interrogated,” he added.

“Choe held several top positions in the North Korean leadership after Kim ordered the high-profile execution of Jang Song Thaek, the previous incumbent and Kim’s uncle and mentor.”

Kim’s uncle Jang, 67, was executed in December, after being accused of plotting to overthrow the communist regime.

Dan Wooding, 73, is an award-winning journalist who was born in Nigeria of British missionary parents, now living in Southern California with his wife Norma, to whom he has been married for 50 years. They have two sons, Andrew and Peter, and six grandchildren who all live in the UK. He is the founder and international director of ASSIST (Aid to Special Saints in Strategic Times) and the ASSIST News Service (ANS) and he hosts the weekly “Front Page Radio” show on the KWVE Radio Network in Southern California and which is also carried throughout the United States and around the world. He is the author of some 45 books. www.assistnews.net

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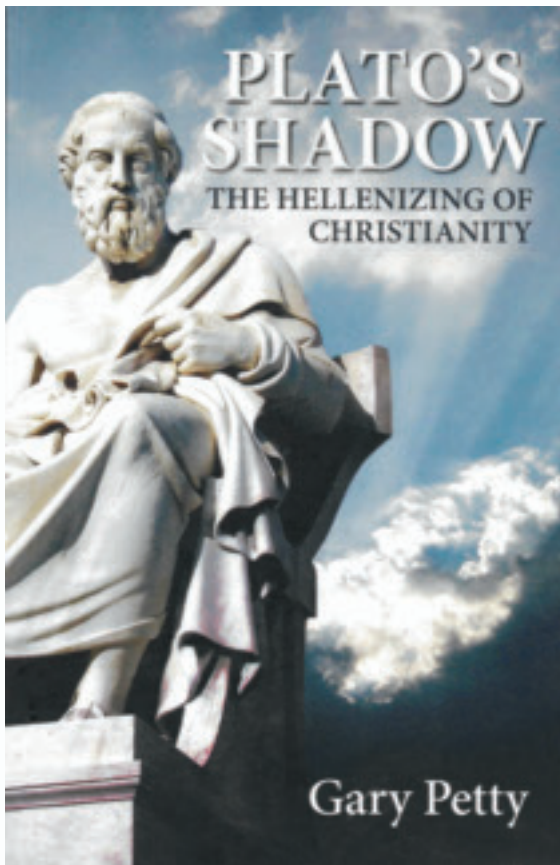
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Please read the review of the book on page 15 of this issue of The Sabbath Sentinel.

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