


The Sabbath Sentinel

March–April 2010



Haiti: A Time to Heal

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

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

The Sabbath Sentinel

March–April 2010 Volume 62, No. 2 Issue 542

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Our Cover: “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” (James 1:27).

(Photos: United Nations Development Agency)

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Editor: Kenneth Ryland, tss_editor@mac.com.

Associate Editors: Julia Benson & Shirley Nickels

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BSA Worldwide Web Site: <http://www.biblesabbath.com>.

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

International addresses:

Australia: Bible Sabbath Associates, Walter & Cindy Steensby, P.O. Box 4305, Hawker ACT 2614, Australia. E-mail: steensby@netspeed.com.au

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

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

Address Service Requested

Our Mailing Address

Bible Sabbath Association
802 N.W. 21st Ave.
Battle Ground, WA 98604.

Ask for a FREE subscription to *The Sabbath Sentinel*

For orders and information, call (888) 687-5191.

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The Preeminence of Christ, Part 2

The Book of Hebrews

In the previous issue of *The Sabbath Sentinel* I talked about the preeminence of Christ primarily from the point of view of the apostle Paul's writings in his letter to the Colossians, and I supplemented the apostle's comments with his statements in both 1 Corinthians and Philippians. In this issue I would like to look at the theme of Christ's preeminence from the viewpoint of the writer of Hebrews.

One of the wonderful things about Bible study is that you often start out looking for one thing and wind up discovering something completely different and more profound. My prior editorial was about a friendly disagreement with someone over the subject of who is in heaven right now. My study of that subject led me to what is one of the most important themes in the New Testament, the preeminence of Christ. I was amazed at how often that theme is repeated in a deliberate and systematic way in the New Testament Scriptures. It appears in Paul's writings, in John's gospel, in Revelation, and in the book of Hebrews.

In the apostle Paul's writings the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice and ministry in heaven are dependent on His preeminence—that is to say, Christ is before all things and over all things.

However, in the book of Hebrews the theme of Christ's preeminence is presented in a completely different way than it appears in Paul's letters or in John's gospel. The reason is that the book is directed to Jews who still looked to temple worship and to the Levites as the custodians of the one true faith. Even though they believed in Christ as the Messiah, they still considered Jerusalem and the Temple as God's place on earth. One of the main purposes of the book of Hebrews was to give Jews a way to extricate themselves from the physical trappings of the Temple and Jerusalem, which were soon to be destroyed, and to direct their affections heavenward where Christ now resided in the one true Temple of God.

Hebrews is filled with exhortation. Apparently some who had been won over to Christ were returning to Judaism. Throughout the book the writer is giving the Jews every reason to embrace Christ and His salvation because of the superiority of His sacrifice and His presence at the right hand of the Father in heaven. In chapter 2, verses 1 to 4, comes the admonition,

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

Who is Jesus Christ?

The book of Hebrews is a book of comparisons. The writer compares Christ to every element of Judaism, and demonstrates His superiority in every case. The book begins by announcing the superiority of Christ over the prophets—the most venerated characters in the Hebrew Scriptures.

- ***Christ is superior to the prophets because of His Sonship***

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they” (1:1-4).

- ***Christ is superior to the angels because of His deity***

From verse 4 to the end of chapter 1 of Hebrews the writer points to the superiority of Christ over the angels. In buttressing his argument for Christ's superiority, the writer makes some incredible comparisons. In verse 6 our Heavenly Father is quoted as saying, “Let all the angels of God worship Him.” Yet we know that only God is worthy of worship. For example, in Revelation 22:8-9 we read “I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel

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Apocalypse: Now? Later? Never?



The book of Revelation (Greek: Apocalypse, “unveiling” or “disclosure”) is the most Old Testament-like of New Testament books. The Apocalypse is typically dismissed as irrelevant by many, avoided by most, obsessed over by others, and the sweet nectar for paranoid doomsdayers. John Calvin wouldn’t include it in his New Testament commentaries. Martin Luther was sure he lived in the last days but considered the book of Revelation “neither apostolic nor prophetic,” and relegated it to an appendix in his New German Bible. Scholars are divided; some say its visions were fulfilled 2000 years ago, others say they are imminent, yet others hold for distant future fulfillments. What should we take from this extraordinary book that closes Scripture’s message?

by Kenneth Westby

What do you make of a symbol-laden book filled with visions and bizarre imagery of dragons, otherworldly beasts, frightening evils, worldwide cataclysms, warnings of persecution and death, mysterious numbers, reoccurring sevens, heavenly scenes of angels singing and God speaking, and concluding with a dream-like future world without suffering or death? Revelation is unlike any other book in the New Testament. If the Apocalypse “unveils” or “discloses” something, what is it?

Are we to read Revelation literally, newspaper in hand, trying to apply its imagery and terminology to current or future events? Do we see it as descriptive prophecy of “what must soon take place” (1:1) in our generation? Or, looking back two thousand years, do we understand it as descriptive history of what took place among that first century generation who received it from John?

I have been a lover of this book since I was a teenager over fifty years ago. I have studied it seriously, have over two dozen scholarly commentaries on Revelation, dozens of popular books and have read hundred of articles attempting to fathom its mysteries and understand its secrets. Does that make me an expert? No, just a student. The famous quip by Mark Twain fits well the subject at hand:

“The researches of many commentators have already thrown much darkness on this subject, and it is probable that, if they continue, we shall soon know nothing at all about it!”

After hearing a sermon or reading yet another scenario on who the beast is or the latest prediction of when the end will come, frustrated Christians throw up their hands in agreement with Mark Twain. You can’t blame them. For many, Revelation had become irrelevant or just plain foolishness. Understandable, but tragic.

A Book for Whackos?

Curiosity about “the end” is normal. We would all like to have an idea of our times and when things will wind down to the end. But if we are told we can’t know that date with any specificity, as scripture clearly does¹, shouldn’t we back away from pursuing the unknowable? Nevertheless, the desire to know a date for “the end” seems just too attractive to simply leave it in God’s hand. Sincere pseudo prophets have ignored all warnings letting their fertile minds run wild making predictions and setting dates. Other self-appointed prophets saw date setting as the means to build a following with the money and power that usually follows.

“*Obsession* is the appropriate word to describe some eight million prophecy buffs today, poring over the prophecies of the Apocalypse in Nostradamus style, anachronistically correlating current events with its ancient cryptic warnings.” So wrote C. Marvin Pate, general editor, in his introduction to the book, *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*. He continued:

Pursuing this angle, these interpreters equate Red China with the “kings from the East” (16:12-16), the European Common Market [EU] with the “ten horns of the beast” (13:1-10), the mark of the beast (666) of Revelation 13 with everything from credit cards to the Internet, and the Antichrist with a parade of prominent people, including Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Henry Kissinger, and Mikhail Gorbachev [many now add Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran and even president Barack Obama to that list]....Such a crystal ball reading of the last book in the Bible, however, has undoubtedly caused more harm than good and is best avoided by responsible hermeneuticians.²

It seems many prophecy buffs are “Saturday night mechanics” when it comes to interpreting the Apocalypse, each having his or her take on its symbols (“locusts” of 9:3-10 = Blackhawk helicopters, their “stings



Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (1887) by Victor Vasnetsov

like scorpions” = nuclear weapons, etc.) and creatively pounding their picture together using what tools happen to be on the work bench. Through the centuries to the present, nightmarish pictures have been created out of paranoia intended to moralize people by appealing to scare tactics. Their prophecies failed, their interpretations missed the mark. Much mischief and deceit hide in the winding warrens of the false prophets who misuse Revelation and lure aside the innocent. Let the traveler beware.

The Apocalypse is not a book about how terrible the Antichrist is, nor how powerful Satan is. It is, as the very first verse says, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him.” It is about Christ’s Lordship, our salvation, our reward, and God’s wonderful plan for our life. It tells us that evil in all its iterations will be defeated and vanquished. It tells us that the kingdoms of this world will melt before the Kingdom of our God, and of His Christ, and that we will reign with them forever and ever (11:15). It encourages readers to see the real Power, supernatural heavenly power, at work to bring us into God’s presence. It counsels endurance, patience, belief, obedience, hope, praise and worship of God, and yes, rejoicing.

A Book for All Seasons?

This article makes no attempt to offer a thorough exposition or interpretation of Revelation, of its symbols, or of possible present or future prophetic fulfillments. Such a project would require volumes, and many have been written. Rather, I intend here but a brief introduction to fundamental facts which can

guide the reader to a more sound approach to Revelation. An approach that I believe will yield better understanding and allow Revelation’s message to powerfully speak to us anew today.

The Apocalypse is not fiction (certainly not science fiction), but it is a carefully crafted piece of literature perfectly suited to the material revealed and to the people who would first read it or hear it read. Revelation is a book, like all New Testament books, addressed primarily to first-century Christians and easily understood by them, because—and this is key—they were thoroughly familiar with Old Testament imagery. Once one grasps these Old Testament idioms, Revelation will become more understandable to us today.

But the more I study Revelation the more I understand why it is in the canon of Scripture and why it is the perfect conclusion to what began the Torah, the book of Genesis. It discloses heavenly secrets in visionary form to a servant of God for the benefit of believers experiencing suffering or perceiving themselves victimized by some form of deprivation—the first-century recipients of John’s book. But its over-all message is sufficiently universal to apply to all Christians in all ages, which is why it found its important place as the conclusion to the biblical canon.

One has to work at understanding Revelation since we are so far removed from its style of presentation. It can’t be read the same way one would read the

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Haiti

Digging out from Disaster

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — According to an AP report Haiti's government has raised the death toll for the January 12 earthquake to 230,000 from 212,000 and says more bodies remain uncounted. Communications Minister Marie-Laurence Jocelyn Lassegue said the government now counts 230,000 deaths, but she says the new figure is not definitive. She adds that the figure does not include bodies buried by private funeral homes in private cemeteries or the dead buried by their own families. The new figure gives the quake the same death toll as the 2004 Asian tsunami.

ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) reported on January 13:

The 7.0-magnitude earthquake, which struck 10 miles outside the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince, has so far resulted in 28 aftershocks of magnitude 4.0 or higher. According to the Haitian government, this is the strongest earthquake to ever strike the country.

With 80 percent of the population living below the poverty line, Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. The country is still recovering from a hurricane that left thousands of Haitians homeless in October 2008.

Haiti has more than 335,000 Seventh-day Adventists worshipping in 470 churches. In addition to a hospital and university, the church operates dozens of schools there.

The quake affected roughly one out of three Haitians, or about 3 million people, according to Red Cross estimates.

For more updates on Haiti and other news, visit www.interamerica.org. In the U.S. contributions may be made to ADRA's Emergency Response Fund, at 800-424-2372 or online at www.adra.org. Donations in Canada should be made to ADRA Canada's Haiti 2010 Emergency Fund at 888-274-2372 or online at www.adra.ca.

Adventist Review reports:

In the aftermath of the Jan. 12 earthquake that struck ten miles west of the Haitian capital, members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are tallying the grim human toll.

Top Seventh-day Adventist leaders in Haiti reported that, so far as it is known, the 7.0-magnitude earthquake killed 522 church members, the vast majority young people. More than 55 churches were destroyed, 60 churches partially damaged and some 27,000 church members left homeless in the capital city of Port-au-Prince.

The official report came as local leaders met with top church leaders of the Inter-American Division on January 20. It took leaders one week to account for their ministers, church employees, members, and churches in the wake of the temblor's aftermath, which left leaders virtually without communication for a few days.

"This is very, very sad," said Sylvan Blaise, president of the church in the Central region of Port-au-Prince where the effects of the quake were the worst and where 300 members lost their lives.





Photos by UN Development Agency

"We have more than 12,000 church members who lost their homes and were left with only the garments they were wearing and nothing else," he said. Blaise, whose home suffered damage and left him and his family sleeping outside his home, also reported that more than 300 members were injured. The thousands left homeless are taking shelter on the grounds of the 50 habitable churches and centers in the 30 districts in the Central Haiti Conference. Several schools were destroyed and damaged.

Some 220 members in the South Haiti Mission were reported dead, according to Pastor Jean Bernard Banatte, mission president. Two members died when a church fell down on them. There, some 15,000 church members were displaced, four schools destroyed, an Adventist Book store destroyed, and about 280 injured. Twelve churches were destroyed and 30 more received extensive damage, reported Banatte.

Leaders reported that among the dead were 450 young people.

The Adventist Hospital, which is within minutes from the university, did not receive major damage to its building. Following the quake, medical teams resumed some operations outdoors. In spite of that, medical activities have continued non-stop, said medical director Dr. Lesly Archer.

"We have been working 24 hours to assist patients," he said.

Medical teams have now been coming in to help care for the nearly 400 patients staying outside on hospital grounds in makeshift tents and the new patients arriving everyday, said Dr. Archer.

The Sabbath in the Book of Acts

by Bryant Buck



Modern dispensationalists argue that when Jesus arose from the dead (or when He ascended into heaven), He opened a new dispensation in the plan of God. Among the new things in this new dispensation, they maintain, was the changing of God's holy day from Sabbath (Saturday) to Sunday. Once Jesus arose from the dead, their argument goes, old Jewish things such as the Sabbath were replaced by new Christian things such as Sunday.

The fundamental problem with their argument is that the events in the book of Acts clearly occurred after the resurrection of Yeshua (and following Acts 1:1–8 after His ascension into heaven). If these dispensationalists are correct, the book of Acts should strongly support their supposed change from Sabbath to Sunday. Moreover, common misinterpretations of the few references to the Sabbath in the New Testament epistles cannot overthrow the actual experiences of the early saints as recorded in the book of Acts. On the contrary, the few references to the Sabbath in the epistles must be interpreted in terms of the actual experiences of the New Testament believers in the book of Acts.

In the first twelve chapters of Acts the apostles are primarily reaching out to their Jewish brethren. Cornelius and his family of God-fearing Gentiles are converted to Christ in Acts 10, but that is the lone non-Jewish conversion recorded in Acts chapters 1–12. The only reference to the Sabbath in these twelve chapters is found in Acts 1:12: "Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away" (NASB). The Sabbath day's journey was the standard of how far believers could travel on the Sabbath day. Interestingly, there is no other reference to Sabbath observance in these first twelve chapters. Since all these early Jewish believers kept the Sabbath, Luke felt no apparent need to mention the Sabbath in the early part of his history of the New Testament church. But when the mission to the Gentiles commences in Acts 13, Luke suddenly begins making repeated references to the Sabbath.

In Acts 13:1–4 Paul and Barnabas were commissioned by the assembly at Antioch to take the gospel to the Gentiles. After first going to Cyprus, Paul and Barnabas then continued to Asia Minor. They landed at Perga and then proceeded to Pisidian Antioch. In Acts 13:14 (NASB) we read: "But going on from

Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down." What was the matter with Paul and Barnabas here? Didn't they know that dispensations had changed and they should be doing the work of the Lord on Sunday rather than on Saturday? The dispensationalists argue that they did this because they were still attempting to reach the Jews. But the passage in Acts 13 refutes their assertion. In verse 16 Paul starts his message to those assembled in the synagogue: "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me!" (NIV). If Paul was only reaching out to the Jews here, why did he also address the Gentiles? If the Sabbath was just for the Jews and Sunday was for the Gentiles, why didn't he tell the Gentiles that he would meet with them separately on Sunday? The dispensationalists argue that Paul did this because these Gentiles were already Jewish converts, but the text fails to tell us whether they had converted to Judaism or not. Moreover, the dispensationalists undermine their own Sunday thesis with this argument. If Paul so addressed the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch because these Gentiles were already Jewish converts, then the Sabbath was not just for Jews, but for Jewish converts as well.

After Paul finished his message to the assembled Jews and Gentiles in the synagogue, we read this account of what ensued: "As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord" (Act 13:42–44 NIV). First, the Bible records that "the people invited them to speak further ... on the next Sabbath." It wasn't just the Jews who invited Paul and Barnabas to speak again the next Sabbath; apparently it was almost everybody in the synagogue including the Gentile converts to Judaism. If our dispensationalist friends are correct, Paul should have told these people that they didn't have to wait a whole week; rather, he should have told them that they could meet with him and Barnabas the next day on Sunday since it had become the new Christian holy day. But he didn't. Instead, he and Barnabas waited a whole week and met with the people "on the next Sabbath" (v. 44). Moreo-

ver, they didn't just meet with a few Jews and Gentile converts the next Sabbath. "On the next Sabbath the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord" (v. 44). Since the majority of Pisidian Antioch's citizens were unconverted Gentiles, that means that Paul's primary audience on the next Sabbath were unconverted Gentiles. Why didn't he tell them that the holy day had changed? The answer is simple: it hadn't. In the first outreach to the Gentiles the Scriptures totally uphold the Sabbath and give no credence to any change of Yahweh's holy day.

In the council at Jerusalem that considered what should and should not be required of Gentile converts to the Christian faith, there is one reference to the Sabbath. When the council reached the decision as to the few ritual Jewish customs that the Gentile converts must observe, the apostle James made this statement: "For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath" (Acts 15:21 NIV). Many have argued that the Jerusalem council did away with the Sabbath. Why then would James state that Moses "is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath"? The answer is obvious: most of the Gentile believers in Yeshua were still attending Sabbath services in Jewish synagogues. If the Sabbath had been done away, James never would have recommended Sabbath observance for learning the teachings of Moses. Furthermore, if Sunday observance had indeed replaced Sabbath observance, shouldn't some recommendation in favor of it have been made at the Jerusalem council?

In Acts 16:9 the apostle Paul is directed in a vision to go to Macedonia. Although Jews were scattered throughout the Roman Empire, they were not nearly as plentiful in Macedonia as they were in Asia Minor. When Paul and Silas arrived in Philippi, they did not go to any synagogue to preach the gospel. Rather, the Bible records: "And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer, and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled" (Acts 16:13 NASB). People of many different religions went down to riversides to pray – not just Jews. Moreover, since Sunday was the most esteemed day of the week in Roman thinking, more people would have assembled at this riverside on Sunday than on Saturday. But Paul and Silas went down to the riverside on the Sabbath to preach to a group of women who were in all likelihood mostly Gentiles. Why didn't they go on Sunday when they would have had a larger audience? If Sunday was the new Christian holy day and particularly the holy day for Gentile converts to Christianity, what were Paul and Silas doing preaching the gospel to a primarily Gentile audience on Saturday?

"When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures" (Acts 17:2 NIV). What was Paul's custom? His custom was that he observed the Sabbath and worshipped on the Sabbath. He reasoned with the Thessalonian Jews for three Sabbaths in a row. The Bible doesn't mention him meeting with them on any other day. Whether with Jews or Gentiles, Paul's custom was the same: He kept the Sabbath as God's Holy Day.

Finally, in Acts 18:4 (NIV) we read of Paul that "Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks." Long into his mission to Asia Minor and Greece, Paul was still proclaiming the gospel on the biblical Sabbath – Saturday. Why would we expect anything else? We have already read that Sabbath observance was his custom. Paul reached out to both Jews and Gentiles repeatedly on the Sabbath.

Previously we noted that when the gospel was being preached to the Jews in the first twelve chapters of Acts, there is only one mention of the Sabbath. But when the gospel went to the Gentiles where supposedly the Sabbath was to be done away, we find Luke making repeated references to it. In the six chapters from Acts 13–18 there are seven references to the Sabbath. In other words, when the gospel went to the Gentiles, the Sabbath came to the forefront in the biblical record. If it was indeed done away as the dispensationalists would like us to believe, it should have receded or not been mentioned at all when the gospel went to the Gentiles. Just the opposite is the case. Moreover, in the six chapters where the gospel went to the Gentiles, there is not one mention of Sunday or the first day of the week. The record of the book of Acts is clear: the Christian holy day remained the Sabbath. It was never changed to Sunday until post-biblical compromisers replaced the biblical Sabbath with the heathen Sunday long after the New Testament was written.

In conclusion, there is only one reference to the first day of the week in the book of Acts. "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight" (Acts 20:7 NASB). This solitary verse is taken by Sunday proponents to overthrow all the evidence to the contrary that we have just gone through. However, a close reading of this verse shows us that this meeting occurred on Saturday evening – not on Sunday morning.

Acts 20:7 states that these believers met "on the first day of the week" and that Paul "prolonged his mes-

sage until midnight." In Genesis 1:5 we get Yahweh's definition of a day: "And there was evening, and there was morning — the first day" (NIV). In other words, a day in the Bible starts at sundown and ends at the next sundown. Since the believers in Acts 20:7 met on the first day of the week and Paul continued his message until midnight, we can only conclude that this meeting occurred on Saturday evening. If it had occurred on Sunday evening, the Bible would have told us that it was "on the second day of the week." Put another way, any day in the Bible starts on the average six hours before any day on our unbiblical Roman calendar. In the Bible the first day of the week always begins at sundown on Saturday evening. This means that it always ends at sundown on Sunday evening. For Paul to continue his message till midnight and the day still remain the first day of the week, the meeting in Acts 20:7 had to take place on Saturday evening. The book of Acts, then, supports only one weekly holy day – the seventh-day Sabbath.

*Bryant Buck is the founder and minister of Solid Rock Home Fellowship in Freeport, Illinois. He is the author of two Christian books: **The Prayer Warrior** and **My First Christian ABC Book**. He is also the founder and owner of an online Christian bookstore: **Partially Censored Books** (partiallycensoredbooks.com).*

Belief in God Relieves Depression

(Washington Times) University of Toronto psychologists reported last year that "believing in God can help block anxiety and minimize stress."

The researchers compared the levels of melancholy or hopelessness in 136 adults diagnosed with major depression or bipolar depression with their sense of "religious well-being." They found participants who scored in the top third of a scale charting a sense of religious well-being were 75 percent more likely to get better with medical treatment for clinical depression.

"In our study, the positive response to medication had little to do with the feeling of hope that typically accompanies spiritual belief," said study director Patricia Murphy, a chaplain at Rush and an assistant professor of religion, health and human values.

"It was tied specifically to the belief that a Supreme Being cared," she said.

—Jennifer Harper

Love that Is unto Death

by *Donald Mansell*

One will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone will dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Rom. 5:7, 8, N.A.S.B.

The annals of human history record a few instances of people who have been willing to forfeit their lives for their friends. In our text Paul alludes to such instances. Perhaps he had in mind the story, familiar in the Greco-Roman world, of Damon and Pythias, or more correctly, Phintias. These two men lived on the island of Sicily in the fourth century B.C. Dionysius the Elder, tyrant of Syracuse, had decreed that Phintias must die on a certain day. The doomed man pleaded that, while awaiting execution, he might be permitted to visit his family and put his house in order. Dionysius granted his request on condition he find someone willing to die in his place should he not show up for his execution.

Damon heard about the tyrant's terms and volunteered to die should his friend not return on the stated day. When the fateful day arrived, Phintias did not show up. Unknown to Damon, Phintias' ship had been held back by contrary winds. After Damon had been placed on the scaffold, he was allowed to address the spectators. He affirmed his undying friendship for Phintias and declared that he had no regrets. He was sure that Phintias had done his best to be back at the appointed time.

As the executioner prepared to do his work, a horseman was seen galloping at full speed toward the place of execution. As he approached, Phintias was heard shouting, "Stop the execution!" When he reached the gibbet, he leaped from his horse and without ceremony climbed the scaffold to where Damon stood. Throwing his arms around him, Phintias said, "I am glad I arrived in time. You have been faithful unto death."

Said Damon, "Phintias, since I cannot die to save you, I will not survive you, and I ask to be executed with you."

It is said that Dionysius was so moved by this demonstration of love in the face of death that he pardoned Phintias and begged the two friends to admit him to their noble friendship.

Admirable as this demonstration of love may be, Christ's love for us is infinitely greater. While we were yet sinners-enemies of God, if you please—Christ died for us. Such love staggers the imagination. Only a God who loves His creatures would do such a thing.

If we love God, it is not because we love Him naturally, but "because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Those who have His love are willing "to lay down ... [their] lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16).

*Donald Mansell, **New Every Morning**, page 80. Review & Herald Publishing Association. 1981.*

Coping with Reality

by Brian Knowles



Every human being is existentially alone. Your reality is unique to you. You may experience the same things your neighbor does, but in different ways. For one person, a divorce is a devastating tragedy from which they never fully recover. For another, a divorce may be a glorious release from a lifetime of oppression. One person loves Brussels sprouts, another views them as foul-tasting mini-cabbages that are not fit for human consumption. Some see the universe as the product of blind naturalism. Others view it as the result of intelligent design.

Part of our reality is the phenomenon of religion. Religion is a particular system of faith and worship. The world is full of religions and many people are full of religion. Some believe that murdering people of other faiths, and sometimes even their own, somehow serves God (cf. John 16:2). A few writers like Sam Harris see religion as the bane of mankind. Writes Harris, "A glance at history, or at the pages of any newspaper, reveals that ideas which divide one group of human beings from another, only to unite them in slaughter, generally have their roots in religion," *The End of Faith*, p. 12.

Continues Harris, "...the central tenet of every religious tradition is that all others are mere repositories of error or, at best, dangerously incomplete. Intolerance is thus intrinsic to every creed," (*ibid.* p. 13). Harris concludes that "...religious beliefs are simply beyond the scope of rational discourse (*ibid.*). He's got a point. Have you ever tried to argue a doctrinal point with someone who is locked in to a particular denominational dogma? Why is it often said, "There are three things one should not discuss in polite company: sex, politics and religion"?

More than three decades ago, I served as secretary for a doctrinal committee in the Worldwide Church of God. At the same time, I managed the Editorial Services Department that produced all of the doctrinal literature of the Church. I knew intimately the contents of that body of literature. The more I delved into those materials, and participated in doctrinal committee meetings, the more I realized that significant doctrinal reform was needed but impossible. The "true believers" in the group were intransigent. They believed that the particular set of doctrines and dogmas around which they had circled their wagons was "the Gospel truth" and not to be meddled with. Those of us who sought reform were viewed as "liberals," heretics and anathema. Battle lines

were drawn and the so-called liberals cast out one by one.

Perhaps unwittingly, the founder of that denomination, Herbert W. Armstrong, appointed to succeed him, a man more liberal than any of us — Joseph Tkach. Once in power, he began scuttling the teachings of his predecessor and replacing them with standard Evangelical doctrine.

The whole thing was a tempest in a relatively tiny teapot. Today, what was once a small cult of personality-type religion has fragmented into hundreds of even more minor pieces. Consequently, the fragments have little or no impact on the larger world. Perhaps that is as it should be. From my perspective, none of these church groups ever captured the essence of the "faith once for all delivered" (Jude 3). The truth, in my opinion, does not lie in post-New Testament Catholicism, Greek Orthodoxy or Protestantism. Nor is it to be found in the fringe cults of personality built around the unique "revelations" of one man or woman.

Returning to Home Base

To find the authentic meaning of what Jesus built, we must move back in history, behind Protestantism, Catholicism and the formation of the gentile Church. We must return to the time of the New Testament — to the original Jewish apostles of Jesus.

As Dr. Roy Blizzard says, "The Church has become a grotesque monster." I agree. We have drifted far from the original paradigm of the Body of Christ. We have devolved into an assortment of paganized, politicized, commercialized organizations and cults of human personality. Jesus did not come to engender hundreds of warring denominations. He did not come to create the theological mess that collectively calls itself "The Church."

As I said at the beginning, the world is full of religions — some of them Christian. Depending on which culture we were born into, they are all part of our reality. We have to learn to cope with them. If any one of them were allowed to become dominant, it could impose its will on the hapless culture in which it arose and, if history is any indicator, people would suffer and die. Every major religion has done its share of torturing, maiming, forced conversions, heresy hunting and killing — all in the name of God.

Continued on Page 14

Crucified Life Ministries

Keeping the Sabbath in Costa Rica

COSTA RICA: When I began my walk with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, little did I know the journey and adventure that I was in for. I grew up going to a Southern Baptist church in Louisiana from the time I could walk until I went off to college at age nineteen. The interesting thing is that it was not until my third year at the University of Louisiana at Monroe that for the first time I began my relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I was two weeks into the faith and got my hands on some preaching tapes of a missionary who had been in Mexico for more than twenty years. After listening to those tapes, there was a burning desire for me to go out and reach people. I soon took my first mission trip to Jamaica and worked with poverty stricken children and also in an orphanage. It was at this time that I knew this was what I wanted to do when I grew up.

I graduated from college and started teaching school. In the meantime I became a volunteer representative for Voice of the Martyrs and started going around to different fellowships sharing about the persecuted church and our brothers and sisters who are in chains for the gospel's sake. It was at this time in my life that I began to read my Bible for myself and not depend solely on what the pastor or minister on television was telling me. The more I read, the more I realized that things I had been taught were not lining up with what I was reading in Genesis to Deuteronomy. It always seemed like there were contradictions between the Older Testament and the Newer Testament. I still continued faithfully reading and studying on my own, scratching my head many times, I might add.

After a few years of teaching school, I had the opportunity to meet a missionary who was living and doing missions in Costa Rica. He invited me to come to Central America and get my feet wet. I took him up on his offer. It was here in Costa Rica that pieces of the puzzle began to come together. I was here in Costa Rica about eight months before I returned stateside to visit family and friends when some videos were given to me by a friend. These videos were about the Sabbath and the feasts of YHVH. There were, I'm guessing, about twelve or so hours worth of teaching in these videos, and I watched them all the way through without stopping. I was amazed at what I was hearing because the questions that I previously had about things I read in Genesis to Deuteronomy were being clearly answered for me. Call it fate or whatever, but it just so happened that the minister in these videos had an office in Costa Rica. I called the office and met with other Sabbath and feast keeping missionaries here in Costa Rica. It was at that time when I finally realized that for a long time the Holy Spirit was drawing me to return to the pureness of the Word from Genesis to Revelation, not just from Matthew to Revelation. My family and I were fortunate enough to find a Sabbath and feast keeping group very close to us, and we began to study the Hebraic Roots of our faith in August of 2006.

The greatest testimony that I can give is that when my wife and I began to keep the Sabbath, it took our marriage to another level. It was as if there was restoration. The more obedient to His Word we became, the closer it brought us together, not only as husband and wife, but as friends. Even friends who were not Sabbath keepers could tell a difference in our relationship and commented on what a difference they could see in our children. They thought we were disciplining our children in some new method. Honestly, we had not really done anything other than become obedient to the Father's instructions, the Sabbath, His dietary instructions, and the feast days.

Since that time we have started a small group in a nearby town in Costa Rica, a group that also keeps the Sabbath and feasts and are obedient to the Father's instructions. As a missionary I travel to different countries in Central America—mainly Nicaragua and different parts of Costa Rica—sharing about the Sabbath and the feasts in different fellowships. We take care of the orphans, widows, and needy people, in addition to other types of outreaches that we do.

One thing I have to say is that it is amazing as to what the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is doing here. More and more people are returning to the Father's instructions and becoming Sabbath keepers and observers of the feasts of YHVH. We are also part of an English- and Spanish-speaking Hebraic Roots community here that continues to enrich our walk with the Eternal. The journey is not finished; I honestly feel like it has just begun.

Blessings in Messiah Y'shua,

Joel Sanchez

For more information about Crucified Life Ministries contact admin@crucifiedlifemin.com or visit www.crucifiedlifemin.com.



Joel, Gaby, Jachin Tobiah, and Abigail Sanchez



Joel and Rico Cortes of Wisdom in Torah Ministries and BSA board member



The Ministry Center under construction



María poses for a photo at the Orphanage in La Fontana, Costa Rica.



The ministry distributing clothes to needy families in San Lucas, Nicaragua

Knowles: "Coping..." cont. from page 11.

Am I saying that religion has produced no good in the world? Not at all. It's a mixed bag. Books have been written about the great accomplishments of the Christian faith in the West. At many levels, it has been a civilizing force. But there is no denying its apostasy from original, apostolic truth. Today's Church, in all of its varied manifestations, is a far cry from the faith of the first Christians. The first believers, "...devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching, and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer," (Acts 2:42). Here we see four primary elements, all conducted in a group setting: 1) Apostolic teaching 2) Fellowship 3) Breaking of bread and 4) Prayer. (Many believe that "breaking of bread" is a reference to keeping the Lord's Supper, since the other three elements listed are all spiritual in nature.) Since all of the believers at this time were Jews, it is quite possible that this was done in a synagogue setting on the Sabbath (which is not Sunday, but the seventh day).

The churches today have, in many cases, moved well away from apostolic teaching. The departure began early — during the lifetimes of many of the original believers. We see indications of it in many of the New Testament writings.

No Expectation of a Neo-Reformation

The point is we're not going to see the kind of reformation that is needed at a denominational level. We may see parts of it in zealous individuals who seek to understand the early church in its original Jewish setting prior to the time of the establishment of the apos-

tate gentile church. It is even possible for whole congregations of courageous, studious, believers to return to authentic apostolic faith — but it is unlikely that it will happen. It takes a special kind of intellectual courage and a hunger for the truth that sets us free (John 8:32), to pursue that truth no matter where it leads. Studying church history is analogous to turning over and endless series of rocks and discovering the ugly bugs that hide beneath. Yet, as Dr. Roy Blizzard often says, "We know what happened, when it happened, why it happened, and who did it." The record is there for all to read if they are willing. The leaders of churches, like the rest of us, have always been free to exercise freedom of choice. They have often done so to the detriment of the Body.

Meanwhile, we followers of Yeshua the Anointed One must learn to cope with the massive distortion that is organized Christianity. We cannot allow its abuses to disillusion us or destroy our faith. Personally, I am no longer interested in church organizations, denominations, and cults of personality. I want God, Yeshua, the Holy Spirit, and the authentic apostolic teachings of Scripture in their original Jewish setting. I want the true faith that was once *for all* delivered. That means enjoying my own mini-Reformation. As Sally Field says, "I've got this one life," and I don't want to spend it barking up the wrong spiritual tree. I wonder how many readers feel the same.

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

The Sabbath in Hebrews 4

This chapter in the book of Hebrews has often been used as a justification for keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, and it is true that it presents a very clear rationale for observing the Sabbath. But, I think the message of this fourth chapter of Hebrews is much broader than the keeping of the Sabbath.

If the message of the Sabbath day is a metaphor for a greater message, the Sabbath also has to be true. In that fact alone there is justification for continuing to observe the seventh-day Sabbath.

The purpose of this chapter has more to do with the exalted nature of our high priest, Jesus Christ. The point that the writer is trying to make is that under the old covenant it was not possible to give God's people rest. Even though Joshua delivered the people of Israel to the Holy Land which the Lord had promised, he was still unable to give them true spiritual rest because of their very nature, which was carnal and inclined toward sin. Israel had sinned many times in the wilderness, so much so that God had contemplated wiping them out on several occasions.

The main point of this chapter of Hebrews fits into the overall theme of the book which is that there is only One who is sufficient to cover the people's sins with His own blood and bring them into a new-covenant relationship with God. In later chapters the author of Hebrews explains how God will write His law into their minds and hearts so that each person will know the Lord and not automatically be inclined toward sin. That is the key to understanding this chapter and the entire book of Hebrews.

We are told in this chapter, "seeing then that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the son of God, let us hold fast to our profession" (4:14). It is only through Jesus Christ Himself that we will ever enjoy the perfect rest that God has promised. The seventh-day Sabbath is our weekly reminder of that future time when we will be at perfect rest and at peace with God. It is a reminder of the time when Adam and Eve walked sinlessly with God in the Garden of Eden. Only through Jesus, our perfect high priest, will mankind once again be able to experience that divine rest that was lost in Eden.

—Kenneth Ryland

Editorial: "Preeminence of Christ, Part 2" cont. from page 3.

who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, 'Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.'"

Again, quoting the words of the Father toward Jesus,

But to the Son He says:

*"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;
A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.*

You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;

*Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You
With the oil of gladness more than Your companions."*

And [this is the Father again speaking to His Son Jesus]:

"You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth,

And the heavens are the work of Your hands.

They will perish, but You remain;

And they will all grow old like a garment;

Like a cloak You will fold them up,

And they will be changed.

But You are the same,

And Your years will not fail" (1:8-12).

One astounding feature of these verses is that the Heavenly Father Himself is announcing the deity of Christ, and declaring Him to be the Creator of the world. It is through Christ and for Christ that all things exist. Without Him nothing exists. I think that because of our familiarity with the Christian message, we grossly underestimate the absolute greatness and superiority of Christ. We often tend to view Him as the human being revealed in the gospels and fail to consider His divine status as the One through whom and for whom all things in the universe exist.

• ***We too will share His glory because of His humanity***

The superlatives are inadequate to describe the wonder of how Jesus' humiliation and sacrifice will allow each of us to share His superiority in His eternal kingdom. Because we possess His Spirit and are alive in Him, we will be exalted with Him as kings and priests in His kingdom.

For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying:

*"What is man that You are mindful of him,
Or the son of man that You take care of him?
You have made him a little lower than the angels;
You have crowned him with glory and honor,
And set him over the works of Your hands.
You have put all things in subjection under his feet."*

For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we

do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, ... (chapter 2:5-11).

I have spent a lot of time in the first two chapters of Hebrews because they form the basis for everything the writer is going to say in later chapters. By establishing the superiority of Christ over the angels and the prophets and proclaiming His deity, the reader is given a glimpse into his own future in Christ if he remains faithful to Him who made all things for their benefit in His eternal kingdom.

Christ's Superiority over All

Because the writer of Hebrews carefully laid a foundation that explained Christ's exaltedness, he can now demonstrate to us and to the Jews of his day, the superiority of the Lord in comparison to all elements in Judaism that the people held in high esteem. Starting in chapter three, the writer begins systematically to make specific comparisons with the most important elements of the Jewish faith. These comparisons are made not to imply that these elements of faith were completely worthless, but to explain that, as valuable as they were, they cannot compare with the surpassing greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

• ***Christ is greater than Moses***

Starting in chapter 3, verse 3, the writer explains that "...this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses," Continuing in verses 5 and 6, he states, "And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant ... but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are...."

There is no mistaking the intention of the writer's words. Moses was a servant in God's house. Though he was faithful, he was only a servant. However, the owner of the house is Christ. He is the eternal Son and the owner, and, therefore, worthy of greater honor than the servant, Moses.

• ***Only Christ Can Give True Rest, not Moses or Joshua***

Although Moses and later Joshua were charged with delivering the people of Israel to the Promised Land, neither was able to give the people rest. God's rest, symbolized by the weekly Sabbath, comes only through our relationship with Christ, the One through whom the worlds were made. In the Garden of Eden God gave

the man and woman rest, and set aside the seventh day to celebrate that intimate fellowship that they had with their Creator. Their only task was to tend the garden six days a week, which allowed them to commune with God on the seventh. They even had access there to the Tree of Life. God provided them with abundant fruits and vegetables to eat, which would have allowed them to live at leisure with God in their midst.

Unfortunately they rebelled against God and lost access to that divine rest. Even though Moses and Joshua delivered the children of Israel to the Promised Land, they could not give them rest because they were plagued with the same sinful nature as their forebears, Adam and Eve. The blood of bulls and goats could not free Israel from their sins. If that were possible, they would have had rest. That is why the writer explains at the end of chapter 4 that it is only through Jesus that we can achieve that perfect rest of our Creator God.

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (4:14-16).

Israel's problem (and our problem) was that their sacrifices could not take away their sins. They could only cover them for a while. God's only solution for Israel and all of mankind was to give us a high priest who could go before the Father at the Mercy Seat of God without having to pay for His own sins prior to entering the Most Holy Place.

• ***The superiority of Christ's priesthood over the Aaronic priesthood***

In chapter 5 the writer begins to explain why the high priesthood of Aaron could not expunge the people's sins. "... he himself is also beset by weaknesses. Because of this he is required as for the people, so also himself, to offer for sins" (5:2b-3).

On the other hand, Christ "...having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest 'according to the order of Melchizedek'" (5:9-10).

Through the remainder of chapter 5 and throughout chapter 6, the writer exhorts his readers to take to heart the truth of the exalted nature of Jesus, and pleads with them not to fall away from the one true faith, because "it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tested the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance" (6:4-6).

• ***Jesus, a High Priest forever after the Order of Melchizedek***

The writer again picks up the theme of the high priesthood of Melchizedek at the end of chapter 6 in verse 19. "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Why is Melchizedek important? Because he received tithes from Abraham and blessed him. The explanation of Melchizedek and Christ's high priesthood in the order of Melchizedek helps to explain why Jesus has superseded the priesthood of Aaron and the Levites and why there is no need for us to have a human priesthood or physical temple to attain salvation.

Melchizedek was a priest of the Most High God and had "...neither beginning of days nor end of life...." He was "like the Son of God" and "remains a priest continually" (7:3). In other words, his priesthood was eternal and superior to the priesthood of the Levites because the Levites were mortal; they lived and died as natural men, a product of their inherent sinful nature.

In the physical order of things it was the right of the Levites to receive tithes, yet the Levites themselves paid tithes to Melchizedek and to Christ ("a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek"). How did the Levites tithe to Melchizedek? They tithed to him through their ancestor Abraham. Not only did the Levites pay tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham, they received a blessing from Melchizedek when Abraham was blessed. Why is the blessing important? "Beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better" (7:7). In other words, as great as Abraham was to the people of Israel, he paid tithes to someone greater than himself and received a blessing from that person, Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God, a priest who was "like the Son of God." The writer is emphasizing that Jesus is equal to Melchizedek in stature and that He is superior to both Abraham and the Levitical priesthood.

• ***Jesus, Mediator of a better covenant with better promises***

Chapters 8, 9, and 10 introduce the readers to one of the main purposes of the book of Hebrews—to help them understand that they are now part of a "better covenant" with God, and that covenant is not mediated by Moses, but by Christ, who sits eternally at the right hand of the Father and promises to give us an eternal inheritance. "But now He [Jesus] has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant which was established on better promises" (8:6).

How is this new covenant better than the old? In several ways:

1. The old covenant that God made with Israel through Moses could not bring about the permanent removal of sin from the life of the believer. Animal sacrifices had to be made continually. That was because the first covenant could not “purge the conscience” of the believer. As the writer states in chapter 10, verse 1, “For the law...can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.” However, “...how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (9:14).

2. The old covenant could not guarantee eternal life. That covenant only guaranteed land and prosperity to Israel so long as they conducted themselves in a manner worthy of God’s blessings. By contrast, the new covenant promises an “eternal inheritance” (9:15) to those who are called to receive it.

3. The old covenant could not prevent the breaking of the Law. The new covenant, on the other hand, provides each of us with the means to keep the Law.

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more. In that He says, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away (8:10-13).

What the first covenant could not do in that it could not purify the sinner’s conscience (9:9), Christ accomplished by writing God’s laws into the minds and hearts of believers.

The Faith Chapter

Where does chapter 11, the faith chapter, fit into the writer’s discussion of the preeminence of Christ and the sufficiency of His sacrifice? The mention of the faith and deeds of ancient patriarchs and prophets evokes in us a sense of awe, and it should. They are figures larger than life for us, yet the Scripture says that, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (v. 13). After all, if anyone should receive God’s promises, the faithful mentioned in this chapter should.

They did not receive the promises because they were waiting for a “better resurrection” (v. 35). They were waiting in faith for the “better promises” of the new

covenant. That’s why some were even willing to accept torture and refused deliverance.

And when will that better resurrection with better promises come? It will come when we are made perfect. “God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us” (11:40). You are the key to the perfection of the patriarchs and prophets. They are waiting on us.

I can think of nothing more humbling than the last statement. Yet it is true. God will not perfect the patriarchs and prophets until He has completed his work with us. At that time, Christ “will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (9:28). We, together with all the great figures of faith, will be resurrected when Christ returns to rule over the nations of the earth (Rev. 11:15, 18b).

In Conclusion

I think there is no better book in the Bible than Hebrews for laying out the case for the superiority of Jesus. The case for Jesus is presented in a very systematic and logical way. If you follow the theme from the beginning of the book to the end, there is only one conclusion that you can come to—that Jesus was before all things, is over all things, and is the only path to salvation, for both the Jew and the Gentile.

The writer laid the groundwork very carefully in order to convince his Jewish readers that all the physical trapping of the religion in which they were nurtured were but shadows of the better and eternal promises to come. They were types of the true and permanent blessings that all followers of Jesus will enjoy at His coming.

The book begins by explaining how Jesus is preeminent in all things: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever...” (1:8), and “You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands; they will perish, but You remain...” (1:10,11). In the final chapter Jesus as the One who is eternal: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (13:8). Micah 5:2 similarly states of Jesus: “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.”

When one stops to consider the message of the book of Hebrews, it is impossible not to be in awe of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (13:20-21).

—Kenneth Ryland

Westby: "Apocalypse" cont. from page 5.

Gospels, or the narrative of Acts, or the letters of Paul. Before one can properly interpret any piece of literature, the Bible included, one must determine its genre or literary type. One doesn't read a romance novel with the same expectations as reading *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, or the 2010 World Almanac, or the stock market page in the newspaper, or the comics page, or obituary page, or the editorial page, or the weather page, or the news stories. Each is specific to the information it presents. Each is a different literary style suited to the information offered.

The Bible contains many a genre of literature from poetry, to historical narrative, to prophetic, to epistolary (letters), to apocalyptic. The most strange type to our literary experience is the last which is the classification given Revelation³.

In order to understand Revelation, we need to know our Bibles backward and forward. To properly understand it, we must become familiar with the "language" or genre in which it is written. Revelation requires work. Ignore the lazy expositors and the shoot-from-the-hip prophets who will, as Mark Twain quipped, "throw much darkness on the subject."

The Most Old Testament of New Testament Books

Familiarity with the Old Testament is a key to understanding Revelation. Steeped in Old Testament imagery and terminology, which provides the dominant source of its information, of its 404 verses, 278 contain allusions to the Old Testament⁴. The writer (likely the Apostle John) as a Christian prophet, received and formulated his message in the imagery of the Old Testament, predominantly from Daniel, and of the Synoptic Gospels, particularly the traditions of Matthew 24.

Although Revelation is completely saturated with the Old Testament, John did not employ a method of citations, but creatively adapted the ancient traditions to his own purpose. The use of the Old Testament is, therefore, prophetic in nature and not midrashic. His focus is not on the Old Testament text as such, but on the prophetic reality which he depicts by means of the Hebrew Scriptures. The writer so easily combines the Old Testament with the apocalyptic traditions of Matthew 24 and its parallels, which had already given the prophecies of Daniel place and authority. By the visions from God (via Jesus and "his angel") John offered a profound reinterpretation of the whole of Old Testament prophecy in the light of his understanding of Jesus Christ.⁵

It must be remembered that most first-century Christians were infused with the Old Testament, and many attended synagogue. Torah, the Writings, and

the Prophets saturated their minds and found their way quite naturally into their writing and speaking. Their Old Testament references need not come with chapter and verse citation (which in those days were not available and books were scrolls) as we moderns do, but flowed naturally from a mind accustomed to hearing the scrolls read. Most did not own or read the scrolls, but heard them read in synagogue and by traveling teachers or rabbis. Much of scripture was committed to memory, made easier by their context in the colorful stories and pictures given by Old Testament writers.

John merges hundreds of Old Testament passages into the Apocalypse many of which are subtle allusions to little-known rituals of Israelite worship. Revelation is very much like a worship service. John did not write a manual of prophecy, but a heavenly worship service in progress. Revelation is a God-centric book and the worship of God is central to everything in life. It is the most important thing we do. Most casual readers may miss the considerable liturgical aspects of Revelation and their implications for our worship today.

Scholars have noted the liturgical scaffolding into which the visions of Revelation are built. Like the book of Hebrews temple ritual and sacrifice form the backdrop and stage for the message. We have scenes of the throne of God surrounded by twenty-four elders. The throne reflects the altar before which the twenty-four courses of the Hebrew Priesthood served in the temple. There are robes, lamps, the Glassy Sea, the Cherubim, Candlestick, Laver, offerings, prayers, incense and a Lamb that is both priest and victim, a temple filled with God's Shekinah, fire and smoke, blood from offerings, sprinkling blood seven times toward the veil and the pouring out of seven bowls as a libation upon the land that had been soaked in the blood of Jesus and his martyrs. The picture is of one great altar of burnt and blood offerings with Father and Son using the temple motif to mete out justice on earth.

The book of Leviticus should be required reading prior to reading Revelation. When reading the Apocalypse's visions of God's judgment of seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls, we can easily recall this pattern of sevenfold judgment from Leviticus: "If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over" (Lev. 26:18, 24, 28). (See Philip Carrington's *The Levitical Symbolism in Revelation*⁶.)

The influence of the Old Testament on Revelation is overwhelming. The seven-sealed scroll (5:1) should bring to mind a scroll similarly described and in analogous context in Ezekiel. There the prophet saw four living, winged creatures, much like those John sees (Ezek. 1:5-10; Rev. 4:6-8). Near the creatures Eze-

kiel sees a crystal-like expanse and a glorious throne overarched by a rainbow, much like that John sees. What was the point of Ezekiel's vision? Judgment on Israel. In Revelation divine judgment is again in view and this is why God's throne of judgment is so prominent in the book. John mentions God's "throne" in eighteen of Revelation's twenty-two chapters. Of the sixty-two appearances of the word "throne" in the NT, forty-seven of them are in Revelation⁷.

The idea of "souls under the altar" crying out to God (Rev. 6) is also a Hebrew, not a Christian concept. Rabbi Akiba is reputed to have said that whoever was buried in the land of Israel was considered as if he were buried under the altar, and if buried under the altar as if he were buried under the throne of glory. It likely derived from the fact that the blood of a sacrifice, which was considered the life of the victim, ran down the base of the altar; thus the life would literally be under the altar. The martyr was seen as representative of the people of Israel and the cry of the martyrs in 6:10 for the Lord to render judgment reflects the appeal of Abel's blood recorded in Gen. 4:10 crying out to God for justice.⁸

The Apocalyptic Tradition

In the Hebrew Bible the book of Daniel best represents the prophetic type of literature called apocalyptic. It was a popular literary form from Daniel's time until about the second-century in our modern era. Dozens of books were written in this style including such non-biblical works as the Ethiopian Enoch, Jubilees, Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Book of the Watchers, the Astronomical Book, the Book of Dreams, the Apocalypse of Weeks, IV Ezra, and many more. In the Christian era dozens appeared after John's Revelation such as the Apocalypse of Paul, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Apocalypse of Peter, Jacobs's Ladder, Apocalypse of the Virgin Mary, Apocalypse of James, and many more apocryphal (fictitious) apocalypses. For centuries this was a popular literary form. The Dead Sea community at Qumran had several apocalyptic works which were found when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the late 1940s.

The apocalyptic style is very visual, full of colors, creatures, sounds and sights that can cause wonder and reach one's mind and emotions with an effect standard writing cannot match. But with its powers there are dangers and cautions—particularly in the matter of interpretation.

Revelation is a highly figurative book that we cannot approach with a simple straightforward literalism. Nevertheless, it strongly represents actual historical events in John's near future, though they are set in apocalyptic drama and clothed in poetic hyperbole. Symbolism is not a denial of a real historical happening, but a matter of literary presentation. John is seeing things—forty-

one times he says he "sees" these events, most in symbolic form such as the slain lamb, the seven-headed beast, and the Babylonian prostitute. The visual nature demands symbolic interpretation, which except for a very few instances (e.g., 1:20; 4:5; 5:6,8; 7:13-14; 12:9; 17:7-10), the symbols are not interpreted for us.

Revelation is concrete and historical as John is writing to seven actual churches in Asia Minor. God and John no doubt had specific persons and geopolitical events in view throughout the book, but these were left opaque and partly hidden by the visionary presentation. This was by divine design. Directed by God's "unveiling," John writes to human beings to spiritually motivate them to remain faithful, to see God's mighty hand at work, to see the victorious work of Jesus, and to catch a spectacular scene of the Golden Age of the coming Kingdom of God.

Reduplication

Daniel was the recipient of heavenly visions and understanding his Old Testament work can provide insight in understanding Revelation. One example is Daniel's depiction of the imagery of "time, two times, and half a time" (Dan. 7:25) in relating to great persecution and the end. This is adapted and continued in marking Revelation's tribulation periods mentioned in 11:2 and 12:6, 14. These two sections are not set in a chronological scheme, but depict the same prophetic sequence from different perspectives. This is an Old Testament pattern of reduplication or recapitulation seen in Revelation.

Daniel sets forth an initial prophetic vision of the future which moves through a sequence of four kingdoms until the last is destroyed by the coming of the kingdom of God (ch. 2). Chapter 7 then repeats the same sequence, but focuses attention on the period of the fourth monarchy in the coming of the divine rule. Again in chapters 8 and 10-11 the same pattern is followed and interpreted from yet another perspective. In spite of an intensification of the changing imagery the pattern of reduplication of the one prophetic sequence is evident.⁹ The focus in Revelation seems to center upon that fourth kingdom which was in its height of power when John wrote.

It should come as no surprise that much of Revelation's material may not be constructed along strictly chronological lines, but by a pattern of reduplication. The purpose is to enrich and enlarge the basic prophetic message. The visions of Revelation include and duplicate other apocalyptic sections of the New Testament (Mat. 24 and parallels; 2 Thes. 2; 2 Pet. 3).

The basic outline is provided by Daniel with the portrayal of the persecution of the saints, the coming of

Continued on Page 22

The Church in the World

British Christian teacher fired from her job for offering to pray for sick girl

By Dan Wooding
Founder of ASSIST Ministries

WESTON-SUPER-MARE, UK (ANS) — A British Christian teacher has been dismissed from her job after discussing her faith with a mother and her sick child and offering to pray for them.

According to the UK-based Christian Legal Centre (CLC), Olive Jones, a 54-year-old mother of two from Weston-super-Mare, Somerset, taught mathematics to children who were too ill to attend school. She spoke to a female pupil about her belief in miracles and asked whether she could say a prayer.

Mrs. Jones, who has more than 20 years' experience in teaching, said the girl was too poorly for a mathematics lesson, so she decided to speak to her, but when the girl's mother said they were not believers she did not go ahead.

The Christian Legal Centre said that during one of the visits the girl stayed in Mrs. Jones' bedroom because she did not feel well enough for lessons, so Mrs. Jones spoke to her mother and raised the subject of her faith, saying she believed God had saved her life.

Mrs. Jones said when she was a teenager she had been driving a tractor on the family farm near Carmarthen in Wales when it slid down a slope but came to a halt just before tipping over. She said: "I shut my eyes and thought I was going to die. Then there was a sound of a rushing wind, like that described in the Bible, and then total stillness.

"I was convinced it was a miracle. I shared my testimony to encourage the mother to believe that there is a God who answers prayer. I believe I have a personal relationship with God, who is a constant source of strength," she added.

Unbeknown to the teacher, the pupil's mother made a complaint. The authorities did not inform Mrs. Jones of any criticism.

Afterwards, when the teacher had another lesson with the pupil she once again referred to the incident involving the tractor and spoke about her belief in God.



Olive with her son James on his return from a tour in Afghanistan

"I told them there were people praying for them, and I asked the child if I could pray for her," Mrs. Jones said.

"She looked at her mother, who said, "We come from a family who do not believe," so I did not pray.

"I asked the mother if she wanted me to cancel the next lesson as her daughter had not been feeling up to maths, but she said no."

Mrs. Jones left the lesson on good terms with the girl's mother, but within a few hours she was asked by the head of the Oak Hill Short Stay School and Tuition Service in Nailsea, North Somerset, to go to her office. The head of the service told Mrs. Jones that sharing her faith with a child could be considered as bullying. Shortly after the conversation at the office she was dismissed from the job.

Mrs. Jones, who attends her local Church of England church, said she was "devastated" by the decision to sack her and added that it was "completely disproportionate."

"If I had done something criminal, I believe the reaction would have been the same. It is like a black mark against my name and character when it comes to getting a reference for another job, just because I shared my testimony — as if I committed a criminal act," she said.

"It was only when I mentioned prayer that the mother said I do not want prayer, we do not believe, so I did not go ahead."

"I'm not out to get anyone, I am angry at their interpretation of freedom of speech. I am amazed that a country with such a strong Christian tradition has be-

come a country where it is hard to speak about your faith," Mrs. Jones added.

"I am not angry with my bosses, as they are trying to interpret new equality and diversity policies," she said. "But I am angry with the politically-correct system and about the fact that you can't mention anything to do with faith to people who might find it of use.

"My main concern is the interpretation of the policies concerned, which seem very ambiguous.

"It is as if my freedom of speech is being restricted. I feel I am being persecuted for speaking about my faith in a country that is supposed to be Christian.

"I feel if I had spoken about almost any other topic I would have been fine but Christianity is seen as a no-go area. It felt as if I was being treated as a criminal. It is like a bad dream that had come true," she said.

Nick Yates, a spokesman for North Somerset Council, said: "Olive Jones has worked as a supply teacher, working with the North Somerset Tuition service. A complaint has been made by a parent regarding Olive. This complaint is being investigated.

"To complete the investigation we need to speak to Olive and we have offered her a number of dates so this can happen. At the moment we are waiting for her to let us know which date is convenient for her."

The Christian Legal Centre is backing Olive Jones in this case. Andrea Williams, Director of CLC commented, "The story of Olive Jones is sadly becoming all too familiar in this country. It is the result of a heavy-handed so-called equalities agenda that discriminates against Christians and seeks to eliminate Christian expression from the public square.

"Olive Jones had compassion for her pupil and finds herself without a job because she expressed the hope that comes with faith. It is time for a common sense approach to be restored in all these matters."

For further Information/interview please phone Andrea Minichiello Williams, Director, Christian Legal Centre at + 44 (0)771 259 164 or email her at AndreaWilliams@christianlegalcentre.com.

*Dan Wooding, 69, is an award winning British journalist now living in Southern California with his wife Norma, to whom he has been married for 46 years. He is the founder and international director of ASSIST (Aid to Special Saints in Strategic Times) and the ASSIST News Service (ANS). He was, for ten years, a commentator, on the UPI Radio Network in Washington, DC., and now hosts the weekly "Front Page Radio" show on KWVE in Southern California and which is also carried on the Calvary Radio Network throughout the United States. The program is also aired in Great Britain on Calvary Chapel Radio UK. Wooding is the author of some 43 books. Two of the latest include his autobiography, **From Tabloid to Truth**, which is published by Theatron Books. The book is available at Amazon.com.*

Imagine

by Julia Benson

At the anniversary of John Lennon's death, a Facebook friend had posted a link to a video he made for his famous song "Imagine." I clicked. I listened to the song. I watched a dreamer sing a song about world peace. I was moved. It's a beautiful song.

In fact, I'm quite sure, unbeknownst to Lennon, he described the Kingdom of Heaven in his song. If you listen you will hear him imagining there is no heaven or hell and people living for today.

Revelation 21:3 tells us we will be living with the Great Eternal in his Kingdom. There will be no heaven or hell. We will be able to live for today because the old order of things has been changed. We will be living Christ. What more is there?

The song then poses what it would be like if there were no countries. There would be nothing to kill or die for, no religion, people living in peace.

Isaiah 66:23 tells us there will be no countries. We will all be one kingdom. There will be no reason to kill or die for one cause or another. Christ our King will provide us with everything we need. What more is there? And religion? There will be no religious divisions. We won't need religion because life will be Christ. Plain and simply.

In the song Lennon describes himself as a dreamer, hoping others in the world will join in unity this dream of living as one. Well, this isn't a dream. Isaiah 65:17-25 describes that this is the way the world will work in the Kingdom. There will be unity!

The song next asks listeners to imagine life without possessions, greed, hunger and that all the people share the world. All I have to say is see Revelation 21:4 for an amazing glimpse of the changes that are in store for humanity.

The song finishes with the chorus again, the part about the dream of unity. "And he that sat upon the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' And he said unto me, 'Write: for these words are true and faithful'" Revelation 21:5.

Now, here is what is wrong with the song. John Lennon probably thought that that this peace described in his song could be achieved through man, if man would just try harder. The Bible tells us that world peace can only come from the Creator of the world. In fact, that is what the entire book is about: we can't go it alone. Without a true and meaningful relationship with God the Father through his son Christ Jesus, we will never achieve peace. Has there ever been a time in the history of man that there has been world peace? Besides the Garden of Eden, absolutely not, and we won't see that peace until God's Kingdom is established (2 Peter 3:13).

Here is what else is wrong with this song. The public side of Lennon's personal life has been well documented as being embroiled in anything but peace. He led a life of divorce, infidelity, drug abuse, disloyalty, abandonment, controversy, jealousy, etc, etc. How can someone so want peace in the world, when he can't even promote peace in his own life. Imagine all the people, who were hurt by a lifestyle focused on self.

Psalm 119:165 says, "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them." Imagine all the people that will see great peace because they love God's law.

Westby: "Apocalypse" cont. from page 19.

the messianic woes leading up to the great tribulation, and the appearance of the Antichrist. The New Testament prophet thus affirms the truth of the older prophecy respecting God's people. When the church has been taxed to its uttermost limit, the kingdom of God is ushered in with the coming of the Son of Man. However, this basic apocalyptic scheme of the New Testament has been enlarged and developed by imagery from other parts of the Old Testament. Psalm 2 provided the standard imagery for the rebellious nations (Rev. 2:26), Joel 2 for the cosmic disorders (Mat. 24:29f.; Rev. 6:12), and Isa. 66 for the hope of the new heavens and earth (Rev. 21:1).¹⁰

Is it not logical that there would be great similarity in Daniel and other Old Testament material and Revelation given the fact Yahweh stands as the source behind all the visions and judgments? Same God, same plan, same ultimate outcome. But time moves on and circumstances on the ground change and so from time to time God provides fresh insights, portrayals, and encouragement to His Saints. And what makes Revelation so very special is the powerful presence of the Son of Man, Jesus Messiah, recently exalted, glorified, and now sharing God's throne in the Great Vision.

Discover the Rich Jewel

The Apocalypse "revealed" to Christians of the first-century things which must "shortly come to pass." It was "Apocalypse Now" for the saints standing on the edge of disaster as that fourth kingdom in Daniel's vision was spewing forth its evil. It was a call to endure and to know that the ultimate victory was to be God's and theirs. Secondly, it was also "Apocalypse Later" as evil would continue to manifest in the centuries following until God and Christ bring an end to the devil's rule and replace the kingdoms of this world. This is the prophetic element to the book. The resurrection of the saints and the return of Christ finally bring the Apocalypse to its climatic end.

Revelation presents unseen realities of God's heaven and his activities on earth in bringing ultimate victory to the Kingdom of God. It helps us see the dimension of reality from the perspective of God's heaven. Eternity is not timeless, but unfolds in stages that humans will live through. Evil will be crushed. Death replaced with life. The righteous vindicated and rewarded. The scales of justice finally balanced. "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants" gives tender guidance to the faithful to endure to the end. It offers divine help to endure trials and imparts hope of eternal life in the sparkling paradise of God's new heaven and earth.

The Apocalypse is a stunning, many-faceted jewel. Expose it to light and watch it coruscate with a rainbow of flashing colors. Its message for the godly is clear. Its visions are brilliant, scary, reassuring, and

leading to an end that echoes Jesus' model prayer: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

I recommend the advice of William Tyndale, a true hero of the Faith, and suggest it be applied to this most beautiful and final book of God's Word.

Though a man had a **precious and rich jewel**, yet if he knew not the value thereof, nor wherefore it served, he were neither the better nor richer of a straw. Even so though we read the scripture, and babble of it ever so much, yet if we know not the **use of it**, and wherefore it was given, and what is therein to be sought, it profits us nothing at all.

It is not enough, therefore, to read and talk of it only, but we must also **desire God**, day and night, instantly, to **open our eyes**, and to make us understand and feel wherefore the scripture was given, that we may **apply the medicine of the scripture**, every man to **his own sores**, unless we intend to be idle disputers, and brawlers about vain words, ever gnawing upon the bitter bark without, and never attaining unto the sweet pith within; and persecuting one another in defending of wicked imaginations, and phantasies of our own invention.

—**William Tyndale**; prefixed to the translation of the Pentateuch, 1530. [emphasis mine]

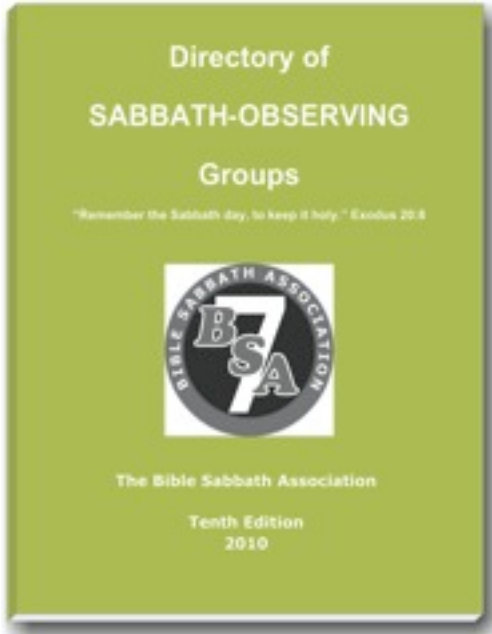
The doors of God's heaven are open to us (Rev. 4:1). Let the visions of Revelation (a picture is truly worth a thousand words) stir our souls to praise, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty," and to action by overcoming all temptations to stand at the final triumph of God.

1. Acts 1:7; Mt 24:36; see also Daniel 12:9.
2. Pate, C. Marvin, general editor, *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (Preterist, Idealist, Progressive Dispensationalist, Classical Dispensationalist), Zondervan Publishing House, 1998, p. 9.
3. While generally apocalyptic, it also includes epistolary and prophetic material.
4. According to Wescott & Hort.
5. See Childs, Brevard S., *The New Testament as Canon (An Introduction)*, Fortress Press, 1985, p. 509.
6. Carrington, Philip, Appendix A in *The Days of Vengeance (An Exposition of the Book of Revelation)* by David Chilton, Dominion Press, 1987, pp. 593-611.
7. Pate, p. 50
8. *The Anchor Bible*, Revelation Vol. 38, J. Massyngberde Ford, Doubleday, 1975, p. 110-111.
9. Childs, p. 510.
10. Ibid. p. 511.

Ken Westby is a board emeritus of the BSA and founder and director of the Associations for Christian Development and the Virtual Church (www.godward.org).

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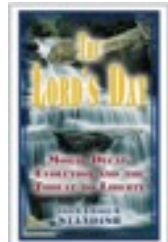
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