

# The Sabbath Sentinel

May–June 2010



**"The heavens declare  
the glory of God."**

**BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association**

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

# The Sabbath Sentinel

May–June 2010 Volume 62, No. 3 Issue 543

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**Our Cover:** "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1).

(Photo: *Light Echoes From Red Supergiant Star V838 Monocerotis as seen through the Hubble Telescope.*)

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## The Gospel according to Genesis

(CONROE, TEXAS) The first day had the atmosphere of a bunch of kids waiting to open their birthday presents. There was a lot of animated discussion, and everyone present was eager to make their contribution to the planned Bible study seminar.

I flew into Houston International Airport without a hint of what to expect. I knew there would be several top Bible scholars in attendance as discussion moderators, and like everyone else I was chomping at the bit to participate. The theme of our study was "Bible Study God's Way." The focus of the study was "the gospel according to Genesis 1 through 11."

I think that by the end of our three-day seminar we were all in agreement that the entire plan of salvation is laid out in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Most of us had not looked at Genesis in that manner, but once the scriptures were presented, the evidence of God's plan unfolded like a butterfly from a cocoon.

In attendance were people from a variety of traditions and backgrounds. Most were Sabbath keepers, but there was one very interesting gentleman there from the Greek Orthodox Church. His name was Bishop Seraphim. The bishop explained to us that even though the Orthodox Church worships on Sunday in honor of the resurrection of Jesus, they have a strong tradition of honoring and respecting the Saturday Sabbath because it is a declaration made by God at Creation, and it is the day that Jesus kept. Bishop Seraphim served as a chaplain for our men in combat in Iraq and spent several months in a hospital and in rehabilitation because of nearly being killed while he was with the men in the field of combat. For that alone I felt a sense of gratitude toward him and others who work to maintain the faith of Christ in our young men and women in war zones.

Before I comment on the focus of our study, I would like to publicly thank Art Mokarow, the organizer of this event. Art presented us with a unique opportunity and an uncommon perspective on the book of Genesis. The event allowed us to see God's plan of grace and salvation in a different light—one that challenged our traditional thinking and deepened our appreciation for the ways of our Creator.

The idea of studying God's plan of salvation in the book of Genesis was very intriguing. We have all seen

glimpses of that plan, but probably never put it all together. Let me start with a scripture that we have all read and understood that it refers to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. In Genesis 3:15 we read, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." In verses 14 and 15 the Lord is speaking directly to the serpent who represents Satan, the real deceiver of Eve. This is the first Messianic prophecy of the Bible. Satan would bruise the heel of the Messiah, the promised Seed of the woman. The wound to the Messiah would not be mortal. However, the Messiah would crush the head of the serpent (Satan) delivering a decisive mortal wound.

These words of God to the serpent lay out the plan of salvation. The Son of Man (the Seed of the woman) would eventually come to put an end to Satan's deceptions and save mankind from the consequences of believing and following the great deceiver.

Please take a moment to reflect on this verse. It presents God's plan of salvation for all of mankind. In other words, God's strategy for saving us was spelled out completely in the Garden of Eden. If you have any doubt about this, look at 2 Timothy 1:9: "[God] who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, ...." As you can see, the apostle Paul understood that God worked out our salvation through His grace, not our own works, before there was even a man or woman on the earth. He had a plan for you to be in His family before time began. All you have to do is to accept His gift and allow His Spirit to live in you.

One of the verses we discussed that was fascinating to me was 2 Peter 2:5. The verse states, "[God] spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth *person*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly...." Most translations and commentators render the phrase "Noah the eighth" to mean that he was the eighth person on the Ark. However, there is also the possibility that Noah was the eighth preacher of righteousness. In other words, there were seven preachers of righteousness prior to Noah. In either case we know that Noah was not the only

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# The Christianity of Thomas Jefferson



by *Kenneth Westby*

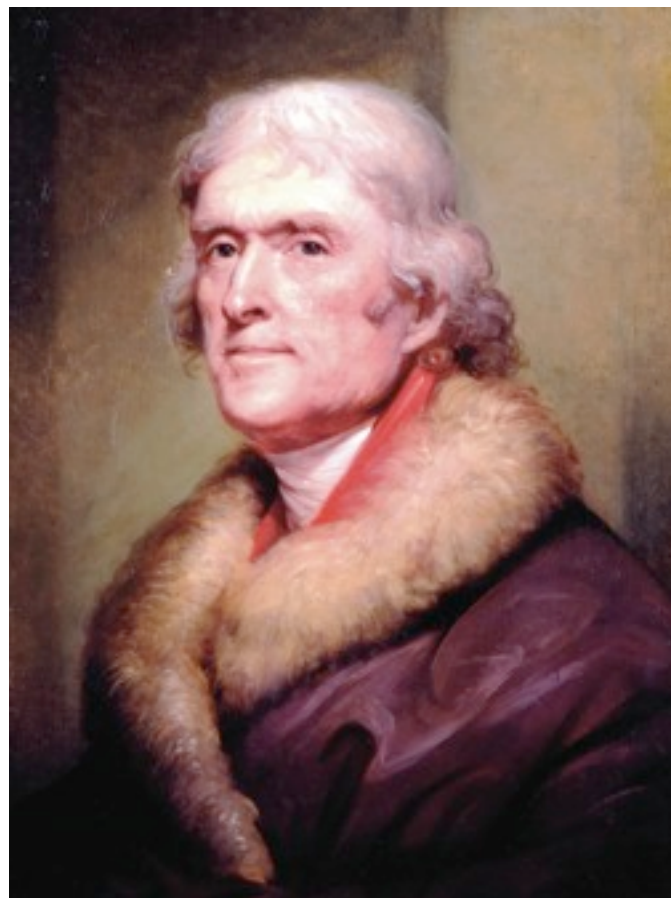
We live in a world of spin, propaganda, and half truths which succeed in keeping most people off balance on the subject of God, His expectations, and His plan. The Good News (Gospel) of the Kingdom of God can cut through the fog of confusion with the clarity of a silver trumpet if we will simply be bold enough to proclaim it. It is all too easy to be intimidated to conformity for fear of what "others" may think or what is politically correct, or doctrinally acceptable. The temptation is to become "vanilla" or one-size-fits-all in our faith.

One thing you notice about the history of the early church in the years following of the resurrection of Jesus was the boldness of the apostolic preaching and the fearlessness of the new Christians as they enthusiastically lived and confessed their beliefs. The outward pressures of persecution didn't suppress the Christians' desire to proclaim their hope and the news that the Kingdom of God had entered their world through the exaltation of Jesus as Son of God. They were sure of the truth of their faith and were not bashful to commit to it, even if it placed them in ridicule or danger.

Their willingness to commit to a most noble truth reminds me of America's founding fathers who risked life and fortune in the cause of liberty. Many of them did lose their lives and fortunes but the prize of a new nation was won. We are now enjoying the fruit of their sacrifice. It is no coincidence that the Founders found backbone to their national commitment in the Christian faith. Many of them saw themselves as humble servants working out God's will for a new Christian nation of free people evening calling the American nation a "New Israel."

Thomas Jefferson, whom some wrongly label a "Deist," gave sustained and systematic affirmations about the Christian religion—even more so than the outspokenly religious John Adams. Jefferson had problems with some denominational doctrines which had put him off. Once some of the religious fog was cleared away, he had an awakening. One of his stumbling blocks had been the doctrine of the Trinity, and after studying the works of the leading English theologian Richard Price, Jefferson learned of books that would help him answer some of his own religious questions. Through Price, Jefferson was introduced to another theologian Joseph Priestley.

It was through this association that Jefferson came to personally discover Christianity. Edwin S. Gaustad writes in his very readable *Faith of Our Fathers—Religion and the New Nation* (Harper & Row, 1987, p. 97–98):



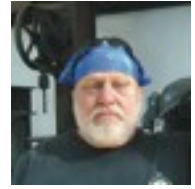
*Thomas Jefferson: Author of the American Declaration of Independence and third president of the U.S.*

"In 1793 Priestley published a lengthy work entitled *An History of the Corruptions of Christianity*, an exposé of what early Christian theologians had done to mystify, Hellenize, Platonize, and generally corrupt the pure primitive gospel of Jesus Christ. When Jefferson read and reread this work in the 1790s, he saw new doors of understanding open wide before him. He thought that he had rejected Christianity; now he realized that it was only the corruptions of Christianity that he had rejected! Those corruptions, unfortunately, so pervaded all of Christendom that the genuine article was lost almost beyond rescue."

*Continued on Page 21*

# God's Personal Plan

by Terrell Perkins



Have you ever wondered why God's plan is the way it is? I don't mean His plan as symbolized in the Sabbath or Holy Days. I mean the crux (pun intended) of God's plan...that His own son would die for us. He certainly could have used another plan. He could have done anything He wanted. Of course, God had untold billions of years (if eternity can even be measured in such ways) to devise the perfect plan to increase His family, and I've had only a couple of decades to ponder it, so my speculations are bound to only scratch the surface.

It seems to me that there are some very profound psychological reasons for His plan to work the way it does. It also seems to me that some Protestants are closer to understanding some of them than some of us in the Sabbatarian tradition. The key is to take things personally.

The Bible wasn't written for us to hit each other over the head with it or to sit in judgment of each other. It was written to each of us...personally. I'm convinced that when someone reads it and comes away understanding just one thing...say, that stealing is wrong, if that person goes away and doesn't steal because he or she is doing what they understand is obeying God, I think that person will be blessed for obeying what they understand. He or she took the admonition ... personally.

We must accept the sacrifice that Jesus the Christ made for us...personally. For His sacrifice to be meaningful in our lives, we have to realize that it was OUR sins that made it necessary. I, personally, have disobeyed the will of my Creator. The result of 'my' disobedience is death...it demands blood so that I understand the seriousness of acting contrary to His will. I have to take that to heart...personally.

For God to forgive 'me' because someone else paid the price for 'my' disobedience...I take that personally. I'm forgiven. I feel loved. That may be the most powerful force in the universe. Just think of how you've felt when you've wronged someone and they forgave you. That was a moment of grace; a direct personal experience of love.

It's quite common for counselors to hear that many people feel like others wouldn't like them if the others knew what they were *really* like. Most of us have our outer selves that we let people see and our inner selves who we think we really are. Most of us at some time or another think that people wouldn't like us, respect us, accept us, whatever...if they knew what we're really like. When we wrong someone, when we trespass against them, it usually comes from someplace deeper in us than our outer self. When they forgive us they're telling us they see a glimpse of what we're really like and they still accept us. That's a part of love. It has the potential to form a bond between people that can be deep and lasting if we take it...personally.

God, our Creator, our Sustainer, our Redeemer will forgive us if we take His sacrifice for us...personally. We should take at least a moment each day to reflect on that. If we do, we will come to feel that this life is a gift, something we didn't earn...it was given to us. God's forgiveness is a gift. God's grace is a gift. He loves me...personally. To show my love for Him I have to show love for the rest of His family...personally.

In some Sabbatarian traditions it's become easy to overlook that Christ's sacrifice for us IS a part of the gospel, the good news, to mankind. Because other, non-commandment keeping, churches put such an emphasis on that fact and ignore the good news of God's coming kingdom, many commandment keepers downplay it as less important somehow. That's a mistake. You see, what God the Father has done through Christ is to unleash a powerful force in the world. He has shown us the power of forgiveness. That too is a part of love. You might even call it the 'Key to the Kingdom.' Forgiveness has the power to transform our lives and world if we'll practice it... personally.

So, what does the Lord require of us? To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God...personally.

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# The Preeminence of Christ, Part 3

## *The Gospel of John*

*by Kenneth Ryland*

As I mentioned in prior issues of this magazine, my reason for beginning this study of the preeminence of Christ grew out of a friendly disagreement I had with a Christian colleague over the issue of who besides Christ has ascended to heaven. My belief is that all saints await the return of Christ for their resurrection and glorification, and that no one can precede Christ to glory. He must be preeminent or first in all things relating to God. "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man..." (John 3:13).

The apostle John confronted the issue of Christ's preeminence head-on in his gospel, and it is in his gospel that we will continue our study.

John had several advantages over the other apostles. He was Jesus' closest friend during His earthly life. He was the only apostle not martyred at an early age. John lived well into his 90s and died around 100 A.D. John had the perspective of time and distance from the events of Jesus' life and could place emphasis on the occurrences that he believed were most important for Christians living in the post apostolic world to understand. I believe that the apostle John very deliberately selected the most significant themes and incidents in Jesus' life to pass down to following generations. That is why John's gospel is not merely a chronological narrative of occurrences in Jesus' life like the other three gospels, but a carefully selected group of events that tell the story of the most critical features of Jesus' life. John consciously framed the happenings of Jesus' life to emphasize those aspects that the Jewish leaders found most objectionable. One of those aspects is the preeminence of Christ.

### **The Foundation**

Since it would be impossible in this article to cover in detail every passage in John's gospel relating to the preeminence of Christ, I will try to present an outline of events that illustrate the many conflicts that He had with Jewish leaders over the issue of His preeminence.

John wastes no time getting to his point about the exalted nature of Jesus. John 1:1-4 reads, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and that life was the Light of men."

One thing is clear throughout John's account of Jesus' life: Our Savior's disputes with the Jewish leaders on many occasions centered on questions relating to Jesus' deity. In chapter one John quickly establishes the grounds for those later disputes by stating that "all things were made by him" (v. 4), "the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not" (v. 10), and "...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (v. 14). In speaking of the witness of John the Baptist to Jesus the Messiah, the apostle records the words of John the Baptist as follows: "...This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me' " (v. 15)<sup>1</sup>. John also gives witness to the fact that Jesus had the power to forgive men their sins and take them away permanently: "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' " (v. 29).

### **Jesus Calls His Disciples**

John continues to dwell on Jesus' preeminence in the accounts of the calling of His disciples. In chapter one we read that Andrew "...found his own brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah...' " (v. 42). In verse 45 Philip finds Nathanael and says to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also in the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Later when Nathanael meets Jesus, he declares, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel" (v. 49).

All of these verses point to the expectation among many Jews that the One who spoke light into existence (the Light of the world) was the One they believed would come to forgive the sins of all mankind and fulfill the Messianic prophecies spoken by all the Hebrew prophets. It is in these things that John chooses to place his emphasis in writing his gospel. John introduces Jesus as the Creator of all things, as being before all things, and as being Ruler, Forgiver, and Savior of Israel and of the whole world.

### **Nicodemus—What He Knew and What He Learned**

**What He Knew:** Nicodemus came to Jesus by night to avoid being seen. He and other members of the Sanhedrin wanted to know Jesus' intentions. In that nighttime conversation with Jesus Nicodemus reveals that he and his colleagues knew that Jesus was from God. "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come

from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (v. 2). It is astounding to think that members of the Sanhedrin who knew that Jesus came from God nevertheless conspired to put Him to death. In Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus He explicitly tells Nicodemus that He would be "lifted up" (crucified, v. 14).

**What He Learned:** In verse 13 Jesus says, "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the son of Man..." After He tells Nicodemus that He, the Son of Man, would be "lifted up," Jesus explains that only by believing in Him could anyone obtain eternal life. "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (vv. 17, 18).

Jesus chides Nicodemus for not knowing and understanding the things about His life that had to take place. "...Are you a teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?" (v. 10). Jesus was not talking only of his lack of understanding about what it meant to be "born again." He was speaking to Nicodemus about all of the things relating to the Messiah's coming that Nicodemus should have understood.

Before Messiah could come as King of Israel and ruler of the world, He first had to rid the world of sin, not through the slaying of bulls and goats, but through the destruction of His own body. A permanent payment for sin had to be made by Messiah Himself. He who "came down from heaven" had to be "lifted up" in order for eternal life to come to mankind. Nicodemus and all the Jewish leaders had to understand that they had to commit their lives to Jesus personally in order to be saved. Their commitment to the Messiah as a conquering king was not enough. Liberation from sin through His death had to come first.

### **The Testimony of John the Baptist**

We have already noted from chapter one that John the Baptist stated that Jesus was not only to be preferred over himself, but was in fact "before me" (v. 30) even though John was actually born before his cousin, Jesus. In chapter three we have a more complete statement from John about the exalted nature of Jesus. John explains to his disciples why it is necessary for him to decrease and for Jesus to increase. John tells them, "...I said, 'I am not the Christ [Messiah],' but 'I have been sent before Him' " (v. 28). John understood that his mission was to fulfill the prophecy of Malachi 3:1<sup>2</sup>. In verse 31 he states, "He who comes from above is above all" and "...He who comes from heaven is above all." This corresponds to Jesus' statement, "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from

heaven, that is, the son of Man..." (v. 13). John further elaborates on Jesus' divine authority by saying, "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand" (v. 35).

Some believe that John the Baptist had grave doubts about Jesus. It is true that after John was thrown into prison awaiting his execution, he needed reassurance from Jesus about whether he really was "making straight" the path for the Messiah. Jesus encouraged John in Matthew 11:2-6 by stating that His works were the works of the Messiah. In spite those last-minute doubts (which we would all have under similar circumstances), John was very clear in John 3 that Jesus was the Messiah. The part that was the hardest for the Jewish leaders to swallow was what John stated in the last verse of chapter three: "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God is on him." John reiterated what Jesus said earlier to Nicodemus—that you must believe in Jesus, the Son of God, to have everlasting life. There is no other way to enter into God's kingdom.

### **Equality with God the Father**

One of the things that irritated the Pharisees the most was that Jesus declared His equality with God the Father. After Jesus healed the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda and told him to take up his bed and walk, the Jewish leaders were incensed that the man was carrying his bed on the Sabbath. Jesus responded to their criticism in the following manner: "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17). The Pharisees answered Jesus with outrage and tried to kill Him: "Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath [i.e., their rules, not God's, regarding the Sabbath], but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God" (v. 18).

Jesus did not recoil at their criticism, but rather pressed forward explaining His equality with the Father. He boldly told them that just as the Father was able to raise people from the dead, that He, Jesus, could also give life to anyone He desired (v. 21). Jesus further emphasized His equality with the Father by saying that the Father had "committed all judgment to the Son" (v. 22). Jesus added that, just like the Father, the Son had life within Himself (v. 26). He had the power to resurrect people from the dead. "...the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live" (v. 25).

As Jesus explained to the Jews, the problem was not that He proclaimed His equality with the Father. The real problem lay with the Jews themselves because they did not believe Moses because Moses wrote of Jesus' coming: "For if you believed Moses, you would believe

Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" (vv. 46, 47). And beyond their lack of belief in the writings of Moses was their unwillingness to submit their will to the authority of the Son of God. As Nicodemus said earlier, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (3:2). When it comes to the things of God, belief always involves submission to the authority behind God's revelations. Jesus was the Father's revelation, and the Jewish leaders were not willing to yield themselves to that authority.

### The Bread of Life from Heaven

John 6 tells the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 men, plus women and children. Everywhere Jesus went, His works testified to His power and authority. This story of how He fed the people bread and fishes took place as Passover approached—a season in which all Jews thought about the unleavened bread that they would be eating for an entire week. Jesus used this occasion to teach the people the meaning of the true Bread of Life.

After feeding the people, Jesus withdrew from them because the people were trying to take Him by force and make Him king. His disciples had gone ahead to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus came to them in the middle of the night walking across the water to the boat. The following day on the other side of the lake near Capernaum, Jesus stood up in the boat and taught the people the real meaning of the Bread of Life.

Even though the people compared the miracle of being fed to God's provision of manna in the wilderness, Jesus assured them that the true bread from heaven was not manna nor the bread that Jesus and the disciples had fed them on the other side of the lake. "...My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (6:32, 33).

In Jesus' teaching about the bread of life, notice again how Jesus emphasizes His authority to give eternal life to people who believe in Him. Note also how many times He tells them that He came down from heaven.

- 1) "...I have come down from heaven,..." (v. 38).
- 2) "...I am the bread which came down from heaven" (v. 42).
- 3) "This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die" (v. 50).
- 4) "I am the living bread which came down from heaven..." (v. 51).
- 5) "This is the bread which came down from heaven..." (v. 58).
- 6) "What then if you see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?" (v. 62).

The entirety of chapter six is rich with meaning for every Christian. Physical food satisfies only for a while, but if we feast on the Son of Man who came down from heaven, we will gain eternal life. That is the meaning of these verses. "Whoever eats of My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (v. 54). If you want to live forever, Jesus, who came down to us from the Father, is the only source of life that the Father has provided us. John 1:3 says that "all things were made through Him." Jesus, the Son of Man and Son of God, is the source of all life and is the only pathway to everlasting life.

### "I am" — *ego eimi*

Several times the Jewish leaders sought to take Jesus so that they could kill Him. They greatly resented His references to God as His Father, counting Himself equal to the Father. "But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me. Then they sought to take Him;..." (7:30, 31). But His references to Himself as "I am" were particularly galling to them. On one occasion, when Jesus said to them, "...before Abraham was, I AM," they picked up stones in order to stone Him to death (8:58, 59). In spite of the Jews efforts to kill Him, Jesus continued to press the point of His equality with God. Our salvation depends on accepting Jesus for who He is, the One who created all things and the One who will resurrect those who embrace Him to eternal life.

The Greek words for "I am" are *ego eimi*. There are many "*ego eimi*" ("I am") verses in the gospel of John. Most are followed by a predicate, that is, a qualifier that further explains the "I am." Here are a few examples.

- 1) "I am the bread of life" (6:48).
- 2) "...I know Him, for I am from Him..." (7:29).
- 3) "I am the light of the world..." (8:12).<sup>3</sup>
- 4) "I am One who bears witness of Myself..." (8:18).
- 5) "...I am from above..." (8:23).
- 6) "I am the door..." (10:9).
- 7) "I am the good shepherd..." (10:14).
- 8) "I am the resurrection and the life..." (11:25).
- 9) "I am the way, the truth, and the life..." (14:6).

The "**Absolute *ego eimi***." As you can see, each one of these "I am" (*ego eimi*) verses has a predicate or some sort of qualifier after the "I am." Each tells us something about the character of Jesus. However, there are other "I am" verses that have been called "absolute I am" verses. In these verses the "I am" statements have no predicates or qualifiers. They simply say, "I am." Let's look at a few of these.

The most famous of these verses is in 8:58, "...before Abraham was, I AM." In chapter eight of John's gospel

*Continued on Page 20*



# Holy Living in a Fallen World

*by Lori Stuckey*

*In today's society holy living has lost its meaning. People are more concerned with the physical circumstances of their lives than in the life God has called them to live. It's time for a new beginning.*

From Genesis to Revelation holiness is not just a happy-sounding suggestion. It is a commandment. If holiness were unimportant to God, He would not be holy. In order to navigate the many pitfalls that lead to sin and complacency and arrive at true holy living, we must seek to understand the many tools the Bible gives Christians to assure them of a victorious life.

One tool for effective, holy living is to read the Word of God and put its principles into effect. This makes the Word of God a living principle inside us. Some other avenues are prayer, fellowship with other believers, putting on the whole armor of God, and witnessing to others of the wonderful benefits that come from having close fellowship with God.

Holy living draws us close to the fount of all blessings, our Heavenly Father, and that is what we call, "living in the Spirit." When we live in the Spirit—close to the Father—and not in the flesh, holy living flows from us like a fountain. The Garden of Eden, the world in which God created Adam and Eve, was perfect. There was no sin and there were no needs. The Lord met them all.

In the Garden of Eden where God communed with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day, there was never a worry about what to eat or what bills to pay. The Lord took care of it all. Their spiritual life was intact. There were no worries and no doubts until the serpent arrived. When doubt entered into the minds of the man and woman, their certainty in the faithful provision of God fled away. Holiness, which was being able to walk side-by-side with their Creator, fell by the wayside, and sin took its place.

Holy living in a fallen world can be accomplished only if we live the way the Bible says. In doing that, we begin to recapture the fellowship with God that was lost to Adam and Eve. God's Word becomes easier to understand and follow when it becomes an integral part of our lives, and our holy and living relationship with God is restored.

Our journey into holy living is a process. As parents we understand that our children do not start walking before crawling. Every phase of our children's lives is a beginning into something more wonderful. With patience we watch in amazement the blossoming of their potential before our eyes. Like our Heavenly Father who applauds our achievements as we strive to live in holiness, we likewise applaud our children as their accomplishments grow.

Living a holy life in a fallen world is a gradual process of grace and dedication birthed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The world that we live in will remain a place of uncertainty as long as the enemy of our souls is the god of this world.

We humans wrestle with strife, diseases, rebellion, and a multitude of hardships. As we go about everyday life in the midst of the chaotic seasons we encounter, it is difficult to maintain our focus on the One who created us.

We must not forget, however, that God realizes our imperfections and has already forgiven them through Christ's atoning sacrifice. When Jesus gave up His life to cover our sins, He said, "It is finished," and that is exactly what He meant. There would be no further need to atone for our shortcomings.

It is up to each of us to decide how we will apply holy living in our Christian life. Because God gave us free will, we have to choose for ourselves the kind of life we will lead. I know from my own experience that life is too difficult to live contrary to the Word of God.

I thank you, Father, for giving us the tools to live a Christian life in a world that is contrary to your commandments. I thank you for sending your Son so that through His Spirit in us, we might have fellowship with you. May we let our lights shine before men so You will be glorified.

# FACE IN THE CROWD

BY JULIA BENSON

Malicious  
Foul  
Malevolent  
He just showed up, uninvited.

“You are just a face in the crowd,” he told me.

Broken heart,  
Broken tears,  
Broken love,  
You are broken.

Swallowed in a sea of family, friends, acquaintances,  
Every one of them has someone else.

You have no one,  
No one,  
No  
One...

Breathe.

“You are not just a face to me.”

I knew that voice.  
It was the Lord of lords, the King of kings  
come to cast out everything else the other one said.

I believed Him and I became like a star shining in the  
universe.

## *Morning Companion*

# For Such a Time as This

Religious folk over the millennia have often felt the need to separate themselves from the world and its foibles, whether it be to hole up in a monastery, to form separate communities, or even to trek across mountains, prairie, and ocean for a completely new start in an untamed land.

I understand the sentiment. I confess to having such thoughts in my melancholy moments. After being bombarded with several days worth of distressing news stories, I have blurted out more than once a desire to move to Honduras or other such climes, and while the events of the past few weeks have changed my fantasy destination, the desire to tell the world where to get off is a very real one.

In 1527 the plague inflicted the German city of Wittenberg. Wittenberg is otherwise famous as the site where Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the church door. Luther was in the city at the time of this plague while many of the residents were leaving the city for healthier locations. The question naturally arose, what is the duty of the Christian in such a time as this?

Luther gave his answer in his treatise “Whether One May Flee From a Deadly Plague.” Wrote Luther, “This I know, that if it were Christ or his mother who were laid low by illness, everybody would be so solicitous and would gladly become a servant or helper. Everyone would want to be bold or fearless; nobody would flee but everyone would come running ... If you wish to serve Christ and to wait on him, very well; you have a sick neighbor close at hand. Go to him and serve him, and you will surely find Christ in him.”

Martin Luther in essence was saying what many Christian teachers have said for many years: It’s time for the church to be the church. This is an ailing world, and times such as this require a cadre of committed people who have their wits about them and are motivated by nothing less than a willingness to serve.

The world is hurting and it needs us. Perhaps, as with Esther, we have been brought to the kingdom for such a time as this.

—Lenny Cacchio (*morningcompanion.blogspot.com*)

# One God – One Family of God

By Terril D. Littrell, Ph. D.



God is our father; we are his children. And, as his offspring, we are related. There are approximately six billion people who inhabit our world. The earth is our house; we are its occupants. We live in a finite ecological system that is sustained by divine engineering, and we are all connected.

Solomon tells us that “the rich and the poor have this in common: the Lord is the maker of them all” (Proverbs 22:2). Malachi 2:10 confirms this declaration “have we all one father? Did not one God create us?” The commonality of our heritage from God is confirmed by Paul in Romans 3:29: “Is he the God of the Jew only? Is he not the God of the Gentile? Yes, of the Gentiles also.”

The perspicacity of these biblical authors confirms that we all have only one Father, that we are one family, and that God does not love one family member more than another. Peter made this statement after sharing the gospel with the family of Cornelius, the Roman Centurion: “... I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (Acts 10:34). Simply stated, God honors all those who honor him (Isaiah 2:30).

There is no one nation or tribe that is cherished by God more than another. He loves us all! “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:16,17).

Could it be clearer that God loves all unconditionally and that we are his people? Paul says to the Ephesians, “but because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you are saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with

him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4–6).

With the ever increasing tragedies of strife and violence in the world, there is a growing need for the promotion of understanding and goodwill among men. With the explosion of technology and travel and telecommunications, the planet continues to shrink, becoming more and more a global village. Wars, terrorism, and attempted genocide that were once continents removed now appear instantly in graphic color in our living rooms. This bringing of man into close proximity to one another serves to

underscore the need for finding ways to bridge the chasms of generational hatred and conflict. More than ever before, the world needs to understand biblical oneness.

The convention of sociologists and demographers has divided us into races: Mongoloid, Negroid, and Caucasians. These “racial” categories have underscored differences in physical appearance, even prompting some to offer the spurious observation that there are mental as well as physical differences between the “races.”

## One Family

We are descended naturally from one father, Adam. We are not descended from some primordial ooze, and we are not evolving into a higher species through the survival of the fittest. Though we have many differences, we are all members of the one human race that God created. As such, we must respect the distinctives of our fellow human beings, looking upon differences not as causes for division but as mutually complementing contributions to the montage of human existence. It was God – not blind fate or evolution – who created our distinctives, and every distinctive contributes to the overall welfare of the human family.



In every family there are similarities and differences. Some of the things we have in common are: hands, feet, eyes, ears, and internal organs. Some of our differences are fingerprints, hair color, skin color, and facial features. Unfortunately, there are and have been elements in the society of humanity that have used our superficial physical differences to say that we are not one race and that there are certain nations of man who are smarter, better, and brighter than other tribes. There are those that feel it would be undignified for their tribe to mingle with certain other tribes. Nothing could be further from the truth than the concept of tribal or national superiority. The geographical boundaries of the tribes and nations of our planet were set by God. Living in the various locations has affected our superficial physical appearances. For example, lighter skinned people usually come from geographical areas farther from the equator, whereas darker skinned people are those who live closer to the equator. The factor that makes one person darker or lighter than another is melanin, which is the black pigment in the eye, hair, and skin. And the amount of melanin in the skin of certain tribes increases as one moves closer to the equator. In his infinite wisdom as the master builder of our bodies God made it possible for his children to adapt to the various climates across the planet.

The size of noses and nostrils has more to do with climate than "good looks." Larger noses with smaller nostrils are usually found in tribes living in colder climates. The reason for these particular physical traits is that cold air is made warmer before it enters the body when it travels through a longer passage with a smaller opening. Conversely, broader noses with larger nostrils are usually found in tribes living on the equator or in equatorial climates. The reasons for these physical traits is that warmer air is cooled before it enters the body by traveling through the broader passageway with a larger opening.

The body is a wondrous thing and is miraculously made. But, desultory physical differences do not make one human being better or worse than another. Black skin is not better than white skin. Brown skin is not better than yellow skin. They are just different hues of skin. The superficial physical differences between tribes have nothing to do with inferiority or superiority. The differences are there because of geographical teleological purposes.

The Lord told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth, and they did. During his lifetime of 930 years, Adam fathered many children, the basis of the gene pool. A gene can superficially be defined as the basic unit of inheritance.

### **The Sin of Pride**

Any attack to elevate one group of people – be it on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, language, color, or

religion – to an elite status, suggesting that they are physically, emotionally, or mentally superior to the rest of mankind, is idolatry.

It is motivated by the spirit of pride that says in the words of the first self exalted being, "I will exalt my throne above..." (Isaiah 14:13). When one group elevates itself above another group and consequently devalues the status of the other, it either has assumed to itself superhuman status or has assigned to the other subhuman status. This is little different from the ancient emperors who arrogated to themselves divine status (like Antiochus IV, the Seleucid king who took the name of Epiphanies, meaning "God manifest").

This was the fundamental sin of Nazi Germany that resulted in the Holocaust, the slaughter of six million Jewish people, including over one million children. When German leaders came to think of Aryans as superior to the rest of mankind, it was relatively simple for them to justify the enslavement of inferior peoples and the elimination of subhuman species. They even categorized all Jewish people as vermin whose extermination was necessary for the betterment of the world.

The dehumanization of any group of mankind is also sin. The record of history is replete with instances of man's inhumanity to man that have resulted in the creation of subclasses and even the neurasthenia of whole segments of the population. When this is done by a class that considers itself to be superior socially, morally, intellectually, or physically to the subjected group, it is sin.

### **One Race**

The truth is that we are one race, the human race, that is denominated into many tribes, either by God's design or by man's choice. Paul clearly sets this forth in his Mars Hill discourse: "[God] has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, so that they should seek the Lord...for in him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'for we are also his offspring.'" (Acts 17:26–28).

Like Israel of old that was denominated into 12 tribes, we may always be a tribalized people, denominated into families, ethnic groups, and nations. We must always recognize, however, that this is no reason for separation, division, strife. We are the sons and daughters of God; therefore, we should treat one another as brothers and sisters.

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*Reprinted from **Ethnicity** magazine, Spring, 2008. Dr. Terrill D. Littrell is a retired pastor with over 40 years of experience in teaching and ministry. He and his wife Chloe lived in Cleveland, Tennessee.*



# What Will Happen to the Next Generation?

by Kelly McDonald

*“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter” (Isaiah 5:20).<sup>1</sup>*



The past few years, two of the top ten shows in America were “Desperate Housewives,” a television show built around men and women cheating on each other and “American Idol,” a show where men and women compete vocally to be called America’s top idol. Meanwhile, last year, in August 2009, two Florida school officials were tried on contempt charges for saying a prayer at a school luncheon. If convicted, they could have faced up to six months in jail and been fined, but they were eventually acquitted of all charges.<sup>2&3</sup> This is just one of the many incidences involving prayer in schools the past few years. Also consider some statistics: Between 1973 and 2005, over 45 million babies were aborted in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Approximately 19.3 million children in 2004 were living with only one parent.<sup>5</sup> Statistics show that 45% to 50% of first marriages end in divorce and that 40% of divorced couples have children.<sup>6</sup>

T.V. programming, recent court cases, and statistics on the family all indicate the state of our country. Cheating on your husband or wife is glorified on a television show which just happens to be one of the top shows on major network prime time television. We are giving immoral actions, such as abortion, politically correct names such as “planned parenthood” or “a mother’s choice,” while prayer in school is an action worthy of **criminal charges** or civil lawsuit. We live in a society prophesied by Isaiah where good is deemed evil and evil is deemed good. The two school officials in Florida were taken to court because they were accused of forcing their religion on the other students. God is viewed as a contemptible thing by some in our society to the point of restricting the religious freedoms of many Christians.

I believe that one of the biggest culprits in the decline of Christian and family values in our society is moral relativism. Moral relativism is the belief that all values and morals are relative to each person. Therefore, whatever I believe is right for me and whatever you believe is right for you, and you cannot judge me for any reason because morality is relative to each person. To borrow a biblical lesson from this point of view, consider the book of Judges. Judges Chapters 17-21 show us just how brutal society can become when everyone does whatever he or she thinks is right in their own eyes. In these last few chapters of Judges, several morally depraved things occur: In Chapter 17, a man named Micah makes an idol for his home while at the same time taking Levite to be his own personal priest

(mixing the worship of God with the worship of the world). In Chapter 18, a small clan from the tribe of Dan destroys a small town of peaceful people (murdering the innocent). In Chapter 19, a Levite travels from Judah to Gibeah in the land of Benjamin. A group of Benjaminites threaten to rape this Levite, but end up raping his concubine to death. Twice in this sequence of macabre events from Judges, the writer lets us know that, “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit” (Judges 17:6, Judges 21:25).

You see, moral relativism touts that there is no moral absolute standard; there is only what is right to you. The danger of teaching that morality is relative to each person is that each person will do what they believe to be right in their own mind without regard for other people. Did the Benjaminites care about the woman or the man when they came to rape them? No, they only cared about what was important to them. Our society has degenerated into a similar situation: we each do as we see fit. We still have laws in this country to guarantee some rights, but how long those laws remain in tact has yet to be seen. There are just some actions that are not right in and of themselves, such as murder, incest, bestiality, and homosexuality because they violate the very order of creation God has established in the beginning. Attempts by homosexual movements to force gay marriage language into state and national constitutions are attempts to blur the lines between right and wrong, between what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. If we allow this same logic to follow its course, then nothing will be against the law. Polygamy (multiple wives), Bestiality, and even polygyny (multiple husbands) will also become legal because these groups will view it as their right, regardless of the effect their actions will have on the society at large. The problem with moral relativism is that it is selfish; it does not take into account how your actions affect others. Homosexual, abortion, and anti-prayer movements that attempt to blur the lines between right and wrong are all byproducts of moral relativism.

Another factor in our country contributing to the decline in Christian values is the decline of the family. Thirty-eight and a half percent of all births in 2006 were to unmarried women.<sup>7</sup> In 2004, nearly 1 in 3 (34.5%) children grew up in a home with an unmarried mother.<sup>8</sup> A study in 1996 showed that children in a single-parent home are more likely to experience emotional or physical abuse.<sup>9</sup> These statistics reflect the decline of the fam-

ily unit in our society. The family unit is where children are first taught moral values and adherence to moral standards. The family unit provides a child with stability and an environment to develop as a human being as well as a child of God. The family unit is supposed to be a microcosm for the political unit of our nation. When the family unit breaks down, the government must govern more because the family plays less of a role instilling absolute moral values. You can compare this to the New Covenant, where we no longer have priests that discern right and wrong for us. Instead, we are expected to govern our own actions for the benefit of the entire body of Christ. The same can be said of the family unit, which is supposed to help govern its behavior in our political system for the benefit of everyone.

This leaves me with one question: With the breakdown of moral values in America and the breakdown of the family, what will happen to the next generation?

One of the American founders, John Adams, said, "We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion ... Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."<sup>10</sup> Proverbs 29:18 reads, "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law." Revelation is an unveiling of God's law or word, and it is supposed to be the guiding force of a Christian nation. Many times we receive a revelation when we read the word of God. For instance, when you read about the Sabbath in the Bible and finally understand that it was on the seventh day, you received a revelation. That revelation was made known to you to move you toward action and repentance. Revelation is a guiding force for a moral and God-fearing people because it teaches them moral absolutes in how they should treat their neighbor and how they should revere God. Without revelation, people cast off restraint and do as they see fit. The second half of Proverbs 29:18 says, "...but blessed is he who keeps the law." The law is the origin of revelation. In Deuteronomy 29:29 God says, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." Revelation is given to teach us how to conform our lives to God's standard for our lives.

Because we are a Christian nation, revelation leading to obedience is supposed to guide our nation. In fact, many of the laws of our country were derived from God's law. Our founding fathers received a revelation from God's law that the laws governing a nation should mirror his perfect law of freedom (James 1:25). However, there has been a shortage of teaching the law of God in this country. As a result, there has been a casting off of restraint, and unbridled passion has risen in our country, as evident through statistics on the home and family, abortion, and our top entertainment

shows. In Amos 8:11, God said " 'The days are coming,' declares the Sovereign LORD, 'when I will send a famine through the land — not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.' " Truly we are in a time when hearing the words of the Lord are scarce. We are becoming less and less free to pronounce his word to the rest of our own nation. When a country abandons its foundation, it abandons its identity. The only way for us to preserve our country is to do as Joseph when he became second only to Pharaoh in the land of Egypt: he stored up seed for the rest of the world so that when the famine came, everyone could have provision. In the same way, we must store up the seed of the word of God during this time in our country so that when the true famine comes, future generations can receive the revelation that is necessary to be a moral, Christian people. Only by preserving God's law can the next generation be protected from the pitfall of moral depravity that befell the land of Israel in Judges chapters 17-21. We must affirm that Christ is our King. We do that by committing our lives to live by His law. When we affirm Christ as our King and commit our lives to live by His law, then and only then, will the next generation survive.

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# Doesn't Anybody Read Anymore?



by Brian Knowles

When I was growing up with my Grandfather, Dr. William Knowles, I often found myself on the receiving end of his frequent readings. His small, but precious to him, library was kept in two places: his bedroom, and in a cabinet in the living room. He never read to me out of the bedroom texts — they were of relevance only to veterinarians. He often read to me from the living room collection.

Included in that collection were works by Rudyard Kipling, Roy Chapman Andrews and Thomas Carlyle. I have to admit that Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* was completely incomprehensible to me. I remember my grandfather explaining that Carlyle had written the whole multi-volume work *by hand* back in the 1830's. It was an autobiographical work discussing creeds and systems of philosophy under the guise of a philosophy of clothes. Hardly appropriate materials for a five- or six-year-old — but I loved Kipling, especially *Kim*.

Granddad instilled within me a passion for good books. From my early 20s to the present, I have been building and drawing on a personal library. My first books were about art since that is what I was doing for a living. Later, when I found myself in the ministry, I began adding commentaries and theological books to the collection. Dean Blackwell, my boss when I was in Oklahoma, instilled in me the habit of haunting used books stores in search of "finds." Dr. Herman Hoeh reinforced that pattern. In fact, I sometimes ran into him in the same bookstores.

In the years since, I have continued to acquire the categories of theology, Christian apologetics, art, herbalism, diet, natural health, gardening, economics, atheism/evolution, intelligent design, cookbooks, Hebrew-roots studies, counseling and many others. As I have changed, my library has changed. Ken Westby gifted me with some excellent theological volumes belonging to Dr. Charles Dorothy's library. Dr. Robert Kuhn also gave me my pick of many of his books.

I don't view my library as "clutter" or something that "gets in the way" — although it sometimes does.

I see it as knowledge. It's precious to me. Every so often I purge it. Not all volumes are timeless classics. As I grow in understanding, I discard books that are no longer useful to me. I find myself reading three or four books at any given time. I love learning! It's a joy to grow in comprehension. I wish I had known many of the things I now know when I was younger. I could have had a more successful ministry and career. And therein lies some of the sadness. The author of Ecclesiastes wrote, "Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body," (Ecclesiastes 12:12b). He also wrote, "...with much wisdom comes much sorrow the more knowledge, the more grief," (Ecclesiastes 1:18). Both statements are profoundly true. Study is work, as Paul acknowledged (2 Timothy 2:15). It's the kind of work all who teach or write should do. You can't draw water out of a dry well.

I realize, to my sorrow, that the generation that is succeeding me tends not to read — or build personal libraries. If they can't find it on the web, forget it. They don't have time to read and learn from books. Often I have attempted to gift someone in my extended family with a book that I believed would help them in some specialized way. They made no time to read it. It lay in some obscure corner of the house, gathering dust. Eventually it was lost or discarded. No time to read. No time to think or reflect. Ready, fire, aim — that's the way modern people live. Act now and think later if at all.

Perhaps they're right. The idea of curling up with a good book—especially a non-fiction one—may be obsolete. In fact, I'm probably obsolete too. I have at least one friend who still reads—Ken Westby; and one family member who's 85. Perhaps the three of us have gone the way of the Packard and the Studebaker. Maybe we should allow the dust of obsolescence to form on us and our books.

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*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](http://www.godward.org)).*

# Patient Endurance

by Julia Benson

It has been nearly 15 years since my baptism and it still amazes me that God works with me the way he does. He has spoken words of love to my heart in times of utter despair. He has placed his hands firmly on my shoulders to turn me around when I've been facing the wrong way. He has given me words to write to encourage others. He has lifted me up in knowledge and wisdom, and every time I think I have reached a new height, he tells me to look up, and then I see something more to learn.

God has taught me love, agape love. He has taught me to ask, what can I do for the others, although I still need to be better about this. He has taught me to love my husband and see him as God sees him. He has taught me to hold on for dear life to the time I have with my daughter before she grows up.

Almost two years ago, we were trying to deal with relocating: finding a new place to live; my husband on the road two hours each day, driving back and forth between the new job and the old home; putting the house up for sale; and being absolutely, positively broke. It was then that God taught me the lesson of trust. I *knew* that God would take care of me. I just didn't *trust* that God would take care of me. I was a nervous wreck for months, worried that everything would blow up in my face. Well, not only did that *not* happen, God has greatly blessed me and that nervous knot in my stomach has been long gone.

Recently, I've learned a new lesson.

Again, it truly amazes me that God will never stop teaching, teaching, teaching. Does that not tell you how much we mean to him? We had been renting our new house for one year, with the agreement that we would buy it upon the sale of our old house, which had not sold yet. I had become very frustrated, even angry with the situation. Oh, I trusted God that things would work out fine; remember, I had learned that lesson quite nicely. But having patience, now that was another story. I was out of patience.

I was letting my impatience with the situation cause me to be think of our real estate agent as incompetent. I was letting my impatience with the situation cause me to become frustrated with the couple who offered to buy our house, but were having difficulty obtaining financing. I was letting my impatience cause friction at home. Our little family had become stressed.

Although money was tight and it was hard to juggle owning one home an hour away and renting our current home, we were making it. I knew we would; remember, I had learned to trust in God. However, I allowed my impatience with the situation to become a thorn in my side and I had been behaving, if not in my actions, at least in my thoughts and attitudes, unchristian.

One morning as I drank my coffee and read from the book of Revelation, I became very frustrated as I read. Now I have a basic, maybe even decent understanding of God's plan of Salvation, but I became frustrated when I read the book of Revelation. I WANT TO UNDERSTAND IT NOW! So as I read the end of chapter 13, the verse that says, "This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints," it about did me in.

I clenched my teeth, shook my fists and asked aloud, "How can I have the patient endurance and faithfulness of a saint when I can't even have patience with the sale of my house?"

Ding, ding, ding, ding. We have a winner.

Maybe God was trying to teach me something. Maybe he was trying to teach me patient endurance and faithfulness. I've already learned the lesson that he will take care of me and meet my needs. That morning I learned that he is preparing me for what lies ahead. I mean, really, if I can't have patience in something earthly like selling a house, how can I be patient in something heavenly like understanding my place in the Kingdom?

God is so, so good. He has been trying to teach this lesson to me for an entire year! He is the one with the patient endurance and faithfulness! Hallelujah! Incidentally, our house finally sold and life is going great!

---

*Julia Benson is a freelance writer who lives in a small town in southeast Minnesota. A former school teacher, Julia has a husband and a young daughter. She attends a United Church of God congregation in southwestern Wisconsin.*



## **Baptisms and Passover in a Refugee Camp**

Gloria counted over a dozen river and stream crossings as we traveled the dirt road through the mountain jungle to reach Mae Surin Refugee Camp. We were very grateful that the monsoon (rainy) season hadn't started yet, because the clouds of dirt kicked up by the four-wheel drive pickup we were traveling in would quickly become a quagmire of mud at the first heavy rain.

Mae Surin is a United Nations camp located in the mountains near the Burma border to house mainly Karen and Karenni tribal refugees from the fighting in Burma. The Karenni are a related tribal group sharing similar dress and customs with the Karen, but the language is completely different. There are over eight major ethnic races and numerous tribal subgroups living in Burma and many of the refugees now living in border camps in Thailand come from one of more of these tribal groups. Most will go, under United Nations' sponsorship, to another country and start new lives. Almost all of the Church of God members from Burma (called into the Church as refugees in Thailand) have emigrated to Western countries such as the U.S.A., Canada, Australia, and Norway.

Westerners are not permitted to stay overnight in the camp, so we arranged to stay in a little guesthouse in a small village about two hours from the entrance to the camp. Our driver, a former Karenni soldier, made the trip into the camp several times a week hauling supplies.

We went in on the Sabbath, the next day for Passover, and again on the first Holy Day of Unleavened Bread. We had to make our trips into the camp every morning and come back out every evening.

There was heavy smoke throughout the mountains, because this is the season that people burn off their land to prepare for planting crops at the beginning of the monsoon. Burning is also done by those who use this time as a chance to encroach on National Forest land. Most of the fires are started after dark. Burning off forest land is technically illegal in Thailand, but the law is largely ignored as more and more land is cleared for plantations. It is the same pattern as in other parts of the developing world. Large tracts of forest lands in Papua New Guinea and the Amazon have been largely cleared of natural for-



*Leon Sexton baptizes Say Nee Htoo as LaNuNan translates.*

est and replaced with plantation crops of one kind or another. In Thailand, I have even seen forest land cleared of valuable teak and other trees in order to plant plantation trees such as rubber and oranges. It seems ludicrous to clear trees to plant trees, but that is sometimes what is done.

King Bhumibol has warned time and again that the clearing of forests will bring devastating mudslides in the rainy season, but few listen. The smoke is so bad that we must close the windows of our house in Chiang Mai and sleep with an air cleaner running. The people continue burning with impunity, even though they will eventually pay a dear price with dwindling water resources—already a local and international problem.

The streams and rivers of northern Thailand are getting smaller and shallower as the mountain forests are destroyed. The trees and other vegetation of the North act as sponges to hold the water, which is then slowly released down the mountains to provide a steady water source for lowland rice production. With the trees gone, the water simply will not be there.

In the future, water will become a prized commodity, perhaps even more valuable than gold or oil. In Asia,



*Say Nee Htoo, Hpoo Hpoo, and Say Nee Say about the be baptized.*



*The three girls receive last-minute instructions before baptism.*

the countries of Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia all depend on the Mekong River water for irrigation. These Southeast Asian countries have been very concerned by China's plan to build a series of dams and reservoirs, which will take the Makong's water, effectively leaving the downriver countries "high and dry." So far, China is unrelenting; and, this will become an increasingly serious political and economic flashpoint for Southeast Asia.

Gloria prayed that God would command it to rain on the fires to put them out, but not give too much rain as to cause the road to turn muddy. The day before the first Holy Day, it did rain—just enough to put out the forest fires, but not enough to turn the road into a mud track! Such is the power of prayer.

I counseled four young people for baptism. Three were ready, so we prepared for their baptism Sunday morning before the Passover. The river that courses through the center of the camp was the logical venue for their baptisms. With the other COG members and a small group of spectators in attendance, I baptized three young Karen ladies in the cold running waters of the Mae Surin River. The girls only speak and understand the Karen language; so while I asked them the necessary questions in English, LaNuNan translated my words into Burmese, and Naw Mya—a Karen Church member and mother of a set of twin girls I was baptizing—then translated into Karen. I had baptized Naw Mya in Kalaymyo, Burma, seven years ago. Now her twin daughters were making their commitment to God and His Son Jesus Christ. It was really an emotional time for all of us, especially watching a mother seeing her own daughters bury their worldly lives in the cool waters of that distant mountain river.

Before we left, we were asked to anoint and pray for a refugee who had a terrible skin disease. I asked him if he believed that Jesus would heal him. He said yes he did. The Bible tells us that it is faith that heals the sick. Please pray for Jaw Min's healing.

I asked LaNuNan to stay and give Bible studies every day and conduct services on the weekly Sabbath and the last Holy Day of Unleavened Bread.

Meanwhile, I asked Nathan Kimmons and Jay Pabolo (a Karen and another of our Legacy graduates) to conduct the Passover ceremony and first Day of Unleavened Bread for our church members in another refugee camp about three hours away.

Gloria and I were both concerned about this trip because of my health. The trip in and out of the camp by four-wheel pick-up was quite arduous, and we had to climb up and down the side of a mountain inside the camp. But God was with me and I was able to accomplish all that we set out to do.

Jesus sent us here to do His work. That is exactly what we are doing. He did not promise a rose garden. Nor did He guarantee I would have perfect health. What He did promise is that He would never leave nor forsake me until the End of the Age (or until my part in His Divine Plan is finished). The Gospel is being preached in the mountains of Southeast Asia. Young people are being baptized. God is glorified.

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*Leon Sexton is the director of the Legacy Institute, a Sabbatarian missionary and educational outreach to the peoples of Thailand and Southeast Asia. To know more, go to [legacyinstitute.org](http://legacyinstitute.org)*



## Messianic Jews in Israel Seek Public Apology for Attack

*Christians await court decision on assaults on services by ultra-orthodox Jews.*

*By Wayne King*

**ISTANBUL, April 23** (*Compass Direct News*) After a final court hearing in Israel last week, a church of Messianic Jews awaits a judge's decision that could force an ultra-orthodox Jewish organization to publicly apologize to them for starting a riot and ransacking a baptismal service.

In 2006 Howard Bass, pastor of Yeshua's Inheritance church, filed suit against Yehuda Deri, chief Sephardic rabbi in the city of Beer Sheva, and Yad L'Achim, an organization that fights against Messianic Jews, for allegedly inciting a riot at a December 2005 service that Bass was leading. Bass has demanded either a public apology for the attack or 1.5 million shekels (US\$401,040) from the rabbi and Yad L'Achim. The case, Bass said, was ultimately about "defending the name of Yeshua [Jesus]" and making sure that Deri, the leadership of Yad L'Achim and those that support them know they have to obey the law and respect the right of people to worship. "They are trying to get away from having any responsibility," Bass said.

The 2005 incident wasn't the first time the church had to deal with a riotous attack after Yad L'Achim disseminated false information about their activities.

On Nov. 28, 1998, a crowd of roughly 1,000 protesters broke up a Yeshua's Inheritance service after the anti-Christian group spread a rumor that three busloads of kidnapped Jewish minors were being brought in for baptism. The assailants threw rocks, spit on parishioners and attempted to seize some of their children, Bass said.

A ruling in favor of the Christian group would mark the first time an organization opposing Messianic Jews in Israel has had to apologize to its victims for religious persecution.

Bass said he is a strong supporter of Israel but is critical of the way Messianic Jews are treated in the country.

"Israel opposes the gospel, and these events show this to be true," he said. Referring to Israel, Bass paraphrased Stephen, one of Christianity's early martyrs, "'You always resist the Spirit of God.' What Stephen said was true."

"It has to do with a violation of rights of individuals to worship in accordance with the basic tenants of their faith and to practice their faith in accordance with their beliefs in accordance with law," he said.

## THE PRIVILEGE OF WORSHIP

*by Donald Mansell*

*"The sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God. Ps. 84:3."*

March 19 is the day the swallows return to San Juan Capistrano in southern California. For the past two hundred and five years they have, with a few rare exceptions, arrived at the old Franciscan mission on this date and departed for their winter home on the 23d of October. In 1939 the swallows broke this schedule for the first time. They departed two months earlier than usual. Many naturalists wondered whether or not they would return the following year. But the day before their scheduled arrival in 1940, a group of "scout birds" flew in, and the next day the main body winged its way to the mission.

The amazing regularity with which certain birds migrate has been observed by man as far back as his records reach. We read in Jeremiah 8:7: "The stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times: and the turtle[dove] and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord."

Psalms 84, from which our verse is taken, was written by David probably while he was exiled from his homeland by King Saul. His words express his longing to attend the worship services of God's house with his fellow Israelites. The nostalgic appeal of the psalmist's words is said to be one of the most beautiful in all literature.

Man seems to have a basic need to worship. He needs regular periods when he can come apart from the routine of life to commune with his Maker and have fellowship with his fellow believers. But man also has a tendency to neglect these seasons of worship, especially when his life is going too well and sometimes when it is going too badly. It is for this reason that the writer of Hebrews admonishes against "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).

Some think that by "day" Paul was referring to the approaching destruction of Jerusalem foretold in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. However, it is more likely that he was thinking of the day of Christ's second advent. Inspiration predicts that as we approach this day it will become more and more difficult for God's people to assemble for worship on the seventh-day Sabbath. However, such difficulties are no excuse for unfaithfulness or lack of punctuality in church attendance now. Sabbath worship with God's people is a precious privilege.

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*Donald Mansell, New Every Morning, page 84. Review & Herald Publishing Association. 1981.*

*Ryland: "Preeminence—Part 3" cont. from page 8.*

there are two other such verses, 8:24 and 8:28: "...for if you do not believe that I am *he*, you will die in your sins" (v. 24); and "...When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *he*..." (v. 28). You will notice that in both of these verses, the word "*he*" is in italics. That is because the translators added the word "*he*." In the Greek text the passage simply says "*ego eimi*" or "I am."

It is important to understand that Jesus was not shy about claiming for Himself the attributes of God, and in this case He is identifying Himself with Yahweh (*YHWH* in Hebrew), the LORD of the Hebrew Scriptures—the Old Testament. That is exactly why the Jews on several occasions tried to kill Him. When Jesus was taken before the high priest prior to His crucifixion, He was accused of blasphemy because He told them that they would see Him "sitting at the right hand of Power" and "coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:65). Jesus was making a direct reference to Zechariah 14, the vision of the Day of the LORD when Yahweh (the LORD) will come from heaven to earth, to the Mount of Olives, and fight against the nations. It was for these references that Jesus was held in contempt by the Jewish leaders and crucified.

The significance of the absolute *ego eimi* verses in the New Testament is that this same phrase is used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, to refer to the LORD (Yahweh). The Septuagint (often called *LXX*) was used quite extensively among Jews throughout the Roman Empire in the first century. For this reason the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day would automatically have connected His use of *ego eimi* with the Old Testament references to the LORD (Yahweh) as "I AM." For example, the sentence structure of Isaiah 43:10 in the Septuagint is almost identical to that of John 13:19. "...that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He" (Is. 43:10). "...when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He" (Jn. 13:19).

There are other passages in Isaiah in which the LORD refers to Himself as "I am." Isaiah 41:4 and 46:6 are two examples. In each of these cases the Septuagint renders the Hebrew phrase as "I am—*ego eimi*." In fact, the Septuagint is very consistent in translating the Hebrew phrase for "I am," that is, "*ani hu*," into the Greek as "*ego eimi*." So, we see Jesus making a direct link between Himself and the LORD Yahweh of the Old Testament.

### **Conclusion**

In this third part of our series on the preeminence of Christ we have seen how Jesus presented Himself to the people. He performed many miracles to confirm that His

power and authority came from on high. The common folk in general accepted Jesus; the leaders sought to find a way to kill Him. In part one we saw how the apostle Paul presented Jesus. In part two we concentrated on how the book of Hebrews presents Jesus to us. In both Paul's writings and in Hebrews Jesus is viewed as the Creator of all things, and the One for whom all things were created. John takes a completely different approach in his gospel. He lets Jesus speak for Himself.

The apostle John starts his gospel the same way that the book of Hebrews starts—that the Father created the world through His Son, Jesus. This is also how the apostle Paul presents Jesus in the first chapter of Colossians. After John's initial statement about the Word of God, Jesus, being the Creator, his gospel takes a different path in that John allows Jesus to tell us in His own words who He is, and Jesus is not the least bit subtle in revealing to us His eternal nature and power.

Throughout the gospel Jesus presents Himself as being equal in God qualities to the Father. This is what ultimately gets Him killed. In John's gospel we not only find that Jesus is referred to as the Creator, He is presented as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29). He is the Living Water, the bread that came down from heaven, the Judge of the world, the resurrection and the life, the Light that came into the world, the way, the truth, and the life, and the great I AM.

I hope that I have given you a few new things to think about when reading the gospel of John. May the Lord give you light as you study His Word.

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### **End Notes**

1. This comment was made in spite of the fact that John the Baptist was actually born before Jesus. He is harkening back to the prophecy in Micah 5:2, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."
2. Malachi 3:1: "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, ...."
3. "The Feast of Tabernacles included spectacular ceremonies that symbolized multiple themes: harvest, drought, the coming winter darkness and the desert wandering after the exodus. Four stands, each holding four golden bowls, were placed in the heavily used court of women. These large bowls were filled with oil and lit during the feast. On this final day of Tabernacles, Jesus was teaching in the treasury located within the court of women. It was in this setting, standing beneath 16 lit bowls of oil, that Jesus identified himself as the true light of the world" (*Archeological Study Bible*, p. 1735. Zondervan. 2005).



Westby: "Jefferson" cont. from page 4.

Thomas Jefferson was willing to challenge his own faulty understanding and study to find the truth about what is the most important topic on earth ... God, and what he is like. I wish more folks today would follow his example. We in America are not yet being asked to die for our faith, but we are being asked to define our faith. Ask: Do I have it right? Now, that takes courage.

Rather than abandoning Christianity because he was disillusioned by the dogma and priests of religion, Jefferson discovered true Christianity. He concluded we needed a religious reformation:

"It is only by Banishing Hierophantic [presiding priest at sacred mysteries and their interpretations] mysteries and Scholastic subtleties ... and getting back to the plain and unsophisticated precepts of Christ that we become real Christians."

What are some of those pagan mysteries and intellectual subtleties to which he refers? One needs to take a hard look

at the key doctrines of modern Protestant and Catholic Christianity and compare them to the "primitive" faith of the Hebrew prophets and the apostles of Jesus. Does the Bible teach an immortal soul, going to heaven or hell upon death, predestination, and three gods in a "Godhead"? No, but you will find them in pagan Greek-Hellenistic-religion. This is some of the fog we need to blow away from the clear teachings of Scripture.

If Jefferson could make breakthrough discoveries over two hundred years ago with the limited sources he had available, we with our vast resources of historical evidence have no excuse for remaining in the fog.

It is not politically correct to challenge orthodoxy, but that is exactly what God expects of those who want to move Godward.

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*Ken Westby is the founder and director of The Association for Christian Development (ACD) and is a director emeritus of the BSA. The ACD Web site is located at [www.godward.org](http://www.godward.org).*

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Editorial: "Gospel in Genesis" cont. from page 3.

"preacher of righteousness" before the Flood. Tradition says that Seth was a righteous man, and we know that Enoch preached righteousness.

If we look at this from another point of view, Eve thought that Seth was the Promised Seed, and it was through the line of Seth that the righteousness of God was carried down from generation to generation. Look at what the book of Genesis says about Seth and his descendants: "And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, 'For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.' And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the LORD" (Genesis 4:25-26).

It was through the line of Seth and his descendants that men began again to turn to the Lord. As the apostle Paul states in Romans 10:14, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Men began to turn to call on the name of the Lord during that time because there were preachers of righteousness declaring to them the way of the Lord and His salvation.

There are other biblical evidences that the way of God's salvation was known by the earliest generations of mankind, long before the flood of Noah. Look at Jude 14-15: "Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have com-

mitted in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.' "

Not only was there a prophesied atonement for the sins of mankind ("...her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel"), but Enoch actually foretold the Second Coming of Christ to judge the world (Jude 14-15). The way of salvation was revealed in its entirety from the very beginning of man's sojourn on this earth. God did not leave mankind in the dark wondering what He expected of His created beings or how He would save them from their sins. His way of righteousness was made known to mankind from the beginning. God has never left man without a witness of His mercy and love, even when all but a handful of people rejected Him in the time before the Flood.

After the Flood of Noah's time Shem passed that knowledge of God's ways down to Abraham. That's why the Bible can say of Abraham, "...Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Genesis 26:5). Shem lived 98 years before the Flood and 502 years after the Flood. This means that Shem lived 75 years after Abraham entered Canaan.

There has never been a time when mankind was left without the knowledge of what God expects of human beings and what He is willing to do for them to save them from the consequences of their sins. God has always expected His followers to live by faith in Him, and they would be saved by His kindness in giving them a way to atone for their sins. God's way has always been to trust Him for the provision of our daily necessities, and to trust Him to save us so that we can live with Him throughout all eternity.

—Kenneth Ryland

# The Church in the World

## LifeNets Assists Victims of Super Typhoon Parma in the Philippines

The super typhoon raged for several weeks in October/November 2009 and claimed more than 1100 lives in the Northern Philippines.

LifeNets assisted a number of families mostly in San Fabian, Pangasina, about 150 miles north of Manila, who either lost their homes or suffered severe storm and flood damage. We even helped a few get their small enterprises back up and running.

Here are the comments from the people who were assisted by LifeNets after they had been damaged by the flooding:

"We used the money to hire additional help to clean the mud from our belongings like furniture, appliances and even the whole house. We also bought food for the family."

— from San Fabian, Pangasinan

"With the amount given to us, we bought food, clothing and school uniforms to replace the damaged ones. The rest we used to restart our uling (charcoal) repacking and selling business."

— widow with 3 children from San Fabian, Pangasinan

"The money was used for our daily expenses, purchased school supplies and clothes for the children. The rest was used for our household expenses."

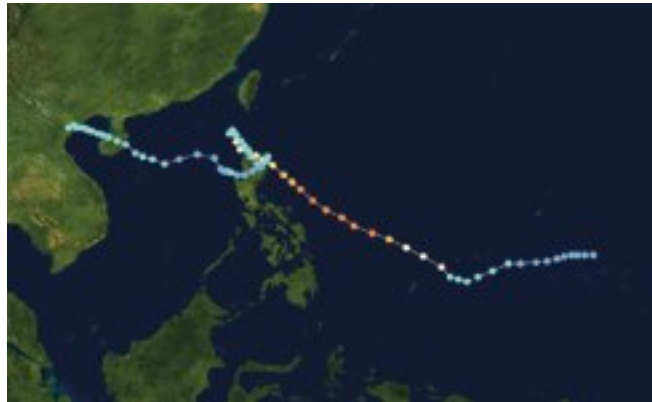
— family in San Fabian, Pangasinan

"We used the money to re-open our small store which went underwater during the flooding"

— family in San Fabian, Pangasinan

"We used the financial assistance to buy clothes for our family especially our 5 month baby. We also bought much needed food for our family."

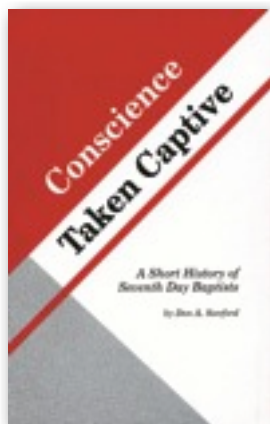
— from San Fabian, Pangasinan



*Parma's track through northern Philippines and then into China.*

***(LifeNets [lifenets.org] is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization that develops programs offering practical assistance that promote the well being and self sufficiency of disadvantaged people throughout the world and, where possible, encourages them to pass on their LifeNets benefit to others.)***

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It is envisioned that this short history will serve as an introduction to the nearly 350 years of Seventh Day Baptist history; that it will

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**PART 4: THE CONVERSION OF CONSTANTINE AND THE NICAEAN COUNCIL.** While his coins state that he was committed to the sun god Sol Invictus, Constantine was also recognized as the First Christian Emperor. Presiding over the Nicaean Council, the date for the observance of Passover was changed from the Biblically prescribed timing. **51 minutes**

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