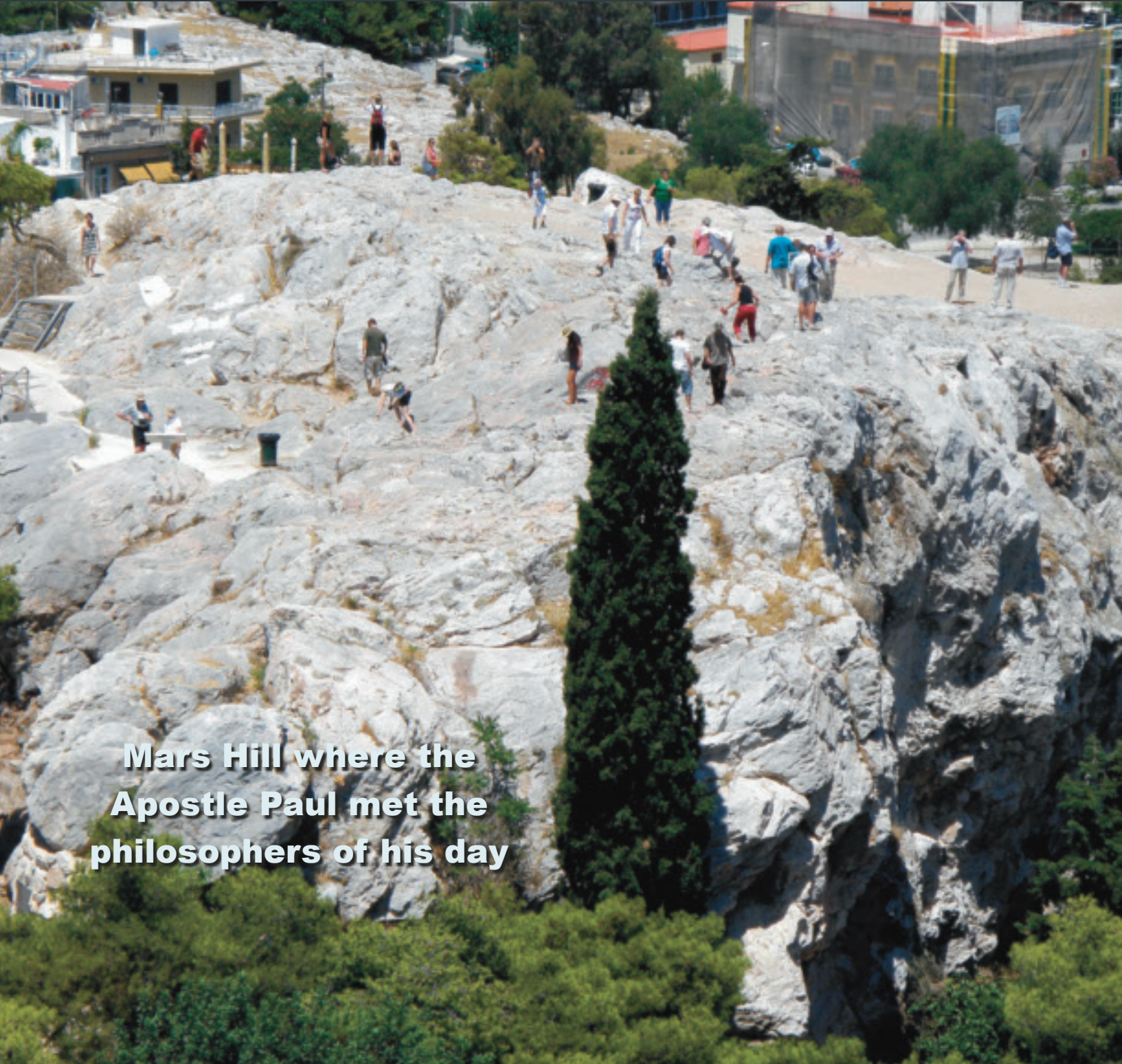


The Sabbath Sentinel

May–June 2013



**Mars Hill where the
Apostle Paul met the
philosophers of his day**

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

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

The Sabbath Sentinel

May–June 2013 Volume 65, No. 3 Issue 561

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Our Cover: Mars Hill as seen from the Acropolis. The Apostle Paul proclaimed that day to the Athenians in Acts 17:23: “For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore you ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.” (Source: Thank you to, <http://faithsteps.wordpress.com/>)

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Are We Living in the Worst of Times?

Many Christians today are convinced that we are living in the worst of times. I don't know whether that is true. It may be the case. All I know is that the world is looking more like ancient Rome every day, and the United States, once a devoutly Christian nation, is leading the pack toward Sodom and Gomorrah.

Marriage and family are being redefined in terms unthought of 20 years ago. We now have added a series of hyphenated marriage types or ones punctuated with adjectives to the list of possible matrimonies. We now are considering trial marriage, gay marriage, multi-partner marriage, and polyamorous families, just to mention a few. Every attempt is being made to move our society away from traditional marriage which has served cultures for thousands of years since Adam and Eve. There are evil forces at work who aim to destroy all religious influence in society, and they will not stop until their sinister work is accomplished, or until Christians awaken to the reality that their religious rights are fast slipping away and put a stop the the slide. Nothing short of national repentance, a new "Great Awakening," will do. You may say, "That will never happen," but it has happened before when a society was descending into sin.

One of the things that to me is very frustrating is that many Sabbatarians have adopted a Calvinist approach to the problem and say, "There is nothing we can do to change the direction of society," or "God calls whomever He will. There is nothing we can't change what He wills." Yet they forget what the Apostle Paul said, "One man plants, another waters, but God gives the increase." Remember also the Lord's parable of the scattering of the seeds. Can any of us presume to know which ground is fertile and which will bear no fruit? This puts the onus squarely on our shoulders. We have a part in making sure the Gospel is preached to all nations. After all, Jesus did say, "'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen" (Matthew 28:19-20).

He said, "Go." Not everyone can go personally, but we can all get behind the efforts of those who are will-

ing to go, and there are many Sabbatarians who carry Christ's message to other lands. Many Sabbatarians have taken up the challenge to lead and sponsor missions abroad, and even missions in their own countries. One of the things we at the Bible Sabbath Association are trying to do is to put resources into the hands of those who are called to "go," and we are very thankful to those who have supported our efforts to carry out our mission.

I would like to give you a quote to emphasize the relevance of this topic, *i.e.*, whether we are living in times unlike any other in history: "It would be unsavoury to describe how far the worship of indecency was carried; how public morals were corrupted by the mimic representations of everything that was vile, and even by the pandering of a corrupt art. The personation [*pretending to be someone else*] of gods, oracles, divination, dreams, astrology, magic, necromancy, and theurgy [*sorcery*], all contributed to the general decay. It has been rightly said, that the idea of conscience, as we understand it, was unknown to heathenism. Absolute right did not exist. Might was right. The social relations exhibited, if possible, even deeper corruption. The sanctity of marriage had ceased. Female dissipation and the general dissoluteness led at last to an almost entire cessation of marriage. Abortion, and the exposure and murder of newly-born children, were common and tolerated; unnatural vices, which even the greatest philosophers practised, if not advocated, attained proportions which defy description."

The quote above comes as a description of the prevailing Roman culture during the time of the life of Christ. It is a quote from Alfred Edersheim's book, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p. 240. It was during this time that the nascent Church in Jerusalem began to flourish and eventually became the dominant cultural force throughout the Roman Empire. The point is, changing the culture is possible, but Christians have to be willing to stand against the slings and arrows of a culture that is dying due to its own internal corruption.

—Kenneth Ryland

When Angels Visit



They surround mankind in overwhelming numbers each having a God-appointed assignment. They are tasked to do special jobs for their Maker and for those sons and daughters made in his image. They operate at an invisible plane. But sometimes they enter the human plane and can be seen with human eyes. Those visits are rare; their unseen visits are anything but rare.

by Kenneth Westby

And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne...and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;

(Revelation 5:11)

When you were a little kid you were unaware that the cosmos was made up of billions of galaxies each having billions of star systems and that the cosmos seemed go on to infinity. Did your unawareness or disbelief in such a state have any effect upon the reality of the cosmos or its stupendous size? Did ignorance or disbelief mean the cosmos didn't exist? Of course not. Because people don't believe in God, does that mean he doesn't exist? No, again.

Maybe you don't believe in angels, and does that mean angels don't exist? Can they exist regardless of your awareness or belief? When a tree falls in a forest and no one is there to see or hear it, does it fall silently? Are our eyes and ears the final arbiters on what is or is not reality? I doubt it.

The Bible is not silent on the existence of angels, and as the righteous superpower creatures of God's making they do his good works. More on that later. But angels fit and work within God's policy of hiddenness. They remain unseen and invisible. They, like their Master, don't use their superior powers to intrude and intimidate humans, but stay hidden to allow people maximum freedom of thought and action—and their accountability for their lives. It is all part of the long range plan of God that eventually will draw all men to God of their own free will. They will be drawn because of God's love, his gifts of eternal life, and his goodness. As Paul put it, it is "God's kindness that leads you toward repentance."¹

Angels do not insert themselves between God and his children; they are part of God's team to assist both him and us. What marvelous, spectacular, glorious

creatures they are; intelligent beings, powerful beyond comprehension, discrete, wise, reserved, and immediate to the commands of God. They are also the watchers over God's children. Many of them may be in your presence at this very moment. We would do well to be mindful of the reality surrounding us and the God to whom we pray.

"You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven."²

Hollywood Supernatural Powers

What is going on with this preoccupation of superpower entertainment figures? It seems that every other movie or show on TV has a supernatural element to it. Often they are dark, evil creatures that morph into yet more fantastic creature modes to do battle with the superhuman hero figure having his own profile of super powers. It seems to be a standard plot. Special effects make it all the more spooky and real. Add to that the steady release of angel movies and demon movies. Has modern culture embraced the spirit world?

Zombies, walking dead people, vampires, and aliens have a big following. I for one have never gotten the fascination over vampires featured in romantic teen and 20-something TV series. I read the classic novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker when I was in the seventh grade. My aunt bought the book for me and the setting was Count Dracula's Transylvanian castle and England in the 1800s. It was fiction, of course, yet it seems

Continued on Page 8

With this article *The Sabbath Sentinel* continues our series on the various movements within the Sabbath-keeping community.



Sabbath Keeping in the Messianic Movement

Dr. Daniel Botkin

My spiritual identity is centered in Jesus (Yeshua), not in Sabbath keeping. However, this does not lessen the importance of keeping the Sabbath, any more than it lessens the importance of keeping any of the other nine of the Ten Commandments. Keeping the seventh day Sabbath is very important to me and to others who, like me, are active in a movement that is usually called the Messianic Movement. Some people call this movement by other names — the Jewish Roots Movement, the Hebrew Roots Movement, the Torah Movement, the Messianic Israel Movement, and perhaps other names I have not heard. But the term most commonly used is the Messianic Movement.

The modern Messianic Movement grew out of the Messianic Jewish Movement, which grew out of the Hebrew Christian Movement of the 1800s. Of course Hebrew Christians/Messianic Jews existed long before the 1800s. As most readers of *The Sabbath Sentinel* probably know, the first-century ecclesia (church) in Acts started with Jewish believers in Jesus, and for several years consisted only of Jews and of proselytes who converted to Judaism.

After the council in Acts 15, Gentiles were admitted into the ecclesia without needing to undergo a formal, full-fledged conversion to traditional Judaism. The Gentiles were given some basic beginning instructions with the understanding that they would attend the synagogues every Sabbath and learn the Torah and put what they learned into practice as they learned it. This can be inferred from James' words "For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day" (Acts 15:21). The Gentiles' repentance, faith, and baptism qualified them to be accepted as members of the Body of Messiah, but their transition to a Torah lifestyle would take time. This method was in contrast to the way that non-Messianic Jews then (and now) accepted Gentiles into the fold. The rabbinical method of conversion normally requires several months or years of study, so that the transition to a Torah lifestyle is complete before the Gentile is accepted as a full-fledged member. The Messianic way is full acceptance as a member based on the Gentile's repentance, faith, and baptism, followed by a transition to a Torah lifestyle.

After Gentiles were admitted to the ecclesia, the makeup of the membership eventually shifted from a Jewish majority and Gentile minority to a Gentile majority and Jewish minority. This was to be expected, because Jews make up a very small percentage of the general population. Unfortunately, after the apostasy set in, the church began separating from its Jewish roots, and Gentiles began bringing in baggage from the pagan cultures in which they had been raised. By the time of Constantine, the church had changed from being a living organism whose members lived as Messianic Israelites, to being a religious organization that detested Jews and eventually persecuted Jews.

In spite of the anti-Semitism in the church, there were Jewish individuals who converted to Christianity throughout the centuries, some out of sincere belief in Jesus, and some merely for the sake of convenience and to avoid persecution. During Medieval times, the church required Jewish converts to take solemn oaths before baptism. In these pre-baptismal oaths, the Jew had to renounce the Sabbath, the holy days, and promise not to shun swine's flesh.¹

Except for the *conversos* in Spain (Jews who outwardly converted but secretly practiced as much Judaism as possible), the history of Hebrew Christians from A.D. 135 to the 1800s is basically a history of individual Jews converting to Christianity and then assimilating into the so-called Gentile Church, and forgetting their Jewish identity. In his book *The History of Jewish Christianity*, Hugh Schonfield wrote:

"The history of Jewish Christianity from the seventh century to the present day [1936] is principally a record of individual converts, who, such was the intolerance of the times, scarcely dare acknowledge their Jewish extraction for fear of persecution on the ground of sympathy towards their former co-religionists."²

After the start of the Protestant Reformation, Christian-Jewish relations began to slowly thaw, at least in some parts of the world. Jewish converts to Christianity were no longer required to take oaths and renounce everything Jewish. By the 1800s Jewish Christians in some countries no longer felt a need to deny or hide their Jewish ancestry. On the contrary,

some of them began to identify themselves as “Hebrew Christians.”

In 1866 the Hebrew Christian Alliance was founded in Great Britain. In their constitution, the Hebrew Christians said: “Let us not sacrifice our identity. When we profess Christ, we do not cease to be Jews... as Hebrew Christians, we desire to be allied more closely to one another.”³

In 1915 the American Alliance of Hebrew Christians was formed, and in 1925 the International Hebrew Christian Alliance was formed. Jewish people began coming to faith in Jesus, many more Jews than in previous centuries. Many Hebrew Christians died in the Holocaust. That fact that they had converted to Christianity did not stop the Nazis from murdering them.

In America many young Jewish people started coming to faith in Jesus in the 1960s and 70s. This was the beginning of the Messianic Jewish Movement in America. At first these Messianic Jews followed the pattern of the Hebrew Christians. They joined Sunday churches but identified as Jewish believers and evangelized their fellow Jews. But in the 1970s, Messianic Jewish congregations started springing up as an alternative to so-called Gentile churches. And of course these Messianic Jewish congregations met on the seventh-day Shabbat, not on Sundays.

As the Messianic Jewish Movement grew, many non-Jewish Christians felt drawn to visit and eventually to join Messianic Jewish congregations. These non-Jewish Christians could see that keeping the Sabbath on the seventh day is a biblical practice, while keeping the Sabbath on the first day (or not keeping it on any day) is not biblical. So Messianic Jewish congregations now consist of not only Messianic Jews, but of Messianic non-Jews as well.

Because Jews make up a very small percentage of the general population, some Messianic Jewish congregations have fewer Jews than non-Jews. Some congregations have no Jews at all. When this is the case, some people drop the adjective “Jewish” and simply call their congregation a Messianic congregation. This is how the Messianic Jewish Movement spawned a more inclusive movement called simply the Messianic Movement, a movement which includes non-Jews as well as Jews.

There is still a Messianic Jewish Movement and there are still Messianic Jewish congregations. Probably the two biggest and best known and longest lasting Messianic Jewish organizations in America are the MJAA (Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, formerly known as the Hebrew Christian Alliance) and the UMJC (Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations). These organizations focus on many concerns that are specifically Jewish, and desire to be a light to their fellow Jews. Non-

Jewish Messianic organizations like the MCC (Messianic Covenant Community) and the MIA (Messianic Israel Alliance) have a broader focus and desire to reach all nations, including Jews.

For Messianic Jews and Messianic non-Jews, the Sabbath is an important part of Messianic life and worship. Unfortunately, many Messianic Jewish leaders believe and teach that the Sabbath is only for Jews, and that Sabbath keeping is optional for non-Jewish believers. I strongly disagree with them (as do most other non-Jewish Messianics), but I appreciate the things these Messianic Jewish organizations have done. Though it was not their intention, the Messianic Jewish Movement awakened many Christians to the importance of the seventh-day Sabbath.

The strictness of Sabbath keeping in Messianic congregations varies. At our local congregation, Restored Covenant Community, members are expected to abstain from work (especially income-producing work), from buying or selling (Nehemiah 13), and from kindling a fire (Exodus 35:3). They are also expected to attend a holy convocation for worship (Leviticus 23:3). We realize that unforeseen difficulties of an urgent nature sometimes arise and people have to make an occasional exception to the general rule. But under normal circumstances, these are the things we expect of our members. Some Messianic congregations are more lax about the Bible's Sabbath requirements. Ironically, from my observation it seems that non-Jewish Messianics often take Sabbath observance more seriously than many Messianic Jews.

Worship services at Messianic congregations vary from congregation to congregation. Many Messianic Jews incorporate extra-biblical Jewish traditions and liturgy into their Sabbath observance, while most non-Jewish Messianics use little or no Jewish tradition and liturgy. Sabbath services at our local congregation in some ways resemble a Protestant church service, with lively music and singing, prayer and praise, and a sermonette followed by a longer teaching, then fellowship around the tables as we share a meal together.

The only outward differences that would be obvious to a visitor are our appearance (our women wear head coverings and long dresses, and our men wear fringes and do not shave) and our use of some Hebrew during the service. We recite the *Shema* and the *v'havta* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) in Hebrew then in English, and we end our service with a recitation of the Aaronic Benediction (Numbers 6:24-26) in Hebrew, then sing it in English. Sometimes one or more of our praise songs will include some Hebrew, but a translation is also sung or otherwise provided so people will know what they are singing. During the song service, several of our ladies form a circle at the back of the room and praise the Lord in the dance.

I have been a guest speaker at many Messianic congregations, and I have found that many of them follow a pattern somewhat similar to ours.

I tell people that there is no one right way to do your holy convocation. There is no "one size fits all" method of conducting a Sabbath meeting. The obvious purpose of the holy convocation is to worship the Lord and edify the members of the body. Sabbath keepers have liberty when deciding things like the style and form of music, the format of preaching and teaching, the type of prayer and praise, the use or non-use of Hebrew, etc.

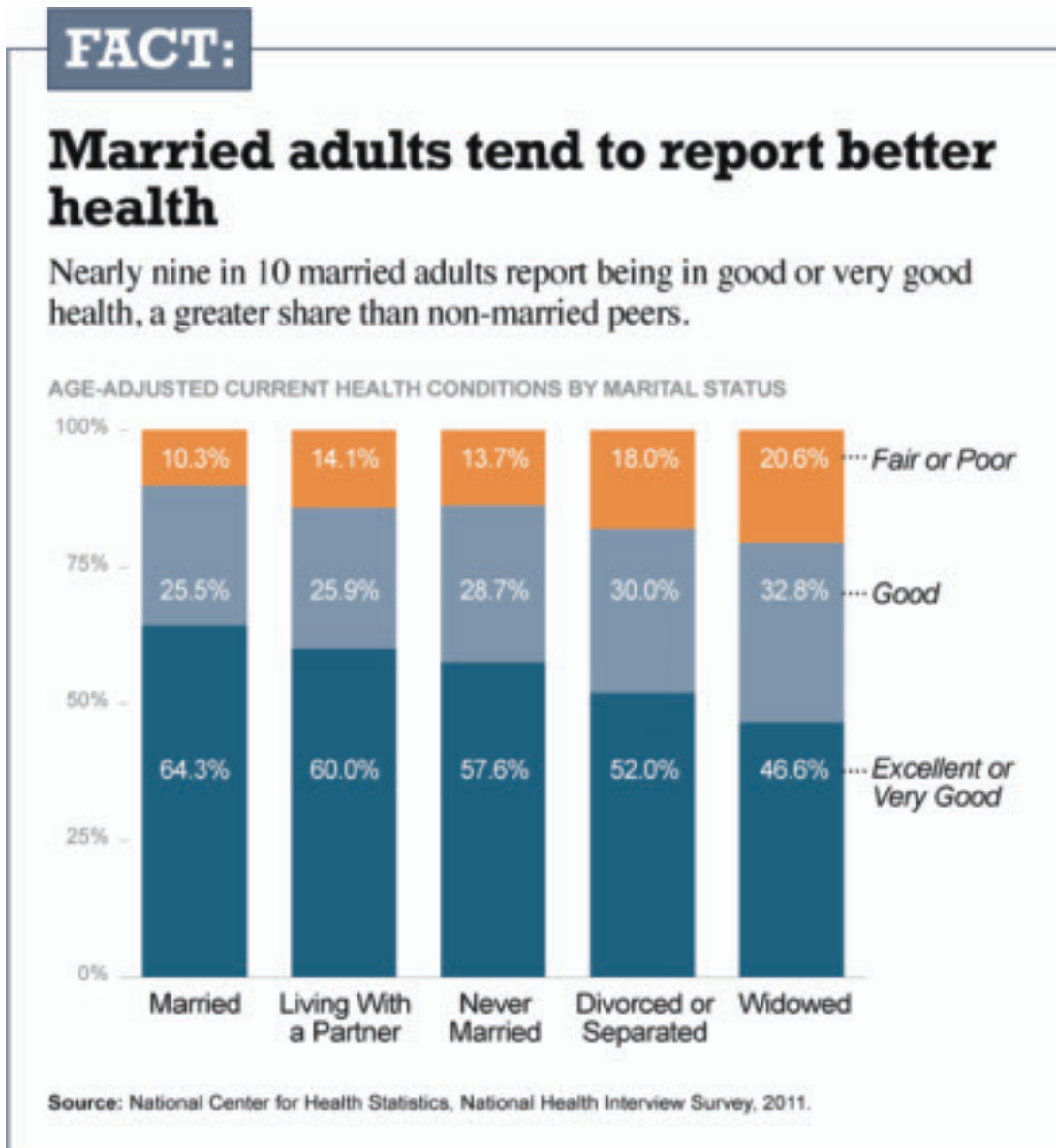
Every congregation is unique and made up of unique individuals with specific needs. Leaders who make decisions about the order of the Sabbath service should pray and trust the Lord to show them what will work best for

their congregation. If our worship on the Sabbath is Bible-based, sincere, heartfelt, and glorifies God and edifies the brethren, then that Sabbath has fulfilled its purpose.

END NOTES

1. See David A. Rausch, *Messianic Judaism* (Lewistown, NY: Edwin Mellin Press, 1982), 16f.
2. Hugh Schonfield, *The History of Jewish Christianity* (London: Duckworth, 1936), ch. 10, section 1.
3. *Ibid.*, 222.

Dr. Botkin edits a bimonthly newsletter called "Gates of Eden." The newsletter is produced by Gates of Eden, a Messianic Jewish ministry. Write to Gates of Eden, P.O. Box 2257, East Peoria, IL 61611-0257. Gates of Eden is on the Internet at www.gatesofeden.org.



Westby: "Angels..." cont. from page 4.

that the entire vampire genre even as fiction would have more in common with the demonic world than the angelic. I avoid it.

Much earlier in history there was a real Dracula (*Son of the Dragon*) but he wasn't a vampire. He was Vald III Dracula a cruel but mighty fighter who led his troops against the Islamic Turks in 1462 who were invading southern Europe. He stopped them and in the process killed over 100,000 in battles along the Danube and Transylvania's Carpathian Mountains (modern Romania). That is Dracula history worth learning, but sexy vampires?

Surprisingly, the burgeoning genre of supernaturally themed books, video games, TV and movies all spew forth from a largely secular entertainment media in bed with a largely secular culture. Yet such a fascination with the supernatural. Why?

Going to the movies isn't going to give us much worthwhile information on the supernatural world. Throughout life I have found only one authoritative source of information that speaks plainly of a supernatural world and its Creator—the Bible. It doesn't tell us all our curious minds would like to know, only what is essential to know.

There is a lot of mystery to life and to human consciousness and men have looked for answers down every alley. We are familiar with the debates over the soul and reincarnation. The phenomena of extended consciousness (near death experiences), remote viewing, extrasensory perception, psychokinesis, clairvoyance, telepathy, and precognition, all of which have their skeptics and believers. The human mind is more than brain, but what is it? The spirit world also seems to be taken for granted by most who are uninformed of the scriptural evidence and so are left without any clear understanding of the powers that operate upon the world.

Is there a paradox here? The agnostic doesn't believe in angels, yet can't quite rule them out anymore than he can rule out the continual reports of unexplainable sightings, paranormal activities, ghost appearances, and the like. The atheist says there is no God, no supernatural things, and that is that. He protests that all other contrary evidences are simply figments of one's imagination.

Encountering an Angel Unaware

I did have a strange experience once which left me wondering if I had encountered an angel but wasn't aware of it at the time. I'll tell you about it shortly, but first, do you recall that unique passage in the book of Hebrews where Christians are warned that God may test their hospitality by actually sending angels?

"Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:1-2).

What did the writer of Hebrews know that perhaps the readers didn't know or had forgotten? Has this possibility ever crossed your mind that you may have been tested by God's angels? We might want to do some soul searching.

We all tend to talk righteously, but it is the doing that counts. We can say "amen" to the concept of being hospitable, but do we actually put ourselves out to do it? Do we spend the time, money (if required for food, etc.), and effort to reach out and welcome and comfort people—especially those in need, new people, the lonely, the strangers?

God Tests but Does Not Tempt

He tested Abraham's obedience by giving him something to obey and then watched to see if he'd do it. When it was clear that Abraham was going to fully obey him the test was stopped and God said (via "the angel of YHWH"): "Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your own son, your only son" (Genesis 22:12).

Jesus gives the principle: don't just take what people say, look at what they actually do. God doesn't tempt with evil, yet apparently God utilizes angels from time to time to see for certain if his children practice what they preach. It might be like the company president occasionally sending in a test customer to see if his employees really treat people as their company motto reads "We Treat Customers Like Family."

Back to my experience. It was the fall of 1973 and I was returning home to Washington D.C. with my family after delivering a sermon in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. On the way back we stopped in York, Pennsylvania, for dinner. After the meal, as the family was loading into our old Chevy Suburban I noticed a fellow, a black man, in the parking lot looking into the raised hood of his car. I walked over and asked him what the trouble was. I don't recall exactly what he said, but it was something about the electrical system or a bad battery. I asked him if he had help coming or needed a ride somewhere. He said he'd appreciate a ride to a place a few miles away.

It was out of our way, but no matter. I invited the gentleman to get in with the family and we'd drive him where he wanted to go. I could tell my wife and four children (all under 10-years old) were a little surprised at a guest joining us, but the fellow was most pleasant. I followed his directions to another section of the city of York and then he said I could stop and let him out along a sidewalk. It seemed a strange spot as there were no buildings or houses or gas station in sight—just an open section of road.

He got out and thanked us all for our kindness and closed the door. As I slowly pulled away I was curious to see where he would go as the area was wide open with no buildings or homes. It was dusk, street lights on, and I could see clearly in all directions. I immediately looked back in my side and rearview mirrors. He wasn't there! The visibility was clear for at least a block and it was only one or two seconds from when he closed the door to when I looked in the mirrors. I turned my head around thinking he was in a blind spot. Nothing. The man just disappeared in about one or two seconds. There was no traffic on the street and the sidewalk was empty. I asked the family if they could see him. No, he had just disappeared. I guess I'll never know in this life if he was an angel.

If that were a test I probably passed it, but I wonder about other areas of my character that God may have tested where I didn't pass and still need work.

“Used” Angels

Angels are good at what they do and have been at it a long time. The angels that protected Daniel from the lions are still around. As are the angels that ministered to the prophets, fought with Israel, protected the saints, and daily carry out God's directives. The particular angel that brought Peter out of prison (Acts 12:1-11) and suddenly disappeared is still with us. Who is that angel protecting or delivering today? You?

How about the angels who watched the temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4) after he'd been fasting for forty days? Be sure the whole angelic kingdom was watching that colossal contest between the Prince of Darkness, Commander Lucifer and the man Jesus, weakened by fasting. One can picture Gabriel, Michael, the twenty-four elders, the cherubim and seraphim and the countless millions of angels of every description watching in anxious anticipation the outcome. And above them stood His Majesty, the Father, watching the man of his own choosing do battle against the source of all evil.

Jesus rebuffed the Devil's temptations with truth and when the matter of worship came up, Jesus quoted from the Shema, the first and greatest commandment, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." Not only did Jesus refuse to worship Satan, he commanded Satan to worship and serve the one true God! At that the Devil took off. Then "angels came and attended him."

Jesus continued a "war" against evil spirits (demons, fallen angels, Satan and his minions) everywhere he went casting them out of people and triumphing over them. The victory in his wilderness temptation was no fluke, and the rest of Jesus' ministry proved that he and his servants have been given power over evil. Jesus tells his followers to no longer cower in fear before evil men or spirits but fear only God! (Matthew 10:28).

The angels that witnessed that victory are still around today and they are charged with ministering to you and me. Don't you suppose that the angels realized that this Jesus, Son of Man and Son of God, would be their commander and chief under the Creator himself? I'm sure they did.

In fact, it appears that angels are delightfully curious about how we weak, flesh and blood, freewill humans will one day become glorified sons of God like Jesus. Peter writes, "Even angels long to look into these things" (1 Peter 1:12). They are tasked with a grand commission to help make it happen, so reveals the writer of Hebrews:

"Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14).

This fact should give us pause as we are not left alone as we move Godward. I'm reminded of the old minister that worked into the night preparing his sermon for the little congregation he pastored. His unsympathetic wife chided him for spending so much time on a message that so few will appreciate. To this the minister replied: "You forget, my dear, how large my audience will be!" If angels are looking nothing on earth done for Christ is trivial.

Jesus was aware of the supernatural angelic kingdom and it created a sense of awe within him. He knew God had undefeatable forces and this inspired his boldness and confidence. When threatened prior to his crucifixion he realized that there were legions of spirit warriors at his disposal, though at that crisis he chose the wiser plan to let events move forward.

Once, while sitting with little children on his lap he warned adults, "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:10-11). Meaning what? If you mistreat these children who are under angelic protection you can be sure that your transgression is communicated to the Almighty! Yes, Jesus says, you'd better watch out and better shake in your boots to even contemplate misusing one of these little ones. Can we notice how aware Jesus is of spiritual realities?

Don't Forget the Destroying Angels of Sodom

The angelic kingdom is huge and multifaceted and we only catch brief glimpses of it, but the creatures vary from otherworldly beings with multiple faces, covered in eyes, wings, fearsome beings, to messengers that look like men.

Gabriel is a chief messenger; Michael is a chief warrior (the only named angels in the Bible). Many are the duties and types of angels. Yahweh of Hosts is a title of God for he is accompanied by thousands of holy ones prepared for battle³. When the prophet Elisha was be-

sieged, he was given God's protection by heavenly warriors on "horses and chariots of fire"⁴. When King Herod accepted worship of the crowd he was struck down by an angel of the Lord and eaten by worms.⁵

God's holy angels have super powers which would make today's TV special effect superheroes look like cheap cardboard cutouts by comparison. Consider the two angels that entered the gates of Sodom to survey the situation and carry out God's judgment. This was a visit from angels never to be forgotten.

They looked like normal men when Lot met them at the great gate of the city in early evening. Lot wanted to protect these innocent strangers from the homosexual perverts that controlled Sodom, so he offered to take them in to his home for the evening. They demurred saying they'd just spend the night in the city square. Lot was savvy to what they would encounter and strongly insisted they come to his home for the evening. They agreed. Read the amazing story of what happened next in the nineteenth chapter of Genesis.

You may be surprised to learn that archeologists have finally, and I believe definitively, discovered the ancient site of Sodom. I've been following the quest for Sodom's location for many years and this seems most credible. The current issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review* (BAR Mar/Apr 2013) has a major report on the very large archeological site, called Tall el-Hamman which lies on the well-watered plain just north of the Dead Sea. The heavily fortified walled city covered 100 acres and was destroyed by fire at the end of the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000-1600 B.C.) and remained uninhabited for some seven centuries. Its walls were 100 feet thick and there were large square towers 50 feet or higher surrounding the monumental gateway where Lot greeted his angelic visitors. The article contains various pictures and artistic renderings.

Excavation of the site has been underway for three years and the findings show a great catastrophe struck Sodom and its satellite villages that left them a barren hulk for seven centuries. Sodom, the powerfully built central city of the plain had ramparts of mud bricks that archeologists estimate were originally constructed using between 150-200 million bricks! The city also had a pagan religious temple in its center.

The most amazing evidence unearthed is a three-foot deep layer of dark gray ash. The melted debris surrounding the ash layer include human bone fragments and many melted pottery sherds. These pottery sherds now have a glassy appearance as they melted in with soil and rock. The archeologists note:

"The glassy appearance of the sherd's surface indicates it was briefly exposed to temperatures well in excess of 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit, the approximate heat of volcanic magma. Similar "melted" sherds were found across the site, suggesting the city and its environs were catastrophically destroyed in a sudden, extreme conflagration." (p. 41, BAR).

It didn't take long for the two angels to confirm previous reports and they ordered Lot to gather up what family he could and get out of Sodom ASAP. In the end only Lot and his daughters escaped, along the way Lot's wife balked at leaving the comforts of the city she had gotten accustomed to.

The two angels saved Lot and let loose the judgment of Yahweh upon Sodom and its allied cities. When Abraham got up the next morning he looked down from his place in the hill country to the cities of the plain: "He saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace" (19:28). Today, men poke about in the ashes of God's judgment.

"Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire" (Jude 7).

Those two angels are still with us. Still able to administer God's judgment—when and if asked. Yet, they were also sent to save. Peter explains:

"If he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deed he saw and heard)—if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment..." (2 Peter 2:6-9).

Lot was no perfect fellow but you don't have to be to merit the help of God. In fact, Lot's wife, while maybe not "righteous," would have also been saved and enjoyed life living with her husband and daughters, but apparently she didn't share Lot's abhorrence for what was going on all around them in Sodom. She didn't see what was so bad that they had to leave or so bad that God would destroy the place. She became too tolerant of sin. It can happen so easily to any of us, and I fear it is now happening to our nation as a whole.

I wonder what those two angels are tasked with nowadays. God is a righteous God who both saves the righteous and punishes the wicked and he uses his an-

gels to do both. Those two angels are still alive and actively working somewhere in our world.

Angels Have Seen It All

There will be an increasing amount of angelic activity as we near the climax of the age. The book of Revelation is overflowing with angelic warfare and kinetic activities. Angels will gather the elect in the resurrection and separate the evildoers for destruction⁶. They were present in power at the resurrection of Jesus.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightening and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid...you are looking for Jesus...he has risen, just as he said"⁷

The angel paid a visit, just in time for the two women's arrival at the tomb. That same angel knows whose names are written in the Book of Life and he is at work now as he was then ministering to the heirs of salvation. The women at the tomb are dead awaiting the First Resurrection, but you and I are yet alive and are receiving the loving care of God, of Christ, and of their angelic servants.

You may never see your angelic visitors and God may remain invisible to you until the Kingdom of God is inaugurated on earth, but never doubt for a split second that God's superpower servants are on duty for you day and night. Soon, at your resurrection among the saints, the entire heavenly host will break out in joyous celebration, "They are risen! Glory to God in the Highest!"

End Notes:

1. Romans 2:4
2. Hebrews 12:22-23
3. Deuteronomy 33:2
4. 2 Kings 6:17
5. Acts 12:21-23
6. Mark 13:27; Matthew 13:39-50; 25:31-46; Jude 14-15
7. Matthew 28:2-6

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Conversation Starters

by Julia Benson

Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

In my experience, training myself to think on such noble things has been a lot easier than training myself to talk about such noble things. So I did something about it and am sharing this experience so that maybe someone else can benefit from this idea.

Sometimes Godly conversation is hard to maintain during fellowship on the Sabbath. Of course we want to catch up on the events of our lives throughout the week; that's easy to talk about. But...putting those noble things that I've been thinking about into words; that's a lot more difficult for me to do. And, basing on the spotty biblical conversation in a lot of church groups, I'm guessing that this is difficult for other people also. So, to help me practice actually talking about God, the Bible, and living Christ, and to promote more godly conversation during fellowship time with my church group, I made conversation starters. I wrote out many different conversation topics, glued them to table tents, and set them on the tables during our afternoon meal after church services.

Admittedly, they weren't a great hit at first. It is hard to embrace change and our conversation seemed a little bit stiff at first. But, each time we used the conversation starters, our conversations became better and better. I haven't been consistent with setting them out each Sabbath, and it's hard to find the time to create new topics. But, it was worth the effort to keep at it! Below are the first set of conversation starters I made. After that I just chose various Bible verses to spur conversation. Currently I'm working on making conversation starters out of questions that I have. I plan to use a Bible trivia book I have to create conversation starters at a later date.

Thinking on these things as well as talking about them is paramount in developing Christ's character in us. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

Here are some ideas:

Share your favorite Bible story and explain why.

If you could meet anyone from the Old Testament, who would it be?

How did you get your start in God's Church? How did your parents or grandparents get their start?

Share your favorite Bible verse and explain why it is your favorite.

John 3:16

Is there anything in the Bible that can't be taken literally?

Share some tips that help you to be better at Bible study, prayer and meditation.

What was wrong with Cain's offering?

Continued on Page 19

God Speaks to Ezekiel— A Message to Israel, Part 3



By Dr. Royce Mitchell, Jr.

Continuing from Parts 1 and 2 in previous issues of this magazine, we found there that Ezekiel was sent to Israel with a message from God. We also found that Israel had been made captive and removed from the land over 130 years earlier, and that there is no record that Ezekiel ever went to the House of Israel. We further learned that the Israel to which Ezekiel was sent would be heavily engaged in idolatry which would lead to the destruction of the land with bodies all around their altars. This does not present to us a pretty picture of the fate of Israel.

We found a picture of idolatry permeating even the leadership in the Temple of God and asked the question as to where Israel would be in the end days, and specifically where God's Temple would be. The question was raised that, even if the Judahites living in "Israel" today were to muster up the courage to erect a temple, would that be God's Temple?

We saw a picture that could be interpreted using scriptures of the Bible to indicate that idolatry would exist in secret within the Temple/Church of God. We now pick up the prophecy in Ezekiel 9.

Here we find that God figuratively calls the six "overseers" of the city, each one having a weapon of destruction (or slaughter depending on the version of scriptures we use) in his hand. Having seen the pollution in the Temple, God calls these six men (v. 2) with their weapons of slaughter who are accompanied by one who appears to be a scribe. This is likely not a set or group of men.

God then calls to the scribe (v. 3) and tells him to mark on the foreheads those who are groaning and mourning over the abominations done in the Temple (v. 4). Then (v. 5), the overseers with their weapons of slaughter are told that they are to go out into the city and, without sparing, to slay everyone except those who were marked (v. 6) by the scribe.

Remember that Peter said (1 Peter 4:17) that the time has come for judgment to begin at the house, or dwelling place, of God.

The order is given (v. 7) and the overseers go into the city and kill everyone who is not marked by the scribe. Ezekiel then asks God if He is going to kill all the rem-

nant of Israel (v. 8). Of note is that most of the remnant of Israel must be engaged in the idolatry in order to incur that wrath.

God responds (v. 9) that Israel and Judah have sinned greatly, filling the land with blood and making the Holy City perverse by claiming God has forsaken the land and that He doesn't see what is going on. Indeed, with alleged leaders in the House of God secretly practicing satan or animal worship right in the House, it is easy to see why God would feel that way. After all, where would the emphasis be on obedience and love for God when the leadership is deeply steeped in idolatry? If the children of Israel are not being taught to love God, then are they really learning how to worship God or learning idolatry?

Some might say that the plethora of religions claiming Christianity today would be those failing to teach love of God and instead teaching idolatry. Perhaps that is true, but are those religious leaders really a part of the Temple of God? It's not likely we will get definitive answers until after the fact.

We have now seen that the prophecies handed to Ezekiel were to be delivered to Israel, and that they had gone into captivity over a hundred years earlier. There's no record of Ezekiel delivering those prophecies to Israel, or of their being fulfilled up to this point.

We have also seen that the prophecy holds that there will be some within the Temple of God at the end who hide a type of worship that is an abomination to God. We are not talking about alleged God worshippers who, ignorantly, keep pagan holidays as a form of worship of God.

What God seems to be addressing is a group of leaders within the Temple or House or Church of God who are committing these abominations! These leaders would know better yet they harbor the sentiment in their hearts that God has abandoned His Church or Temple and that He isn't watching or seeing the evil that they do.

Because of these leaders, God unleashes destruction on Israel such that the land is filled with blood, and He refuses to spare anyone except those who sigh and cry for the wickedness of the land.

Wherever we believe Israel is in the last days, this prophecy remains unfulfilled. What can we do to avoid what is coming? Some would say to seek out those engaged in the idolatry and purge the Church/Temple of them. But, those leaders practice their idolatry in secret beyond the prying eyes of the brethren. This is not a practical solution. We ought not to engage in a witch hunt unless God points out who the witches are!

The solution for escape is right there in the prophecy. We need to be sighing and crying over the evil that is done. That evil needs to be something we cry out to God about.

We need to be holding fast the profession of our faith without wavering (or allowing those who practice evil to take us off the path that follows Jesus). We need to be provoking one another to love and to do good works, showing the outgoing love that is demonstrative of the Spirit of God residing within us.

We need to be regularly assembling with the brethren so that we can encourage and exhort each other, and even more so as we see the days of greater and greater evil approaching us.

We need to observe Leviticus 26:1 where we are told not to make idols for ourselves or to bow down to them. In context, we are told to keep God's Sabbaths and reverence His sanctuary (v. 2).

God takes His Temple seriously and Paul claims that we are His temple. Dragging idol worship into the Temple is considered an abomination to God! Yet, the prophecy is clear that this is exactly what will be done in God's Temple in the future—if not already.

Continuing reading in Leviticus 26 we find a series of blessings that will be poured out on us if we will only refrain from idol worship, keep God's Sabbaths and reverence His sanctuary.

We have been reviewing just one in a series of prophecies directed at Israel through Ezekiel. There are other dark prophecies the fulfillment of which are still ahead. The world is going to be a very dark place before it gets better.

However, if we turn back towards the end of the book of Ezekiel, we find that the news is not all bad that God is sending to Israel through Ezekiel! God is going to restore Israel and Judah in the end (chapter 37). He will reunite them and bring them into their own land, never more to be divided.

After that, there will be no more defiling with filthy idols because He will be their God and no other! We

know this is a future event because God says David will be king over them, the reunited houses of Israel. In that day, all of Israel and Judah, now one nation truly under God, will walk in God's judgments and will obey His laws and do them.

In that time, God will create an everlasting covenant of peace with reunited Israel and will dwell with them—forever! Until then, let us not rely on men to tell us what God desires of us but instead be like the noble Bereans, searching the scriptures daily to determine whether what we are told by our leaders is truth.

A twentieth century leader in the Worldwide Church of God, Herbert Armstrong, said often that he was not to be believed, that we should blow the dust off our Bibles and prove for ourselves what the truth is. That advice is as good today as it was when he first said it. We may get it wrong but this author believes that God honors our attempt to get it right far more so than the excuse "the minister you gave me did teach me that and I believed."

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Yahweh's Children
A website for kids

Have you searched for Sabbath-oriented activities for your children? Sometimes that can be challenging. We want our children to enjoy the Sabbath day, yet to learn appropriate activities acceptable to our Father.

Yahweh's Assembly in Messiah, Rocheport, Missouri, has a children's website which has been designed for this exact purpose. We have tried to make it eye-appealing for children and periodically change the background to keep it that way.

You will see, under "Bible Books," that we are putting actual books of the Bible online in a format easy for children to read with activities scattered throughout each segment. At the end of each chapter, there is an interactive quiz for them to take—no records kept.

www.yahwehschildren.org
www.yaim.org

From Darkness to Light?

by *Brian Knowles*



Uganda is a landlocked African nation slightly smaller than the state of Oregon. It is home to many tribes and at least three major religions: Roman Catholic (33%), Protestant (33%) and Muslim (16%). Another 18% represent indigenous beliefs. In 1894 Uganda became a British Protectorate. The country gained its independence from Britain in 1962.

Today, this republic of 33 million has been governed by a number of heads, the most notorious of which was the dreaded Idi Amin Dada, the very personification of evil.

On January 25, 1971, Amin, commander of the nation's armed forces overthrew the government headed by Milton Obote and declared himself President. He arrogated to himself absolute power. In 1976, he extended that rule to life. From the day he seized power, a pall of darkness descended over Uganda.

Amin began by expelling most of the nation's Indians and Pakistanis, who controlled much of the Uganda's small business. Political and tribal opponents were subjected to torture and violence. Between 1971 and 1979, as many as 300,000 Ugandans may have been slaughtered.

The country's economy fell into ruin and its infrastructure disintegrated. This did not stop Amin from invading neighboring Tanzania in 1978. He was aided by Libyan troops. The next year, Tanzania counter-attacked, capturing the capital, Kampala. The tyrant was driven into exile. The nation heaved a sigh of relief as Milton Obote was returned to power.

The sigh was short-lived. Obote too began a campaign of repression of his opponents. Furthermore, a rebellion in the north, led by The National Resistance Army (NRA) and Yoweri Museveni, broke out.

Obote again fled into exile in 1985. Lt. General Basilia Olara-Okello took the reins of power. His glory was also brief. In 1986 he too quickly exited stage left.

The power vacuum was then filled by Museveni, who, in 1986, organized a new government. Despite much turmoil, Museveni restored order and began rebuilding the country with help from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In 1994 a constituent assembly was elected and the next year it enacted a new constitution.



President Yoweri Museveni

In October of 2012, Uganda celebrated its 50th anniversary of freedom from British rule. President Museveni presided over National Jubilee prayers. Instead of reeling off the usual pious-sounding blather reserved for such occasions, the President did something possibly unique in modern political history: He repented of his, and his nation's, sins. He began, "Father God in Heaven, today we stand here as Ugandans and Africans. We thank you for all your goodness to us.

"I stand here today to close the evil past and especially in the last 50 years of our national leadership history and at the threshold of a new dispensation in the life of this nation. I stand here on my own behalf and on behalf of my predecessors to repent. We ask for your forgiveness.

"We confess these sins, which have greatly hampered our national cohesion and delayed our political, social and economic transformation."

The President then brought the focus down on specific sins: "We confess sins of idolatry and witchcraft which are rampant in our land. We confess sins of shedding innocent blood, sins of political hypocrisy, dishonesty, intrigue and betrayal."

The road Museveni has chosen for his nation and himself will be hard. Already the Western news media are attacking him for his stand on gay rights. The leftist *Los Angeles Times* has led the charge by editorializing:

“The criminalization of gay behavior cannot simply be explained away as part of a country’s cultural mores; rather it is an outrageous violation of fundamental human rights,” (November 27, 2012).

The *Times* calls Uganda and the thirty other African countries that outlaw homosexual activity “homophobic.” It is likely that the wrath of the West will focus on the issue of “gay rights” at the expense of all the other positive reforms Museveni is seeking to implement.

In closing his ground-breaking prayer, Museveni said this: “We want to dedicate this nation to you so that you will be our God and our guide. We want Uganda to be known as a nation that fears God and as a nation whose foundations are firmly rooted in righteousness and justice to fulfill what the Bible says in Psalm 33:12: ‘Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. A people you have chosen as your own.’”

He continued, “I renounce all the evil foundations and covenants that were laid in idolatry and witchcraft. I renounce all the satanic influence on this nation. And I hereby covenant Uganda to you, to walk in your ways and experience all your blessings forever.

“I pray for all these in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

The prayers were jointly developed by Uganda Jubilee Network, an association of Anglican, Evangelical and Pentecostal churches.

Christians everywhere might pray for the success of this well-meaning grouping of God-fearing leaders, no matter how much they may disagree with the particulars of any given denominational theology. Uganda is experiencing a positive revolution that can only result in good if it is allowed to flourish. We can expect the enemy to do all that he can to sabotage this noble effort. As the light spreads, darkness will be there to engulf it like a

black hole. Any leader or nation that embraces godly principles can expect to be viciously attacked.

Yoweri Museveni is a hero of the faith. As he seeks to “fundamentally transform” his nation from darkness to light, other national leaders are doing the opposite. Syria’s leader, for example, is slaughtering his own people by the tens of thousands in a desperate bid to cling to power. The so-called “Arab Spring” in the Middle East is replacing one kind of darkness with another — Egypt being a case in point.

It will be important for Museveni to maintain balance. In the past, well-meaning Christian zealots have created oppressive ecclesiastical tyrannies that have resulted in burnings at the stake, torture, inquisitions, forced conversions etc. If Christians don’t live the godly life on the basis of unforced choice their faith is bogus. The eyes of a hostile world will be upon Uganda’s grand Christian experiment. Will it succeed or fail? If the people of the nation get behind their leaders, it stands a chance. If there follows a genuine national repentance, revival could occur.

Ideally, church and state should be separate entities. Attempts at theocracy seldom work. Of course in Uganda, a theocracy may not be intended. Time will tell how Museveni’s positive reforms will work out. The nation bears watching. Meanwhile, many other corrupt national leaders could take some notes from Uganda’s remarkable example. The shift from darkness to light could work — if the people of the nation get behind it and the major evils are driven out.

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).

“Gospel” of Judas Free of Forgeries But Still “Fake, Heretical,” Says New Testament Scholar

A member of the media looks at pages of the original manuscript of the Gospel of Judas on display at the National Geographic headquarters in Washington, DC. The National Geographic unveiled the ancient manuscript dating from the third or fourth century.

By Katherine Weber, Christian Post Reporter, April 11, 2013, 7:48 pm

Researchers have recently revealed their methods for determining that the Gospel of Judas, a fragmented Coptic text traced to Egypt in approximately A.D. 280, is in fact free of forgeries.

Daniel B. Wallace, professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, contends that although the text may in fact be free of forgeries, it carries no historic credibility, and proves to be a fake gospel that paints a heretic view of Jesus.

The text, which was discovered in Egypt in the 1970s, was analyzed in a 2006 National Geographic Society investigation by a team of researchers led by microscopist Joseph Barabe of McCrone Associates in Illinois to determine if the ancient Egyptian text raised any red flags regarding forgeries.

The text describes Judas Iscariot, one of the biblical 12 apostles who betrayed Jesus to Sanhedrin priests, as being an ally of Jesus, turning the son of God over to the authorities at his request so that his spirit may be released from his physical body.

Living Faith

“The Just Shall Live by Faith”

By Terril D. Littrell, Ph.D.



Faith is not something that we must pray to receive. It is something that we already have. In four places, the Bible makes it clear that, “the just shall live by faith” (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). The faith about which the Scriptures speak is living faith.

Faith is the seed that is divinely imparted to us when we are born into the human family. It is a spark of the divine that we all share. We have it because it is produced in our hearts by the action of the Word of God; therefore, our faith is governed by divine law and is based in God’s faithfulness.

Our everyday lives would be totally dysfunctional if it were not for this simple faith that God and his laws are entirely dependable. A baby feels perfectly secure, having faith in his mother’s arms. When we step out of bed, we have faith that the floor is intact. When we take an elevator to the top floor of a skyscraper, we have faith that we will be safe. When we fly on a transoceanic flight, we have faith we will arrive safe and sound.

Faith is the link that connects us to a living; supernatural God. Faith keeps the Christian experience from being superficial and keeps us in contact with an ever-present God in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, and today, and forever. Faith makes it possible for us to communicate with God, to talk with him and him with us.

The Beginning of Faith

Faith begins its work in our lives when we choose to believe in God. The first article of faith in the ancient Apostles’ Creed declares, “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.”

The centrality of our relationship with God is faith. Paul tells us that “without faith it is impossible to please God, for whosoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” Faith says, “I believe,” “I trust,” “I obey.” Then faith begins to work for us personally when we hear from God.

The Bible tells us that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). If we believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that

Jesus is the Christ, we shall be saved (Romans 10:9). When we confess or affirm with positive action that God is present with us even in our mouth, immediately faith will rise in our very being. When we confess God’s Word, we find ourselves among those whom Jesus described: “them also who believe on me through their word” (John 17:20). It is through faith that we hear and accept the word of the gospel and become children of God through the Messiah.

Once we are part of God’s family, he invites us to seek and worship him and to receive his abundance of blessings. When we listen to God, seek his direction, know his will for our lives, and take the steps of obedience to his revealed will, we take God as our partner and begin our faith walk with him.

Then, our faith in God always acts promptly and boldly! It reaches out, takes hold, and moves forward. Faith acts even when we do not see with our eyes. Our faith says, “there is a God,” and “With God all things are possible.” God and we form a majority, for the Bible says, “If God be for us who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).

Faith is our spiritual capital in the bank of heaven. It is held on reserve for us to use when we need it. The dividends that it returns to us depends on the investment that we make.

The Basis of Faith

Faith is founded on the promises of God and on the faithfulness of God. We can always trust God to be faithful to keep his promises. This is why the Bible says, “Now faith is....” Faith is present tense, right now! It is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Said another way, faith gives substance to our hopes and makes us certain of realities that we do not see.

The Function of Faith

Faith functions to make the promises of God, which are unseen, real and substantial to us. Faith is that highly specialized energy that gives our mental, emotional, and physical being expression to what we believe. Abraham was given promises by God; therefore, he “staggered not at the promises of God.” He demon-

strated his faith in God's promises by being obedient and faithful to the divine will and plan of God.

Without obedience and faithfulness to God's Commandments and promises on our part, faith cannot work in our lives.

The Planting Stage of Faith

The first stage of faith is the planting stage. We plant the seed of faith by taking action. We set a goal, and we find a sense of direction. When we get started, the seed of faith is germinated. The lesson we learn about planting faith is this: Don't wait on God; he is waiting on us! We start with faith, not fear. We start with our eyes and hearts on possibilities, not problems. We put one foot in front of the other and step out on God's promises. Planting faith says, "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

This is when we learn to focus totally on God.

We bring God into our problems. We remember that every problem contains the seed of its own solution, and we trust God to open our eyes to see the solution that is contained within the problem itself. We plant a seed of faith, fully expecting that God will cause it to grow.

The Developing Stage of Faith

The second stage of faith is development wherein our confidence in God stimulates belief so that our faith grows and is strengthened. Belief is not faith, but it is a partner to faith. We immediately learn that there is power in belief when we dare to believe in the promises of God, dare to believe in ourselves and our potential as God strengthens us.

Believing is the activity that keeps faith on the job until it has made an unseen reality substantial. One thing is certain: we can only achieve what we dare to believe. Jesus made it clear to us: "All things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23). Genuine faith always involves total commitment.

The Persistence Stage of Faith

As faith works in our hearts, we struggle. Things get tough, and we experience pain. We find ourselves surrounded by impossibilities, and we are tempted to quit; however, we persist. We never believe in never. We refuse to accept defeat. We dig in and hang on. This is when we deepen our roots in faith. We work hard and we play by the rules of the game—God's instructions. We endure pain; we keep on keeping on because we know that God is faithful and he expects us to be faithful too.

While we persist in faith we avoid the trap of presumption, which is a wrongly motivated, misguided perversion of faith. Part of the problem of presumption

is the assumption that God will do something for us when the truth is that God will do something with us. It is only when we have done everything within our own power that God reaches beyond our human limitations and performs miracles.

God is not just the good Santa Claus in heaven: we tell him what we want, and he just gives it to us. We name it and claim it. This, however, is not the way the law of the universe called faith works. The way to avoid presumption is to know the will of God. We cannot ask amiss if we ask inside God's will. We must be sure that we are motivated by the spirit to serve others rather than by a spirit of materialism. We cannot serve God and mammon.

Presumption is not faith in God; it is faith in faith. This is why there is no painless faith. We must endure hardness as a good soldier; we must bear the cross to gain the crown. There must be balance between testing and rewarding.

The Productive Stage of Faith

The productive stage of faith begins when we let go and let God. We affirm the promises of God by confessing his Word, not to remind God of his Word, but to affirm our faith in his Word. We receive what we confess in faith believing in Jesus name. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). This is the sequence of confession: I can, I will, I did.

Confession, however, must always agree with the Word and will of God. Faith produces energy when we speak God's Word, not our words. The Word of God is powerful and creative. Just as God spoke his Word and all things came into existence, speaking his Word will bring nonexistence into reality.

The Mountain-Moving Stage of Faith

Scripture tells us that the trying of our faith produces patience, and patience has its perfect work (Romans 5:3-4). It is this patience-powered faith that has mountain-moving energy. Jesus said, "Speak to the mountain. Say to it, Be moved!" (Matthew 21:21). There are mountains everywhere. In our lives, they are insurmountable obstacles, but these mountains only exist so that they can be moved by faith.

When we believe that the grace of God can move our mountain or provide us a way over, under, or through it, we begin to see the miraculous power of God that removes obstacles before us and makes a way where there seems to be no way.

Mountain-moving is initiated in such a minute portion of faith that Jesus likened it to a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds. If a mustard seed is planted in the right place, it can dislodge a boulder that can trigger

an avalanche that can remove a mountain! Too often we look for too much when God is looking for a little—faith, that is!

As God’s children today we don’t need more faith. We simply need to learn how to live by the faith that God has planted in our lives. We are chosen of God to be full of faith and faithful. It is our nature as children of God.

So, think about it. Believe it. Act upon it. Be patient about it. It will happen to you, and you will experience the joy of knowing that the just shall live by faith.

*Dr. Terril D. Littrell is a minister and educator with over forty years of experience in instructing believers in biblical faith. Dr. Littrell became a member of the Bible Sabbath Association in 1961. He served as assistant editor of *The Sabbath Sentinel* in 1967, and served on the Board of Directors from 1967–1969. He was elected president of the B.S.A. from 1970–1978.*

Voice For Life Wins! Pro-Life Group Granted Rights as Official Student Club of Johns Hopkins University

April 10th, 2013

ANN ARBOR, MI – The Thomas More Law Center (TMLC) a national public interest law firm based in Ann Arbor, Michigan, announced this morning that the Student Government Association (SGA) Judiciary Committee of Johns Hopkins University (JHU) issued a unanimous decision late yesterday evening overturning a SGA ruling that denied recognition to Voice for Life (VFL) as an official student club of the University.

TMLC, whose mission includes defending the constitutional rights of pro-life groups and individuals, representing VFL, authored an April 4th letter to top Johns Hopkins University officials and the SGA Judiciary Committee laying out the legal basis requiring recognition of VFL. However, Andrew Guernsey, VFL’s president and Chris Fernandez, VFL’s treasurer, presented VFL’s case to the SGA Judiciary Committee last night.

Responding to the decision, Andrew Guernsey commented: “We commend the SGA Judiciary for honoring Johns Hopkins’ institutional commitment to free speech by overturning Voice for Life’s rejection by the SGA Senate. Today is a victory not only for pro-life students here at Johns Hopkins, but for pro-life students around the country. We hope that our story of rising above discriminatory opposition can inspire pro-life students around the country to courageously take a stand for life and speak truth to power at their own college campuses.”

The Thomas More Law Center defends and promotes America’s Christian heritage and moral values, including the religious freedom of Christians, time-honored family values, and the sanctity of human life.

A Study in the Scriptures

The Cost of Being a Disciple

by Bryant Buck



One thing we know for sure from the Scriptures is that Jesus is looking for disciples — not just believers. One of the Free Dictionary’s definitions for a disciple is “an active adherent, as of a movement or philosophy.” To be an active adherent of any movement, you cannot just be involved in that movement one or two days a week. Thus, as an active adherent in any movement you identify with, and you are involved in that movement seven days a week, 365 days a year. There are a number of verses in the gospels which bring out this truth that true disciples of Yeshua commit to following Him all day every day.

In Mark 1:16-20 (NAS) we read these words: “As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending their nets. Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.” Think about this: Jesus didn’t describe either the food or the lodging accommodations when He called these four men to be His disciples. He didn’t promise them any student scholarships or grants nor did he make any mention of any paychecks. Plus he called these men in the middle of their working day to just get up and leave their gainful occupation to follow Him. There is a high price on real discipleship. It may cost you your job; it may mean no regular paycheck and no guaranteed meals or sleeping accommodations. When my wife and I were in our 20’s, Jesus called us to leave our jobs and move to another town 40 miles away from where we lived to get involved in another church there. It was our call to discipleship and Jesus honored our obedience through many difficult trials later in life.

“As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, ‘I will follow You wherever You go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head’” (Luke 9:57-58 NAS). In this case Jesus described the lack of good sleeping accommodations to this volunteer. Since we hear nothing more of this volunteer after this passage, undoubtedly his declaration “I will follow You wherever You go” was just religious bluster. In truth, He wouldn’t follow Jesus without regular sleeping accommodations. “And He said to another, ‘Follow Me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.’ But He said to him, ‘Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God’” (Luke 9:59-60 NAS). This man’s request to first bury his father seems like a reasonable request. But his request shows that Jesus was not first in his

life. How often do we put what is humanly reasonable in front of what is spiritually beyond our reason? But if what is beyond our reason is the call of Jesus, then we should forget what is humanly reasonable and follow Jesus.

"Another also said, 'I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.' But Jesus said to him, 'No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God'" (Luke 9:61-62 NAS). From Christ's reply we can see that this man had started to follow Him. This would-be disciple had put his hand to the plow of discipleship, but his heart was still with his family back at home. Again his request to say good-bye to his family was reasonable, but the call of the Lord Jesus goes beyond our reason. If you follow your own reason and the acceptable behavior of the human race, you will find it extremely difficult to be Yeshua's disciple.

You have to trust the Lord to be His disciple. Yeshua won't show you everything that is down your road of discipleship at the time He calls you. If you insist on figuring out what Christ is doing when He calls you, you will miss His call. But if you hang in there a while, He will pull you through the times when you become discouraged with His call.

Peter hit this point midway in His following through on Christ's call on his life. "Peter began to say to Him, 'We have left everything and followed You'" (Mark 10:28 NAS).

Peter was discouraged; he had hit the point where he felt that he wasn't going anywhere in giving up everything to follow Yeshua. "Jesus said, 'Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life'" (Mark 10:29-30 NAS). What is Jesus telling His disciples here? If you hang in there, if you respond to His call and don't give up on it when it seems like nothing is happening, the Lord will give you far more than whatever you gave up when you responded to His call. Now the brothers and sisters Christ gives you in your discipleship may not be the same ones you gave up, but you will be blessed with the brothers and sisters He gives you. You simply cannot out-give the Lord. If you become His disciple and give up everything for Jesus, He will give you far more than your heart can imagine.

In closing this brief Bible study, I need to point out that along with the blessings of following the Lord Jesus, He has forewarned us that we will also receive persecutions (see Mark 10:30 above). That's the bad news. The good news is that the persecutions will only last for the duration of our life here on earth. The judgment for sinners who don't follow Jesus will last for eternity. So why not be Christ's disciple and respond to His call? There is no greater life that you can have here on earth.

*Bryant, a BSA board member, is the founder and leader of Solid Rock Home Fellowship in Freeport, Illinois. After retiring from a career selling life and health insurance, Bryant has gone on to pursue his love of writing. He now has two published books: **The Prayer Warrior** and **My First Christian ABC Book**.*

Benson: "Conversation Starters" cont. from page 11.

Share a verse you have committed to memory and discuss it.

Discuss the history of God's church all the way to the first century.

Share your favorite hymn and explain why.

Describe the best Sabbath ever.

Why are we here?

World events are happening quickly. What does the Bible say is in store for humanity before Christ returns?

Discuss the importance of family in God's plan for humanity.

How can you stay focused on the Kingdom of God?

How can you seek a clean heart and stay humble before God?

How does Bible study, prayer, meditation and fasting help you to bear the fruits of the Spirit?

How can you build unity of God's Spirit among your family and Church brethren?

How can you stay grounded in the core doctrines of the Bible and not be blown about by every wind of doctrine?

How can you seek balance in all areas of life? Luke 2:52: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."

How can we face problems realistically and maintain a positive attitude? Philippians 4:8 "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

How different would the world be if people just lived by the Ten Commandments?

Is living in the Kingdom a reward for a job well done, or is it a necessity: you absolutely have got to be with Christ like you need air to breathe.

For the kids:

How do good manners show respect for other people and for God? Give examples.

Play Twenty Questions. Think of something or someone from the Bible and have someone else ask questions about it and guess who or what you have chosen.

Talk about a Bible story you heard in Sabbath School: Sampson, Elijah, etc.

Describe the best Sabbath ever.

Why are we here?

When God works with children, they are:

1. called by God
2. they must experience conversion (changing their lives)
3. they must make a commitment to God

*Julia Benson lives in southern Minnesota and serves as an editor and proofreader for **The Sabbath Sentinel**.*

“Born of a Virgin”

by Terrell Perkins



Most of worldly Christendom venerates the story of Christ's birth and Mary the mother of Christ as the "Virgin mother of God"¹. The story of Christ's birth is closely related to the doctrine of being born again as will be shown. Most evangelical Christians believe that they are born again for simply accepting Christ as their savior. A careful study of the scriptures will reveal a different picture of these teachings than the ones widely held. The story of Mary and Christ's birth reveals an important part of God's plan to His people.

The story of the virgin birth is often overlooked by Sabbatarian churches because it's the focus of so much attention by Catholics and Protestants. Ironically those who focus so much on it don't actually seem to know, or care, what the scriptures really say. They accept tradition in place of scriptural teaching. While the story has been twisted and skewed by non-biblical sources over the centuries, God ensured that we have the scriptures to come back to for the truth.

God doesn't do anything by accident. He reveals His plan to us in several ways through His word. His Holy Days reveal His overall plan of working with mankind. He reveals His personal plan of salvation through the design of the Tabernacle in the wilderness. He reveals His plan for the spiritual birth for His children, the Body of Christ, in the story of Mary and her child's birth. These "layers of truth" are one of the proofs of the Bible being God's revealed word to mankind.

Mary (Miriam in Hebrew) was betrothed to the carpenter Joseph when the angel Gabriel came to her and told her she was to bear a child. Mary was a virgin, untouched by a man...neither had she ever served another god. A betrothal in the Judea of Mary's time was quite different than today. The marriage would have been arranged by her parents. Joseph was probably a much older man, established in his career and able to support a family. The betrothal was a binding legal contract. Jewish custom recognized a betrothal as a marriage even before consummation. Such an agreement could only be broken by an official decree of divorce.

When Joseph learned of Mary's pregnancy he wrestled with what to do. The law allowed that he could have her brought before the elders to be stoned to death for infidelity. He thought instead to quietly divorce her without making it public until an angel appeared to him in a dream. The angel explained that Mary was to fulfill the prophecy that a virgin would give birth to the one who would be the savior. Joseph, being a righteous man, obeyed what the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary home as his wife. He didn't touch her until after Christ's birth.

The rest of the story is well known except, perhaps, for the fact that Mary was no longer a virgin after Christ's birth. In fact she went on to bear him several half-brothers and sisters. What I would draw the reader's attention to here is that Mary was a devout and righteous woman, legally betrothed when the Holy Spirit came to her and impregnated her with the one who would be Christ.

Many times in the scriptures is the church symbolized by a woman, as was the nation of Israel, because it is through women that new lives come into existence. The church is likened to a virgin, a pure and chaste woman untouched by a man. A harlot is symbolic of a false church because she has allowed other spirits to enter her. Mary was a type of the church. Her story, the story of a virgin giving birth is recorded in God's word as an analogy and a lesson for His church.

The church, the spiritual organism that is the likened to the Body of Christ, will one day officially become the Bride of Christ. Before that ceremony those who truly accept Christ and begin to obey God are given His Holy Spirit. The Body of Christ is the betrothed of God and receives God's Spirit in a way not unlike the way Mary did. The church is, in a sense, impregnated by God.

What Mary went through, being imbued with the Holy Spirit before her marriage and then bringing forth the son of God is a type of the process the church is going through. The Holy Spirit is given to human be-

ings before the marriage of the Lamb. Those so imbued are the betrothed of God. When they “come to term” at Christ’s return they will be born again...born of the spirit. It is in the church that the children of God are nurtured and it is through the church, the virgin mother, that new spirit beings will be born.

To enter God’s Kingdom one must be “born again.”² The process of being “Born Again,” however, is widely misunderstood. All those born of the spirit ARE spirit. A careful study of the third chapter of John will make that clear. Christ was the firstborn of God and until Christ returns no one else will be born of the spirit.

Members of The Body of Christ enter into a new covenant with God when they accept Christ. That’s the way God deals with His people. A covenant is a kind of binding legal contract. Both parties in a contract agree to do something for the other. Mary was impregnated with the Holy Spirit before her marriage. The members of the Body of Christ, the church, have been given the Holy Spirit before the marriage of the lamb. In both cases a covenant was entered into.

The covenant Christians are a part of is likened in the scriptures to a marriage covenant. That covenant will be officially sealed with the marriage ceremony of the Lamb. While the new covenant Christ spoke of is yet to come, the betrothed are legally bound by that covenant now.

When God “became engaged” to physical Israel He did so before giving them His Holy Spirit. He entered into a covenant relationship with the physical nation of Israel. Because Israel didn’t live up to their part of that covenant that relationship changed. God is still betrothed to Israel but the physical nation of Israel has been changed to include members not of the physical nation. (Those who are descendants of Abraham and Isaac.) The scriptures use the analogy of a vine, a living thing connected to the source of life. Those called of God who are not of the physical nation of Israel have been grafted onto the vine. They are now a part of the covenant God made with Israel. The nature of God’s relationship with those He is working with has changed. He is now giving His Holy Spirit to those He is working with. It is receiving His Holy Spirit which binds believers in a covenant with God.

For members of the church to receive God’s Holy Spirit they should not defile themselves with other spirits. The church, ideally, should remain pure and chaste to become Christ’s bride. The reality is teachings of

other spirits have entered into the Body of Christ. There are always spiritual forces that seek to destroy the Body of Christ. That’s why vigilance on the part of believers is essential. Additionally men have added their own teachings to those revealed by God. The doctrines of demons are meant to lead believers astray and the traditions of men can and do change. That is why we have the scriptures to come back to.³

Christ was born as a physical, mortal human being. In a sense Christ did the reverse of what His brethren will do. He stepped out of eternity and became flesh; he went from being spirit into being born a physical being. Those sons and daughters of God yet to be born will go from being born of the flesh to being born of the spirit. God’s new Sons and Daughters will be born again when Christ returns. They will be born of the spirit and given spirit bodies. Mary bore a sinless being. When the church bares God’s sons and daughters they too will be sinless because they will no longer sin.

The scriptures are full of such parallels. Consider one example in the story of Abraham being willing to sacrifice his only son Isaac to prove his faith towards God. God showing His faith towards us, so to speak, when He sacrificed His only son Christ for us.

End Notes

1. Like some early followers of Christ, many regard Mary as a higher than Christ. That has become a Catholic tradition. Some modern Christians regard their church as somehow more important than Christ. Both are wrong.
2. It is often overlooked that those people who survive into the millennium as physical beings will NOT be in the Kingdom of God. The scriptures are clear, flesh and blood cannot inherit God’s kingdom. It is not until they are changed into spirit bodies, born of the spirit, that they will enter the Kingdom. How that will happen is not stated in the scriptures. They may die and be resurrected in spirit bodies or perhaps they will be changed before they die. The story of Adam and Eve seems to indicate that there will no longer be pain in the birth process.
3. The Body of Christ can never stop seeking the truths of God in the Scriptures.

Terrell Perkins graduated from Ambassador College in 1981, and has been a Sabbath keeper for about 35 years. Terrell lives in Capitan, New Mexico, and works as an artist-blacksmith hand forging metal sculptures and architectural hardware and furniture. Terrell has been a freelance writer for over 20 years.

The Church in the World

Wednesday, 03 April 2013

EXTREMIST MUSLIM REBELS TAKE OVER CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC; CHRISTIAN PROPERTY TARGETED

Country/Region: Africa, Central African Republic

Church buildings have been attacked and the homes of Christians looted in the aftermath of a bloody coup by a band of Muslim rebels in the Central African Republic (CAR).



President François Bozizé was ousted by the rebel coup

The Seleka rebels seized control of the country on 24 March following a three-month uprising. Their leader, Michel Djotodia, has assumed the presidency from the ousted François Bozizé, becoming the predominantly Christian nation's first Muslim president.

Days of chaos and looting followed the takeover, with Christian property being targeted by the rebels, while that belonging to Muslims was spared.

A senior church leader said that the rebels destroyed a number of church buildings when they entered the south-eastern town of Bangassou. The house of a seminary rector was robbed and destroyed, and a mechanic severely beaten when he would not reveal where church-owned vehicles were kept. A Baptist church in Bambari was also destroyed.

A Christian in the capital Bangui said:

"We are no longer at home. They pillage our goods which are then sold by the Muslims who export them."

ISLAMIST TAKEOVER?

The rebellion spread from the North, where CAR's Muslim minority is concentrated, and has had a militant Islamic character. The Seleka rebels are said to follow Wahhabism, an extreme and puritanical version of Islam that is practised in Saudi Arabia.

When Djotodia arrived at the Bangui mosque for Friday prayers following the takeover, Muslims chanted "Allahu Akbar" ("god is great"), the oft-used cry of militant Islamists.

One woman said, "They say, 'It's our turn now. We will make you pay.'"

Djotodia has insisted that CAR is a secular state and that he "must serve my country, all Central Africans" but admitted that "some people with bad intentions want to lead the country into inter-religious conflict."

Christians, who comprise around 75% of the population, and Muslims, who account for around 15%, have previously lived peaceably together.

CAR has had a succession of unstable, military governments since it gained independence in 1960. Ousted president Bozizé himself came to power in a coup ten years ago.

It is currently in a lawless state. On 25 March, Djotodia suspended the constitution, announced the dissolution of the National Assembly and said that he intends to rule by decree.

The violent takeover has been condemned by the African Union, the UN Security Council and the US.

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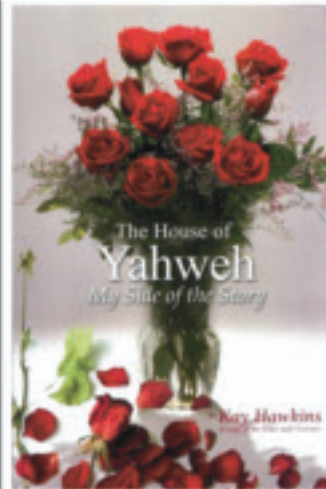
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