

The Sabbath Sentinel

July–August 2011



**Joplin, Missouri,
May 23, 2011**

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

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

The Sabbath Sentinel

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Is God Angry with Us?



No, I don't mean you personally. Is God angry at our nation and other Western countries that have given up their Christian birthright for a bowl of lentils? Are we Jacob or Esau?

The West spawned the idea of individual freedom, a governing principle that grew out of the Protestant Reformation. As each individual was responsible before God for his personal salvation, so governments were responsible for facilitating the relationship between man and God, nourishing it by guaranteeing the freedom to choose how each person should live his life. That approach, based on the Bible, produced the spectacular fruit of centuries of incredible innovation, personal freedom, and unimagined personal and national wealth.

However, as the memory of Christ and His ways fades from public consciousness, we are witnessing the collapse of the great European and American economies and a rising tide of natural disasters. We have exchanged a reliance on God as the supplier of our needs for the pursuit of bread and circuses. We have chosen Caesar over the God of Creation.

Natural Disasters

Unless one has been living in a cave for the past several years, it is impossible not to notice the spate of unnatural "natural" disasters that continue to occur—earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, hurricanes, tornadoes, and more floods, and more tornadoes. And, let's not forget all the new and more potent diseases: the untreatable European E-coli, bird flu, swine flu, AIDS, and the myriad of cancer types that now exist. The degree of human suffering that was once distant from us is now beginning to wash over our own shores. Is this because we have turned away from God?

Many will say that God does not do that sort of thing anymore, that during Old Testament times God brought calamity on nations and punished Israel for its idolatry, but we are now living under a New Testament dispensation of grace. God's anger at human behavior has been quenched by the sacrifice of His Son Jesus on the cross. But, is this an accurate picture of how the God of the universe judges nations?

There is no future judgment for nations—only individuals. Nations are a social arrangement of individuals

and communities that exist at a specific time in history. They have no possibility of eternal life as individuals do. For these reasons nations have to be judged and rewarded or punished during the time they exist. For example, there is no future judgment for Rome, or Greece, or ancient Babylon. Their days have come and gone, and they were judged by God during the time they existed. Can we expect God to act today any differently toward the U.S., Britain, Canada, Australia, or any other modern nation who owes its free society to the founding principles of Scripture?

It is quite revealing that the book of the Bible which the founders of the American Republic referred to most often is not found in the New Testament. It is the book of Deuteronomy, the section of the Torah that lays out the foundational principles of good national governance. It was their intention to model the new American government after the eternal principles of citizenship and governance found in Scripture. Given this fact, should we not be calling our nation to return to the principles of our founding? How are we to be judged less harshly than the ancient nation of Israel? "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

So, I return to my original question. Is God angry with us? Is our abandonment of Christ and Christian living bringing His judgment on us in the form of tornadoes, floods, drought, wildfires, and other natural disasters? One thing is certain; we are not being protected from the disasters that have always plagued the "gentile," pagan nations.

Fading Morality

"...the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Is this not a description of society today? Nonetheless, this passage comes from Exodus 32. When Moses went to the mountain to receive the tablets of the Ten Commandments, the people begged Moses' brother, Aaron, to make them an idol they could worship, so Aaron took gold from the people and fashioned a golden calf. After the people had

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When Churches Split

by *Kenneth Westby*



Splits happen. There have been many, and there will be many more. They occur in all denominations and for that matter in just about any human organization. I experienced a big one first hand.

They called me “the Devil,” well, maybe not THE Devil, or THE Satan, but a bad hombre under the devil’s influence. I was accused of being used by the Prince of Darkness to attack “the church,” to cause a split. Heavy stuff. I was innocent of the charge and wasn’t pushing for a split, but what does that matter?

Who were the “they” to which I refer? The “they” were the human heads of God’s One and Only True Church, the OTC. They were the most important humans on earth, spiritually speaking, to use the proper caveat. More heavy stuff.

What was the crime that prompted my firing and energetic denunciation? Simply this: I questioned church practices, ethics, and doctrine and suggested reforms. In this I was not alone as 35 other ministers were of the same opinion on the same issues, and they too were fired. It now seems a lifetime ago.

Since I seemed to be a leader the devil label was pinned on me and great calamity ensued: The human heads of the OTC (One True Church) warned the confused and wavering brethren that this may be the end-time sign when Satan launches his attack to destroy The Church. Hold fast. Don’t listen to the evil dissidents. Do what we tell you. Send money.

The OTC survived the 1974 faux attack and could continue to ignore or hide its problems—at least until the next crisis. Problems ignored stay problems and future crises are guaranteed to come. And come they did until finally the OTC broke into many pieces, with a few sharp and nasty ones still thinking themselves the OTC. Nevertheless, the breakup proved therapeutic and liberating for many. But the departed individual Christian was now left standing alone before God and responsible to discover His will—without the false comfort of hiding behind the OTC, its correct dogma, and its ministers knowing God’s will and administering God’s authority.

Once out of a high-commitment cult or church organization, it becomes just you and God. That can be scary at first, but can prove to be the best thing that ever happened to promote individual growth and Christian maturity. I think most find this to be their story.

High Drama

In the months leading up to and for many months following a church split emotions move in hyper drive, emails and phone calls shoot into the ether like anti-aircraft flack, bad motives generously attributed (rightly or wrongly), lists of sympathizers and “enemies” develop, leaders emerge, fence sitters are pushed, and preparations get legal and irreversible. The high drama distorts facts, but that’s called the fog of war. Meanwhile a lot of church members minding their own business wonder what all the commotion is about. It seems to be a minister’s brawl. Preachers who lecture on how to live harmoniously apparently need more mirror time. One side has one story as the opposite side tells another. Good luck on finding out the real scoop. Sometimes it takes a decade or two before the pieces come together giving the real picture of why it all happened.

Big church splits, firings, and purges produce strange phenomena. One day the church has loyal faithful employees, effective and good-hearted ministers; the next day, these same individuals are evil plotters, disloyal dissenters, snakes, inciters to rebellion (which, you must remember, is akin to witchcraft), attackers of the OTC and the poor innocent brethren within, etc., etc.

Page flipping loyalists quickly amass Scriptures describing the crisis. The tender, helpless tithe-paying flock must be protected from these self-serving plotters who have “gone the way of Balaam,” and forsaken “the faith once delivered” (to the OTC leaders, of course). The End Times are headlined “in the last days deceivers shall arise...” The end is near for Satan has come with wrath attacking the church. Send money.

In my case, all this and more were packed in 10-12 page legal size letters whisked out to the East Coast by church jets to hit the post offices fast and crush the supposed rebellion. It worked—at least in the short term. Reputations were ruined, former friends fled in fear, church members were left befuddled and confused. To what end?

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Anna the Prophetess

And the Hope of All Israel

by Doug Ward

Traditional Christian nativity scenes give a convenient visual summary of people and events connected with the birth of Jesus. They generally include Mary, Joseph, and the infant Jesus, with a manger and animals, often accompanied by shepherds, angels, and magi.

As with any shorthand representation of reality, a nativity scene sacrifices some precision and detail for the sake of simplicity. Nativity scenes that include both shepherds and magi collapse together two separate events, since the magi probably arrived in Bethlehem some months after the shepherds. A more accurate portrayal would require two separate scenes, one at a manger and another at the house visited by the magi (Matt. 2:11).

In between the two Bethlehem snapshots we could insert a third scene, at the temple complex in Jerusalem. About six weeks after the birth of Jesus, his family traveled from Bethlehem to Jerusalem to present the offerings prescribed in Lev. 12 (Luke 2:22-24). In this scene Jesus and his parents are joined by Simeon, an old man who blesses God for the coming of the Messiah and prophesies about the implications of Jesus' birth (Luke 2:25-35); and by Anna, an elderly widow who also rejoices in the birth of the Messiah.

Although this third scene is sometimes overlooked—it is not included in the movie *The Nativity Story*, for example—it has much to teach us. From the fact that Joseph and Mary made the trip to Jerusalem, we learn that they were observant Jews, careful to carry out the requirements of the *Torah*. From the fact that they could not afford a lamb for the offering (Luke 2:24; Lev. 12:8), we find out that they were not wealthy.¹ Simeon's prophecy highlights the importance of the birth of the Messiah as well as the trials and challenges that Jews in general, and Mary in particular, would face as a result of that birth.

And what about Anna? Luke's description of her is brief:

There was also a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old, having been married to her husband for seven years until his death. She had lived as a widow since then for eighty-four years. She never left the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment, she came up to them and began to give thanks to God and



Rembrandt's depiction of Anna the Prophetess

to speak about the child to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:36-38, NETBible).

It turns out, however, that these few verses have a great deal to tell us about where Anna was from, why she was named Anna, why she was drawn to the temple, and what the birth of Jesus meant for her personally. My purpose in this article is to explore, with the help of some fascinating research by New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham ([1], [2]), what Luke intended to communicate in his short account of Anna.

Anna's Name and Tribe

To begin, we note that Anna's name can also be written in English as "Hannah". The original biblical Hannah, mother of the prophet Samuel, was a prophetess herself (1 Sam. 2:1-10). It is very likely that Luke intended his readers to connect the two, since he seems to emphasize the parallels between Samuel and

Jesus in Luke 1-2. The parallels between 1 Sam. 1-3 and Luke 1-2 include the following [4]:

- The births of both Samuel and Jesus were miraculous, and both were accompanied by great thanksgiving.
- Both Samuel and Jesus were presented before God by their parents (1 Sam. 1:22,24; Luke 2:22). The parents of both received a blessing during their visits to the house of God (1 Sam. 2:20; Luke 2:34).
- With their parents not present, both Samuel and Jesus were active at the house of God at relatively early ages (1 Sam. 3; Luke 2:42-49).
- Both were said to have “grown in favor with God and man” as they grew up (1 Sam. 2:26; 3:19; Luke 2:40, 52).²

There is additional significance in the name Anna in Luke 2, as we shall see soon. To understand this significance, we will need to consider another piece of information from Luke 2:36: the fact that Anna came from the tribe of Asher, one of the northern tribes of Israel. What did this detail mean to the original readers of the Gospel of Luke?

Bauckham ([1], pp. 163-164) explains that in the time of Jesus, Jews did not think of the northern tribes as being “lost.” A first-century Jew who heard about a person from the tribe of Asher living in Jerusalem would have had some good guesses about that person’s background. Bauckham carefully examines what those guesses might have been.

One possibility is that Anna could have come from northwestern Galilee, the traditional homeland of the tribe of Asher. Many people from this region were taken captive by the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser in about 733 B.C. (see e.g. 2 Kings 15:29), but others were left behind. When King Hezekiah of Judah organized a special Passover celebration at Jerusalem about twenty years later, he invited people from the northern tribes, and a few, including some from the tribe of Asher, made the trip to Jerusalem (2 Chron. 30:10-11).

Galilee was inhabited mostly by Gentiles by the time of the Maccabees in the second century B.C., but there was apparently still an Israelite minority living in the region (see 1 Macc. 5:21-23). When the Hasmoneans took control of Galilee, they replaced pagan settlements by Jewish ones, bringing in many Jewish families from Judea ([1], p. 165).

By Jesus’ time there was a lot of friction between Israelites and Gentiles in the Galilee region. An Israelite from a family that had maintained its tribal identity through the centuries undoubtedly would have been very patriotic and loyal to Jerusalem and the temple. Bauckham observes that it would not have been surprising that “a Galilean prophet, expecting the redemption of Israel from pagan rule, should move to the relig-

ious heart of the nation and the expected centre of God’s eschatological restoration of the nation, in order to spend her time in the temple ...” ([1], p. 165).

Exiles in Media: The Tobit Connection

The other main possibility is that Anna came from a family whose ancestors had been taken into captivity by the Assyrians. 2 Kings 15:29 does not mention precisely where people from Galilee were taken, but it is reasonable to suppose that they ended up settling together with the second wave of exiles from the northern tribes that came just twelve years later. Of these Israelites, we read the following in 2 Kings 18:11 (NETBible):

“The king of Assyria deported the people of Israel to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, along the Habor (the river of Gozan), and in the cities of the Medes.”

As the centuries went by, it was with the third of these locations—Media, a territory that today is part of Iran [3] — that the exiles from the northern tribes came to be associated. For example, the historian Josephus wrote in the late first century A.D. that the captives from the northern tribes had been taken “into Media and Persia” (*Ant.* 9.14.1).

One main evidence of and source for the association of the northern tribes with Media was the popular story of Tobit.³ In the Book of Tobit, Tobit is a Galilean from the tribe of Naphtali who is taken captive to the Assyrian city of Nineveh (Tobit 1:10). Relatives of his have settled in the Median cities of Ecbatana (3:7) and Rages (4:1; 5:6). At the end of the book, Tobit on his deathbed instructs his son Tobias to take his family to Media, which Tobit believes will be the safest place to go after the prophesied destruction of Nineveh takes place (14:3-4). Tobias obeys, moving to Ecbatana where his in-laws live (14:12-15).

Bauckham observes that “awareness of tribal membership may be more likely to have survived in the eastern diaspora than in Galilee” ([1], p. 169). Many exiles in Media, in the midst of an alien culture hundreds of miles from Israel, apparently banded together in communities and worked to preserve their Israelite identity. Such a picture is certainly reflected in the Book of Tobit, where Tobit and his family have a detailed knowledge of their ancestry and are concerned about marrying within their tribe.

At some point the Median exiles established formal ties with Jerusalem and the Temple. Bauckham believes this connection with Jerusalem may have begun sometime during the Persian period, after exiles from the House of Judah had returned to Israel and rebuilt the Temple. Josephus records that when Ezra led another group of Jews back to Israel from Babylon (c. 458 B.C.), they were accompanied by some members of the northern tribes from Media (*Ant.* 11.5.2).⁴ Perhaps

these returnees from the northern tribes helped facilitate a relationship between Jerusalem and the Median diaspora community.

Media was viewed as a very remote location by people in Judea, especially because the trip between Media and Jerusalem had to be made entirely by land.⁵ Still, there was regular communication back and forth between religious leaders in Judea and Israelites throughout the diaspora, including Media. One interesting example is a letter written by Gamaliel the Elder (the teacher of the apostle Paul) dealing with a calendar issue ([1], pp. 174-175). Gamaliel's letter, which makes the announcement that an extra month is being inserted in the calendar that year, is addressed to "our brothers belonging to the exile of Babylonia and belonging to the exile of Media and all the other exiles of Israel."

An attachment to Jerusalem among pious Israelites in Media is reflected in, and was probably promoted by, the Book of Tobit. At the beginning of the book, Tobit explains that his tribe of Naphtali had gone into captivity because it had abandoned Jerusalem and the Temple and fallen into idolatry (Tobit 1:4-5). He knows that Israel's exile resulted from its sins (3:4) and fulfilled prophecies of the scriptures (2:6), all of which God would faithfully carry out (14:4). Tobit finds hope in the prophecies, which also assert that Israelites will one day be able to return to Jerusalem, where all nations will worship the true God (13:1-17; 14:5-7). In the meantime, he advocates that his countrymen hasten the fulfillment of these prophecies by obeying God, in particular by being generous to the poor (13:6; 14:8-11).

For Median Israelites who felt as Tobit did, there were several ways to express a connection with Jerusalem. One was to pay the annual half shekel temple tax. Josephus reports that this money was collected in the eastern diaspora at the cities of Nehardea and Nisibis, from whence it was transported to Jerusalem (*Ant.* 18.9.1). In Jerusalem, sacrifices were offered on behalf of the people in the diaspora.

Given sufficient funds, an Israelite could achieve a more direct connection with the Temple by personally undertaking the long trek to Jerusalem for Passover, Pentecost, or the Feast of Tabernacles. People who did so were again following the example of Tobit, who had faithfully journeyed to Jerusalem for the pilgrim festivals before he was taken into captivity (Tobit 1:6). Acts 2:9 mentions that the pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for Pentecost in the year of Christ's resurrection included Medes.

Finally, there were a few who had the means and inclination to actually move to Jerusalem. One example preserved in Jewish tradition is Rabbi Nahum the Mede, who taught in Jerusalem during the final years of the Second Temple (see Nazir 5:4 in the Mishnah). Judging

from his name, either he or his parents had moved from Media to Jerusalem.

Bauckham ([1], pp. 179-180) observes that Nahum was an ideal name for a Median Israelite. The prophet Nahum had predicted the destruction of Nineveh, as emphasized in Tobit 14:4, 15. The fulfillment of this prophecy was very significant for the exiles in Media, because it provided evidence that God would also carry out his promises to bring them back from captivity. In addition, the name "Nahum" means "comfort" or "consolation." The corresponding verb is often used in the book of Isaiah in the expression of promises of the restoration of Jerusalem and the return of the exiles (Isa. 40:1; 49:13; 51:3,12; 52:9; 61:2; 66:13). By the first century, the words "comfort" and "consolation" had become synonymous with the deliverance brought by the Messiah. (For example, Simeon in Luke 2:25 looks forward to the *consolation* of Israel.) The parents of Nahum the Mede expressed their faith in the fulfillment of God's promises by giving their son the name Nahum.

Based on all of this information, it seems quite plausible that Anna could have belonged to a family from the Median diaspora that at some point migrated to Jerusalem, as the family of Nahum the Mede had done.

Anna the Mede?

We have discussed two possible scenarios for the background of Anna the prophetess in Luke 2:36-38. Perhaps Anna's family hailed from the traditional territory of the tribe of Asher in Galilee. Or perhaps her family went into exile in Media, then later came back to Israel.

Which is more likely? Here it turns out that Anna's name is an important clue that may help us decide the answer to this question.

Bauckham points out that, as far as we know, the name Anna/Hannah was not especially popular in Israel during the late Second Temple Period: "Of the 247 Jewish women in Palestine from the period 330 BCE-200 CE, whose names are known, our Anna is the only one who bears this name" ([1], p. 178).

On the other hand, there is reason to believe that the name Anna could have been popular among religious Israelites in the eastern diaspora, the people for whom the Book of Tobit was especially meaningful. In the Book of Tobit, Anna is the name of Tobit's wife!

This fact helps tip the scale in favor of our second scenario, the one in which Anna comes from a family that moved back to Israel from Media. Just as it would be natural for such a family to name a son Nahum, so it would be natural for a family from this background to name a daughter Anna.

While we are thinking about names, we should also consider the possible significance of Phanuel, the name

of Anna's father. The name Phaniel was not a popular one, as far as we know. It appears in two biblical genealogies, one from the tribe of Judah (1 Chron. 4:4) and the other from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Chron. 8:25). Bauckham knows of only one other instance of this name besides the one in Luke 2. It appears on an ostraccon (an inscribed piece of pottery) from Beersheba from the late eighth century B.C. ([1], p. 180).

Would this name have had a special meaning for an Israelite from the Median diaspora? Phaniel means "face of God," which in the Hebrew Scriptures is a metaphor for the favor (or disfavor) of God. For example, a familiar line in the Aaronic benediction (Num. 6:24-26), "May the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you" is a prayer for God's favor.

This metaphor often appears in the Hebrew Scriptures in connection with the themes of exile and return ([1], p. 181):

- In Deut. 31:17-18; 32:20, a future captivity of Israel is described in terms of God hiding his face.
- Psalm 80, a psalm that exiled Israelites could have sung as a prayer for return from captivity, has the following refrain: "Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved" (v. 3, NIV; cf. vv. 7, 19).
- When King Hezekiah invited the people who remained from the northern tribes to his special Passover celebration, he exhorted them to repent so that their friends who were in exile would be able to come back (2 Chron. 30:6-9). God "will not turn his face from you, if you return to him," Hezekiah wrote (v. 9, NRSV).
- In interceding for Jerusalem and for his people in exile, Daniel prays, "let your face shine upon your desolated sanctuary" (Dan. 9:17, NRSV).

These examples suggest that for Israelites in Media, the name Phaniel could have expressed a hope that God would show favor to his people and bring them back to the land of Israel. Similar "face of God" imagery appears in the Book of Tobit (3:6; 4:7; 13:16).

The Anointed Anna

We can now understand more fully what Luke intended to communicate in his brief passage about Anna in Luke 2:36-38. Phaniel and Anna came from a family of the tribe of Asher that had lived in the eastern diaspora in Media. Like other exiles from the northern tribes, they treasured the story of Tobit. Phaniel told this story often to his daughter, whom he named after Tobit's wife. Like Tobit, he longed for the time when the exiles in Media would be able to return home to Israel, so he was overjoyed when he was able to actually move to Jerusalem. He passed along to Anna his love for Jerusalem, the *Torah*, and

the Temple. In her widowhood, Anna expressed this love in her continual worship at the Temple complex.

When Anna met Joseph and Mary and God revealed to her that their baby was the promised Messiah, she rejoiced in the wonderful news. God had shined his face upon Israel, as her father's name expressed. He was fulfilling his promises and would surely bring his people back to the land of Israel.

Bauckham ([1], p. 185) observes that the accounts of Simeon and Anna in Luke 2 complement each other nicely. Simeon, a member of the House of Judah, highlights Israel's role as a light to the nations (2:30-32). Through the work of the Messiah, salvation would go out from Jerusalem to all the world. Anna, a member of the House of Israel, represents Israel in exile, scattered among the nations. Through the work of the Messiah, Israel one day would come back to Jerusalem. With his accounts of Simeon and Anna, Luke beautifully communicates the hopes of all Israel.

References:

1. Richard Bauckham, "Anna of the Tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36-38)," *Revue Biblique* 104 (1997), pp. 161-191.
2. Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002.
3. Gerald M. Bilkes, "Medes, Media" in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, David Noel Freedman, Editor, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000.
4. Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, New International Biblical Commentary, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody

End Notes:

1. This is also an indication that the magi arrived in Bethlehem later. If the magi had already come and presented their gifts, Joseph and Mary might have purchased a lamb.
2. For more on Samuel as a type and forerunner of the Messiah and on the prophecies of 1 Sam. 2, see the article "Samuel and the Gospel" in Issue 7 of *Grace & Knowledge*.
3. For an introduction to this story, see the article on the Book of Tobit in Issue 13 of *Grace & Knowledge*.
4. This is a detail not found in the scriptures—see Ezra 8—although it may be hinted at in 1 Chron. 9:3. Bauckham speculates that Josephus might have been acquainted with people in Jerusalem whose ancestors had come from the Median Diaspora ([1], p. 172).
5. Bauckham ([1], pp. 173-174) mentions a story preserved in the Talmud about a rabbi in Israel whose father lived in western Media. When the father died, his son didn't find out about his death until three years later.

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How We Play the Game

by Terrell Perkins



Did you ever sit down to play a game, like Monopoly, with other people and get so caught up in the game that you forgot about everything else? Did you, or any of the people you played with, take it just a little too seriously? How about this...did anyone you ever played with surprise you by revealing a side you hadn't seen before, like being greedy or perhaps cheating?

It's easy to get caught up in such things for some people. The game becomes their reality. It becomes a reflection of their ego. They seem to forget that it's not 'real' life; that the stakes don't really matter. What matters is how we play the game.

As a Christian, I have come to see life like that kind of game. I have come to believe that the ultimate reality is what we are being prepared for. I don't mean to say that what goes on in this life is unimportant at all. I just mean that 25 million years from now the details of what happened in this life will be meaningless. Just think of our board

game again. Chances are you may not remember any details of a particular game, but you may well remember if someone showed a greedy or cheating nature. This life is a kind a game, one that reveals our character. Some positions we land in are just luck of the draw or the throw of the dice. What we do once we're there is entirely a matter of our choice; a reflection of our character. It is the character that we develop here that will have lasting value in that ultimate reality.

It is a fact of our existence that our days on earth as mortals are numbered. We are all going to die some day. How one can really know that and still get worked up over how much stuff they've accumulated is beyond me? A popular bumper sticker declares that: "He who dies with the most toys wins!" Wins what? It is a well-known truth that we can't 'take it with us'!

What we do take with us is the kind of people we have become. We take our character with us. If we've lived as honorable people or liars and cheats, it will go in our 'permanent files'! If we have lived as people of faith or people who believed in nothing, I believe it will matter.

I've heard some non-believers declare that Christians just 'must not be that bright' for believing in something that's little more than a fairy tale. None of it can be proven they say. They're right; I can't 'prove' what I believe is true. But, I've decided that even if what I believe turns out to be completely meaningless, I still think it is the very best kind of life! I will have lived a life of faith, a life believing in something bigger than myself. I will have spent my life trying to become a better person and to help others become better people. I will have spent my energies learning to love. That's surely a better life than one without purpose. And what good is a life devoted only to oneself?

I choose faith in God. I see proof of Him every time I open my eyes! And, I pity those that don't. I try to see the big picture of what is going on here on earth. I realize that I'm nobody and nothing in the grandness of the universe. But, I believe, the very Creator of the universe knows my name. I feel humbled and exalted at the same time because of that. The older I get the more I realize just how short this existence really is. An inner voice declares that it all means something more; that what's going on here will have lasting value.

What I believe is that Jesus the Christ conquered death by His resurrection and God holds out the promise of eternal life to me through His sacrifice. That is the hope that I live with.

To live a life of faith and hope and love...what could have more value than that?

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.



It's Time to Think about Family Life

By Bill Ellis

Special to ASSIST News Service (www.assistnews.net)

SCOTT DEPOT, WV (ANS) — When family life disintegrates and dissolves from what it was intended to be, the state and nation in which this takes place is precariously attempting to balance itself on the cusp of total destruction. Simply put, when family life fails, complete devastation is at hand.

Our society is on the brink of annihilation. Can anything be done or is it too late to even attempt to make required adjustments? I offer these suggestions, which, if properly applied and put into action immediately, could possibly make a positive difference.

1. Mother and father were intended to be the guiding and directing members of each family. James Dobson, modern authority on family life, has said, "If you want your child to accept your values when he reaches his teen years, then you must be worthy of his respect during his younger days."

2. Children are like many adults. Most do not know how to think. They seem to imagine that they will not be held responsible.

3. Adults and children alike need to realize that every decisive action always produces a decisive reaction. It's in the old proverb, "The chickens always come home to roost."

4. The apostle Paul wrote a very important letter to the churches of Galatia of only six brief chapters. It sounds very much like a letter he would have written to the United States in June 2011. I wish all the members of Congress and the President would read it until they had it memorized. We must never forget this: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

5. One of our major problems is that we teach our children that success can be measured in terms of money and material. They will do anything to get money. That kind of belief leads to cheating, stealing, crime, killing and destruction.

6. There is an immediate price to pay for wrong living and an everlasting price ultimately. Kitty and I were watching an Inspirational Network rerun of an old

"Walton Mountain" story recently and heard Rose, a family relative, make this comment: "You don't get the stomachache from the green apples somebody else ate." The apple eater is responsible for his own aches.

7. Another problem we face is an educational system that in many areas is failing. Failing in places where schools and teachers have everything they need except one essential: That is the support of parents.

8. We also face such problems as adultery, homosexuality, abortion, drunkenness, gambling, infidelity and sexual lawlessness. The New Testament book of Romans, chapter one, especially verses 16–32, deals with the sins of our day and chapters two and three speak of God's righteous judgment against all ungodliness.

9. We need to teach our children and each other the value of faithfulness. Prolific author and apologist, Charles Colson, writes, "Our standard is not earthly success, but faithfulness to God's calling."

10. June 4, 2011, marked another Wedding Anniversary for Kitty and me. What a happy, enjoyable and beautiful experience that has been. There is no secret to such a wonderful marriage. It is putting God first in our lives and obeying His word.

Family life in America, just like our educational, political, economic, and national morality is in big trouble. We had better get it back together very soon or it will all be destroyed. Our days of laughing at God and going unpunished are about over.

These few suggestions just might help if put into good use. In case you have not noticed, we are in a mess. Too many leaders and citizens have their heads buried in the sand. You may pray daily for bold leadership from men and women of good report.

Bill Ellis is a syndicated columnist, and convention and conference speaker on every continent. He is the writer of more than 2,000 newspaper and magazine columns, articles and contributions to books. He is also a widely known motivational speaker and pulpit guest who utilizes enjoyment of life and just plain fun and laughter while speaking to high school, university and professional sports teams as well as to business and professional groups of all kinds.

The Paralyzing Power of Fear

by Daniel Botkin



“Tell us your phobia and we will tell you what you are afraid of.”
—Robert Benchley, American humorist

I have an interesting little book I picked up a few years ago. It's called *The Little Book of Phobias* by Joe Kohut. Most of the book consists of quotations from famous people talking about fears and phobias. The book also contains “A Phobic's Lexicon” which lists over 200 common phobias.

I had heard of a few phobias before — *agoraphobia*, *claustrophobia*, *xenophobia*, etc. But until I read this book, I didn't realize that fears were so specialized nowadays. There are words to describe the fear of dust (*amathophobia*), the fear of frogs and toads (*batrachophobia*), the fear of pins and needles (*belonephobia*), the fear of colors (*chromophobia*), the fear of dinner conversation (*deiphophobia*), the fear of objects on the left side of the body (*levophobia*), and fear of the Pope (*papaphobia*). There's even a word for the fear of fearing, namely — you guessed it, *phobophobia*. I'm just glad that people in my local congregation don't have *homilophobia*, the fear of sermons. At least one phobia mentioned in the book is nonexistent, I think (at least I hope so): *luposlipaphobia*, defined as “the fear of being pursued by timberwolves around a kitchen table while wearing socks on a newly waxed floor.” (Fans of Gary Larson might recall this from an old *Far Side* cartoon.)

While *luposlipaphobia* is a cartoonist's imaginary phobia, real fears and phobias are no laughing matter. They can paralyze strong men. They can possess you and fill your mind so full that you lose sight of the Lord and His sovereignty. Fear can cause you to forget Who is in charge of the universe and in charge of your life.

Fear can cause you to lose your trust in the Lord, so much so that you are afraid to do anything for the Lord. Remember the unprofitable servant in the Parable of the Talents? The master had given each of his three servants various amounts of coins (called “talents”) to invest for him while he was away. When the master returned, the first two servants had doubled the talents they had been given. But, the third servant told his master, “I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth” (Matt. 25:25). Those three words, “I was afraid,” became that man's epitaph and the epitaph of all unprofitable servants who let fear stop them from doing anything for the Lord.

The key to overcoming fear is loving God and trusting Him, because fear is rooted in unbelief. It springs up

where there is a lack of trust in God. The fear which prevented the ten spies from entering Canaan is described as “unbelief.” (See Numbers 14:11 & Hebrews 3:17-19.) When Peter walked on water and became “afraid,” the Lord said to him, “O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?” (Matt. 14:30f). The ten spies' fear was rooted in their unbelief; Peter's fear was rooted in his doubt and the littleness of his faith.

I have been reading the autobiography of John G. Paton to our daughters at bedtime. Paton was a missionary to murderous, bloodthirsty cannibals in the New Hebrides Islands in the 1800s. Many missionaries were killed, cooked, and eaten by cannibals in those islands, and many attempts were made on Paton's life. On one such occasion, three cannibals came upon Paton as he was working in his yard. The cannibals all aimed loaded rifles at his head and urged one another to fire the first shot. Paton said nothing to them. He just calmly continued working in his yard, praying that the Lord would either supernaturally protect him, or let him die as a martyr. After a short time, the three cannibals ran away. Many more similar attempts were made on his life. Paton's extraordinary courage was rooted in his love for the Lord and in his trust in the sovereignty of God. On another occasion Paton was surrounded by a big crowd of armed cannibals who had chased him and his companions down with the intention of killing them. Paton describes his response:

“My heart rose up to the Lord Jesus; I saw Him watching all the scene. My peace came back to me like a wave from God. I realized that I was immortal till my Master's work with me was done. The assurance came to me, as if a voice out of Heaven had spoken, that not a musket would be fired to wound us, not a club prevail to strike us, not a spear leave the hand in which it was held vibrating to be thrown, not an arrow leave the bow, or a killing stone the fingers, without the permission of Jesus Christ, whose is all power in Heaven and on Earth.”

Paton simply trusted that the Lord would preserve his life until his work on earth was finished.

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18). Fear could not

Continued on Page 14

April 28, 2011, 53 tornadoes in Alabama killed 238 people in several Alabama cities.



The tornado that destroyed Tuscaloosa, Alabama.



April 29, 2011, the monumental job of healing and cleanup begins.

May 22, 2011, an EF-5 tornado destroyed one third of Joplin, Missouri. 157 known dead.

What can you do to help?

There are several agencies that are accepting donations that go directly to the tornado victims. Here are several suggestions:

- Salvation Army: (salvationarmyusa.org)
- Adventist Community Services: (communityservices.org)
- United Way: (liveunited.org)

Each of these agencies has local chapters that can guide you in how to help the tornado victims.



Before and after in Joplin, Missouri.

Botkin: "Power of Fear" cont. from page 11.

dwelt in John Paton because he believed that God's love for him was perfect — even though Paton's young bride and newborn son had died of illness soon after their arrival to the island.

Our heavenly Father's love for us is perfect in every way, even when it seems imperfect to our limited understanding. The more deeply we believe that His love is perfect, the more completely fear will be cast out of our hearts and minds.

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Global Survey: Evangelicals Say Secularism, Not Islam, Is Top Threat

Slightly over 70 percent of global evangelical leaders at the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization — which convened over 4,000 evangelical leaders from over 190 nations last fall in South Africa — named secularism as a major threat, according to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life survey. By comparison, only 47 percent of the leaders said the influence of Islam is a major threat.

When combining major and minor threat considerations, 91 percent of the leaders felt secularism is a threat to evangelical Christianity, while 81 percent of the Christian leaders said Islam is a threat to the faith.

Evangelical leaders from the Global North (86 percent) more often felt secularism is a threat to the evangelical faith than those in the Global South (59 percent). And an overwhelming majority from North America, 90 percent, said the influence of secularism is a major threat. The figure is even higher among those in the United States (92 percent).

Concern about the threat of secularism is the lowest in the Middle East and North Africa, where only about a third of the Christian leaders viewed it as a major threat.

Despite all the talk about the clash of civilization between Islam and Christianity, Islam was ranked fourth out of a possible nine major threats to evangelical Christianity according to popularity of responses.

"To put it in context, it is not as though it is not seen as a threat, it is just that secularism in its associated practices tends to be seen as much more of a threat," said Luis Lugo, director of the Pew Forum, according to Voice of America. *(Christian Post)*

The Diffusiveness of Christian Love

Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place (2 Cor. 2:14).

J. B. Phillips paraphrases this verse: "Thanks be to God who leads us, wherever we are, on Christ's triumphant way and makes our knowledge of him spread throughout the world like a lovely perfume!"

On a certain well-known television program the panel members were blindfolded and asked to identify a mystery guest. On one occasion, as soon as the guest stepped onto the stage, one of the panelists, in harmony with the rules of the program, immediately disqualified himself, indicating that he knew without question who the mystery guest was. It was his wife.

After the blindfolds were off, everyone wanted to know how the panelist knew that the mystery guest was his wife. "It was really very simple," he explained. "I recognized her by her perfume."

When Henry M. Stanley went to Africa in 1871 to find Dr. David Livingstone, he was, by his own account, an atheist. But after he had lived with Livingstone a while, he became a Christian. Later he wrote:

"I saw this solitary old man there, and asked myself, 'How on earth does he stop here—is he cracked or what? What is it that inspires him?' For months after we met I simply found myself listening to him, wondering at the old man carrying out all that was said in the Bible: 'Leave all things, and follow Me.' But little by little his sympathy for others became contagious; my sympathy was aroused; seeing his piety, his gentleness, his zeal, his earnestness, and how he went about his business, I was converted by him, although he had not tried to do it."

What was the secret of Dr. Livingstone's unconscious influence?

When the explorer's faithful African helpers found him dead in his tent, he was kneeling by his cot. In front of him lay his diary, the last entry of which read: "My Jesus, my Saviour, my life, my all, I anew dedicate myself to Thee." Is it any wonder his life influenced others for good?

As you "follow on to know the Lord" (Hosea 6:3), the knowledge of His love will so permeate your thoughts, your words, your actions, that your life will unconsciously influence others for good.

Let Dr. Livingstone's last prayer be your prayer of dedication this day. As you pray this prayer in faith, God will work in you "to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

Donald Mansell, New Every Morning, page 21. Review & Herald Publishing Association. 1981.

made offerings to the idol, they "sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play" (Exodus 32:1-6 NIV).

There is nothing that characterizes our society better than to say, "the people rose up to play." Young men are not men anymore; they stay boys until their 30s, and some never reach adulthood. As I check the movie listings for this week, I see that "The Hangover, Part II" has made over \$215 million, and "Bridesmaids," ("Hangover" for girls) has grossed around \$125 million. This is what our teens, 20s, and 30s are feeding on for entertainment. It's all about drunkenness, debauchery, and irresponsibility.

Let me add a few items to the list of moral decline:

1) In spite of the horrible record of divorce and child abuse of those living together before marriage, the number of people cohabiting in the U.S. has risen 12 fold since 1960 to over 5.4 million in 2005.

2) Over 52 million abortions have been performed since abortion was made legal in 1973. How many scientists, missionaries, engineers, and doctors have been put to death to protect a woman's "right to choose?" How could this possibly please God? Children are a gift from God, "a blessing He commands." What did God say to Israel about "passing their children through the fire" in sacrifice to Molech? Leviticus 20:2-5: "Again, you shall say to the Sons of Israel: Whoever he be of the Sons of Israel or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that gives any of his seed Molech; he shall surely be put to death...." How is slaughtering babies in the womb any better than sacrificing them in the fire to Molech?

"When you present your gifts and offer up your children in fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols to this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will not be inquired of by you" (Ezekiel 20:31).

3) How about our embrace of homosexuality as a legitimate alternative lifestyle? It's not just that our society has openly accepted the legitimacy of homosexuality; many Christian leaders have now taken this position. Romans 1:26-27, "Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error."

4) The United States Air Force Academy has created a "worship space" on campus for the "Earth-Centered Community," which, according to the Air Force, includes among other denominations the Wiccans, Druids, Heathens and Pagans — (CNSNews.com).

Debt

The apostle Paul said, "Owe no man anything, except to love one another, for he that loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8). The first part of the apostle's admonition is often overlooked: "Owe no man anything...." Debt is a curse; it is not a blessing. Unlike natural disasters, however, debt is a man-made curse. It is a judgment, not of God, but one that we have inflicted upon ourselves. We know this to be true, but we are inclined to ignore the clear biblical teachings on debt and God's financial principles. We think that God is not really serious when He tells us in Proverbs 22:7, "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a slave to the lender." Let the word "slave" sink in.

The West long ago abandoned the time-honored, biblical principle avoiding debt and credit. Individual debt in the Western world is staggering, and governmental debt is even worse. According to Money-Zine.com, "The latest statistics from the Federal Reserve indicate that the total amount of consumer debt outstanding remained fairly steady in 2010. The total amount of consumer debt in the United States stands at nearly \$2.4 trillion. Based on the 2010 Census statistics, that works out to be nearly \$7,800 in debt for every man, woman and child that lives here in the U.S. If you're saying to yourself — that the statistic doesn't seem quite so bad — keep this in mind: We're talking about consumer credit, which does not include debt secured by real estate." In other words, this does not include American mortgage debt.

Western governments are in even worse shape than individuals. The entire Western economic system which has been built on increasing debt, government deficits, and inflation has been brought to the verge of collapse. Greece is bankrupt, and Spain and Portugal are not far behind. The U.S. may be in even worse condition than any European state with unfunded liabilities for Social Security and Medicare alone at over \$100 trillion.

The past 80 years of politicians buying votes through expanded social programs has become unsustainable. This vote-buying Ponzi scheme will likely change our societies in ways that we find very unpleasant. The nature of these political shenanigans has been to convince the voting public that they can get something for nothing—that they have a right to the fruit of another person's labor. Thinking that it no longer matters, we have cast aside the time-honored, biblical principles of money and finance. Many have become content to live at the expense of others. "For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Our Problem

When nations establish their governments based on godly, biblical principles and their citizens as missionaries go to every corner of the globe to bring the good news of Christ and the gospel to godless, suffering nations, those governments are declaring to the world that their form of government is superior to others because it is based on biblical principles. In other words, their citizens become ambassadors of a way of life that acknowledges God in their nation's founding. Whether we like it, citizens of other countries still look upon us as representatives of the "Christian" world, even if our citizens are not currently living as Christians. Because we at one time adopted the name, "Christian," our nations are seen as such. Ask a Muslim where to find the Christian nations, and he will tell you that it is the U.S. and Western Europe. You will get the same answer from Hindus in India and Buddhists in China. Like it or not, our people are labeled as followers of Christ.

Further, our nations' founders called upon God to guide them in laying the foundations of our republics—to establish the principles of government that would be pleasing to Him and most equitable to all the citizens. Given that as our foundation, how can we escape the judgment of God upon our nations when our citizens *en masse* abandon the Christian principles of our founding?

Can We Avoid God's Curse?

Deuteronomy 28 outlines blessings upon a nation that will obey God's commandments and curses upon the nation that refuses to follow those commandments. Some will say that these apply only to the ancient nation of Israel. However, as the American founders understood, the book of Deuteronomy holds the key to the blessings and prosperity of any nation. Even though God spoke these words to Israel, the principles embodied in this chapter are universal. They will apply to any nation that seeks after God and aspires to do His will.

I encourage all to reread this entire chapter. You will see where our past blessings came from and why we are now in serious trouble. The principles espoused in Deuteronomy 28 are applicable to all nations at all times in history. Seek and obey God and you will prosper; disobey and ignore the Lord, and you will lose your prosperity and suffer from every possible calamity. The covering of God's protection will be removed from you. You will be left naked in the world, subject to everything that Satan can throw at you.

Is there Hope for Us?

The road back has to begin within the Church, the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). "For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17). Rather than compromising our values to "go along to get along," we need to be bold in calling the people of God back to obedience to God's standards. If we do not clean up the Church first and call God's people back to righteousness, how can we expect nonbelievers to listen to anything we have to say. This takes a personal commitment from each Christian and a community effort within the Church to put an end to compromise. There is no substitute for obedience to God and His commandments. Do we really love God? Then we must do as Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments," (John 14:15).

The prophet Isaiah told us exactly what to do, "Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his

thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6-7).

"'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways!...'" (Ezekiel 33:11).

There is always a path open that allows us to return to the LORD. If we are convinced that this path is open to us, should we not also be urging others to follow that same path?

"Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear, you Israelites: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? If a righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits sin, he will die for it; because of the sin he has committed, he will die. But if a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he will save his life. Because he considers all the offenses he has committed and turns away from them, that person will surely live; he will not die" (Ezekiel 18:25-28).

Jesus gave us the answer in the Sermon on the Mount, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

—Kenneth Ryland

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

(U.S. Declaration of Independence).

Westby: "When Churches Split" cont. from page 4.

My group of "rebels" were like the gang that couldn't shoot straight. We had made no preparations for departure, no secret planning meetings, just a bunch of naive preachers who thought we would get a fair hearing. Since then I think "rebels" have wised up and plan these things.

The WWC (OTC) organization survived with its 1974 leaders intact and in charge. The "dissidents" were defeated and destroyed. But, as is usually the case, in strong arm suppressions, there is another casualty: Truth. It can be hidden or buried for a while, but truth has a way of winning in the end. It is a light that cannot be extinguished and when it shines, the lies and deceptions are exposed. That shining may not happen soon or all at once, but eventually the truth will out.

Unity Hustlers

Standing on the sidelines for the past 37 years watching this process repeat itself in one form or another, and seeing the hundreds of church breakups, small and large, there are patterns that emerge. From those patterns and from personal experience lessons can be drawn that may offer understanding, perspective, and yes, hope.

Not all splits are bad. Some in fact are quite necessary and some are good, even noble if the issues are biblical truth and proper treatment of people. I don't wring my hands over the need for "unity" among all the various Church of God iterations. The unity the hand-wringers call for is an organizational unity, joining their particular church outfit, returning to the true fold—theirs. Much of the unity talk rings false, an excuse to recruit members into another OTC.

The unity mongers are self-serving and use their noble sounding rhetoric as a criticism of little groups that have split away suggesting that they have done some wrong thing and need to repent and reunite. There is this lingering nostalgia for the halcyon days when the WWC was the full unity of the One and Only True Church and ruled the waves. A lot of tin-horn wannabes continue to try to resurrect those stone-dead glory days. I say R.I.P. God and his Truth march on.

Corporate or organizational unity is just fine, but if one must compromise truth, morality or ethics to maintain it, then maybe unity isn't such a good thing. A division may preserve individual doctrinal distinctives and truth that would otherwise have to be abandoned to preserve unity. A split may allow individuals a fresh start in their Christian walk, away from heavy-handed ministers who had them sitting on the bench. There are a number of good things that could come from Christians' parting of the ways—organizationally speaking. There are also negative things, and collateral damage.

The true unity of which the Bible speaks is unity of spirit, God-like character, love, and commitment to

faith and obedience to God and his Son (Col. 3:1-4, 9, 12-14 "...together in perfect unity"). The legitimate One True Church is a spiritual entity composed of believers having the very Spirit of God. Its membership roll book is kept in heaven far away from the prying eyes of mortals. That Church belongs to God and is headed by his son, Jesus Christ. We should all attain to be members in good standing in God's OTC.

I believe membership in humanly organized churches is encouraged by God, but not required. Members of the heavenly OTC are to be in fellowship with other believers, be engaged in service, and committed to proclaiming Jesus' message in its fullness: the Kingdom of God. That Christians organize themselves in churches or denominations to accomplish these things can be good. How good depends on the people, on their character and vision. But, please, never confuse earthly organizations with the spiritual Body of Christ, the real OTC. Ideally, all members of human church assemblies would also be members of the Body of Christ and behave accordingly. But alas, we don't know ideal, but we know God, and we know how he wants us to behave toward each other.

The Splits

Each church split is occasioned by a maze of motives often hidden behind the official reasons. Frankly, most splits are unnecessary, even silly. If occasioned from the top down, they are usually about power and control, who or which faction gets to call the shots. Security and money are big things, but the prideful ego of getting one's way looms big in management. Injured pride occasions revenge and pay back. There are differences in management style, philosophy, sense of purpose, mission, money allocation, etc. These internal differences are normal in all organizations. Organizations are dynamic entities and must work smart and cooperatively to keep it together, to keep it solvent, and to keep it growing. But, people are people and sometimes it doesn't work.

In churches, honestly organized, there is not a lot of get rich money to chase. So the sweet nectar to suck is not money but power, prestige, meaning, having one's way, and of course, security. Fights will generally be found in these areas. Doctrine may also be involved, but sometimes it is just cover for motives common to the human condition. We all must do battle with these competing pulls of human nature.

Lessons Learned

Conditional Friendship: I learned a hard lesson upon being forced out of my church. I had friends, many friends. Some were so close that I thought we would be friends till death and beyond. I think they felt the same way. We had laughed and cried together and shared our dreams and sorrows.

What I didn't understand is that the church organization—its work or mission—took precedence over personal relationships. I was their best friend as long as I was a member in good standing in the OTC. It wasn't a matter of putting God before a friendship, but somehow God and the OTC's Work had morphed into the same thing. If you left, or were kicked out of the OTC, then you had rejected God, and rejected his Apostle, blah, blah, blah. So my friendship which I thought would hold through thick and thin was revealed to be conditional. I'm sure my friends felt loss, but couldn't do anything about it if they wanted to remain a member or minister in good standing.

My advice: Don't base your friendship upon status within an organization. True friendships should survive one leaving for another church home or just leaving. There can be real reasons for severing a friendship, but I doubt church affiliation should be one. My! Jesus had genuine friendships with "sinners" and IRS agents (Mt. 11:19). David's best friend was his enemy's son.

We church people need to learn the art of disputation. Growing in knowledge often means challenging accepted wisdom, orthodoxy, presuppositions, including our own. New approaches and ideas usually come through other people. They are not to be regarded as enemies, but patiently and respectfully entertain their evidence and make your own judgments. You may not buy their conclusions, but may learn some good stuff along the way. Christian "biblical bull sessions" are healthy and should be encouraged, dogmatism and coerced conformity avoided. Everybody believing the same thing about every doctrine is like a desert that hasn't had rain for a century.

Give those of "wrong opinions" some slack. How many wrong doctrines did you believe in times past? I not only sincerely believed some bogus doctrines, I taught them! We learn. We grow up, or at least we should. Give each other space for growth which means being tolerant of his or her present lack of growth. This is kindness. We thrive with kindness.

Stay away from judging people and noting faults. Let God be a man's judge. A judging church is a cold church of cliques and self-righteous prigs. Authoritarian, hierarchical groups oppress intellectual freedom, stultify spiritual growth and initiative. God is free and loves freedom. He created all his sentient creatures, angelic and human, to be free. He wants our love to be freely given him and gives us plenty of space and time to come around to his point of view. We should be so generous with each other.

Righteous Christian living is to be mastered by all. Biblical scholarship is another matter. The Bible is not an easy book to master. It is a composite of documents 2000 years old or older, written in ancient languages, and to peoples in cultures and contexts that are not

fully understood. Much of it can be plainly understood, some of it is difficult. Properly "doing theology" requires specific background, skill, and access to the tools of scholarship. The Bible demands respectful handling, not bullying to fit a pet dogma.

Nevertheless, even among scholars we will find disagreement, so the better informed we are, the better able we are to make judgments regarding what Scripture teaches. Never before in all history has so much information on Scripture been so readily available. A gold mine of knowledge awaits the eager learner. Seeking to better understand God's word should be our never-ending and life-long passion. "I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free" (Ps. 119:32).

Exercise respect to all. If your belief is this or that and is not embraced by most in your fellowship group, believe what you will but don't evangelize. Be honest with your different belief if asked, or if the occasion naturally arises. If you are part of a mature Christian fellowship, it will continue to love you and tolerate your differences. You should not feel intimidated into silence and virtual denial of your beliefs, but neither should you go about blabbing them to people who aren't interested. Give the respect you want others to give you. Often that can be the kindness of avoiding dead end arguments.

Build on points of agreement and give the points of disagreement a rest. I know that this isn't always easy to do and some points are too important to one's conscience to let slide, but here is where we must passionately seek Godly wisdom. If things are just too stressful because of disagreements, peacefully leave and find a more agreeable place. Don't try to destroy the group you leave; just leave.

One can be selfish about being right. The bride of truth is humility. God who has all truth presents his closest personal virtue as "kindness" (Jer. 9:23-24). To Moses, Yahweh characterized his glory as "my goodness" which passed in front of Moses (Exo. 33:19). Jesus confessed that he was "gentle and humble in heart" which is why his offer to "Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened..." is so appealing (Mt. 11:28-30). Don't forge truth into a club to beat people, or into a badge of superiority. Truth is a gift to be held with humility.

The Big Three

Here is what I believe makes for a good church or fellowship culture: A spirit of acceptance, a spirit of forgiveness, and a spirit of love. We quickly recognize these as qualities in the heart of God. They are also the deepest yearnings of the human soul. We want to be accepted, forgiven, and loved. If these permeate the atmosphere of your local church, don't you think

real spiritual growth, contentment, and happiness will flourish? Are we capable of offering these?

Acceptance is not a critical spirit of judgment or condemnation, but quite the opposite. It is one of mercy. Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy," and he used the example of judgment, "Judge not, and you shall not be judged." If you want God to be merciful and accepting of you, faults and all, then offer that same grace toward others. That "other" is also an "Image Bearer" whose name is known to God.

Forgiveness follows the same principle, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Mt. 6:15). Notice that our willingness to forgive is made the one condition to our being forgiven (note also there is no mention of blood or sacrifice, just our willingness to forgive). This is powerful. Do we exercise it?

Advice: Honestly locate and bury every grudge-hatchet you have. Establish a hatchet graveyard behind the church and fill it up with buried hatchets. Let acceptance and forgiveness reign.

Love, of course, is a decision to give respect and honor to your fellow imperfect servant of God. Love is the giving bond that knits us together. It is what lies behind all the virtues of Godly character and action. Wouldn't you enjoy attending a fellowship of people flowing with acceptance, forgiveness, and love? Then be that individual in your church group.

Alone Before God

Everyone should compose his or her own personal Statement of Faith. That's your job, not your church's job. Once written it may be in perfect agreement with your church's statement, maybe not. It is *your* statement that defines what *you* believe is most important in your covenant with God (Dr. Charles Dorothy once wrote a primer on making your own Statement of Faith; write and I'll send you a copy).

Hold fast to your core beliefs and make sure they are truly core...and few. Jesus was able to summarize life in the one Great Commandment, which he could expand into two commandments, and which could then be summarized in one word, love.

One's Statement of Faith should be fairly brief, not cluttered with every doctrine and speculation one likes. There are many teachings one may believe to be scriptural, but these shouldn't become tests of fellowship or put on a par with one's core beliefs. Too many "must believe" points in a personal statement of faith will exclude people — people who might share your core beliefs, but not all those on your long list. Don't make your long list of "must believes" a test of fellowship with others, or you will be mighty lonely in your empty church. Work to include, not exclude.

Becoming a genuine Christian is not child's play. We have been called to take on the image of Yahweh, to become like him in mind, character, and love. This is huge. To conform to the Divine Image and take on the Divine Nature is to climb to the stars—impossible without help. Jesus has done it and God offers his spirit to assist in our spiritual transformation. We also need help from each other as friends, teachers, mentors, encouragers, exemplars, supporters. We don't do it alone. We need good churches with good people more interested in moving Godward than moving the church board to do this or that.

Sure, there are troubles with human organizations. None is perfect so why be spiritually destroyed when they flop. Disappointed? Sure. Splits happen. Don't blame God. It is all about humans struggling to find their way. We need to learn to work through the maze of human affairs discovering those things that are true and priceless along the way. God never promised "easy." The path is narrow and it takes vigilance and grit to stay on it.

Your Life's Last Chapter Not Yet Written

Jeremiah was about to throw in the towel with the hard job of doing God's bidding in a crooked and perverse world. I can feel for the guy for he had it much worse than anything I've ever experienced in my "church wars." His treatment was brutal and he was worn down and absorbed in self-pity. He served God honestly but was so disappointed with God's rebellious people he was ready to chuck it. He was tired of it all.

Yahweh answered his complaints with a challenge: "Tired, you say? If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? And if in a safe land you fall down, how will you do in the jungle of the Jordan?" (Jeremiah 12:5).

God told Jeremiah what I believe he would say to you and me: that he has called us to a life of purpose far beyond what we think ourselves capable of living and promised us adequate strength to fulfill our destiny—a destiny beyond local churches, their politics, and their splits—a destiny at the side of His Majesty sharing rule over all creation.

Do we quit at signs of difficulty? Are we fatigued by a run-of-the-mill crowd of apathetic mediocrities playing church? Well then, how about the real race with the swift horses of excellence attached to God's chariot? "Jeremiah, do you want to shuffle along with this crowd, or run with the horses?" His life became his answer, "I'll run with the horses." How about you?

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

Fatherhood

Reclaiming Your God-given Role

by David Guerrero

This easy-to-read, 166 page volume on fatherhood is thoroughly based in the Bible and shows how God views fathers and their role in the family. A pastor and certified Christian counselor, David Guerrero lays out a step-by-step plan for recapturing the proper, God-ordained place of fathers in the family. The disintegration of families is at crisis proportions in our society, and Christian families are following this destructive trend. The answer to that crisis is found in the Word of God.

However, please don't be fooled by that description. This book is not a scripture marathon on everything fatherly. It is full of practical experience from the author's personal life with his own family as well as his many years of counseling other families in their struggles to make family life work the way God intended.

Some of the chapters in this valuable book include:

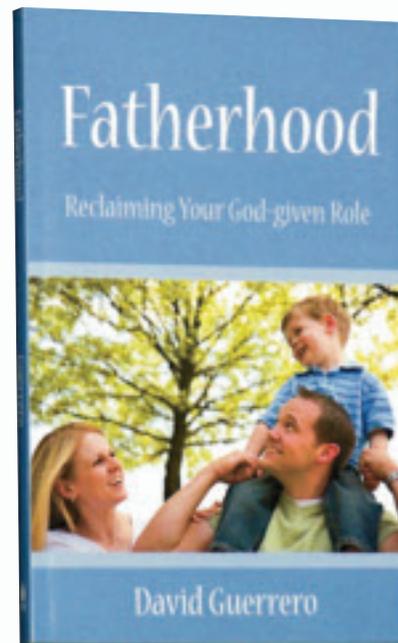
Where Have All the Fathers Gone?
The Father as Priest
The Father as Prophet
Headship: Following God's Design as Leader of the Home
The Father and His Daughter
The Father and His Wife

One very unique feature of this book is that at the end of each chapter there is a study guide which takes the reader through the lessons brought out in that chapter and emphasizes the scriptural basis of the material presented. The study guides are a great reinforcer of the concepts presented in the chapter.

Here are just a few quotes from **Fatherhood** to whet your appetite to get this book and make it your manual on fatherhood:

In the chapter, "The Father and His Daughter," Guerrero states, "Today's high rate of teenage pregnancy as well as the loss of femininity, even in the church, is the result of the father's neglect to be his daughter's first and true love....Today's father can break this trend by taking the time to see that his daughters are taught, as well as model to them, what is true love, what it means to be a woman. Fathers today need to take the time to listen, talk, and touch the lives of their daughters."

In another chapter Guerrero explains, "God could trust Abraham to 'command' his household in the way of Yahweh. Abraham fulfilled this role as king not by



dictatorial methods, but by clear precepts and consistent example. Abraham knew his position and responsibility and directed his family to live lives that would receive God's blessings."

Guerrero explains how he personally had to come to a better understanding of his role as husband and father. He was busy saving others from their family problems, but at the same time was neglecting his own family. He reached a point where he knew that he had to make drastic changes in his own relationship with his wife in order to save his marriage and his family. That is the point at which the ideas in this book were born. Once he was able to see his own neglect, he and his wife together began to formulate a better plan for their own relationship and how they were to rear their children. It was at that juncture that he stopped looking at his wife as a competitor and started treating her as a partner.

David and his wife, Jacquelyn, have four children (Joshua, Hannah, Joel, and Micah). The Guerreros currently reside in central Wisconsin. David and Jacquelyn are co-founders of Rekindle the Flame Ministries (R.T.F.M.), a Christ-centered ministry that seeks to help others find peace and positive growth in the relationships of life.

The book is available through the BSA. See the back cover of our magazine for details.

—Kenneth Ryland

Are They Really Smarter than You?

"Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed on him?" (John 7:48)

"Are you going to believe me or your own eyes?" (Chico Marx)

I hate to admit this, but after a major political event I am more fascinated by the journalistic commentary that follows it than the event itself. That might be because so many political events and speeches are yawners reminiscent of college Speech 101.

But I'm also interested in other people's take on what happened, even though it might remind me of Chico Marx's line at the head of this column: "Are you going to believe me or your own eyes?"

Jesus had the same type of press. He healed the sick, raised the dead, fed the multitudes, and taught a new and living way.

If that's all he ever did, it's doubtful that the religious elite of the day would have tried to destroy him. But Jesus had a little problem. His teachings did not fit in the little box of religion that his contemporaries had constructed for their concept of God. He preached unique ideas that threatened the current power structure. That was a threat they could not let stand.

Jesus once healed a blind man, who then came to the conclusion that "if this man were not of God, he could do nothing" (John 9:33). The religious leaders' retort? "You were altogether born in sin, and do you teach us?" (verse 34). Are you going to believe us or your own eyes?

Another time the Pharisees and chief priests sent a contingent of temple guards to arrest Jesus, but his teaching was so compelling that the guards refused their orders. "Never has a man spoken like this," they told the Pharisees, who retorted, "Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed on him? These people who are ignorant of the law are cursed." (John 7:46-49)

These religious elites clearly held a high view of themselves and a condescending view of the unwashed masses. When they said, "These people who are ignorant of the law are cursed," they sound suspiciously like certain elements of our own culture.

It's good to seek out others' opinions and to listen to their learned commentary, but no one has a right to tell you how to think or to call you names if you happen to disagree. There is a lot of that going on these days.

—Lenny Cacchio

You can catch all of Lenny's latest commentaries on <http://morningcompanion.blogspot.com>.

Just the Facts

The historian Plutarch was a priest in the temple of Apollo at Delphi. In his writings entitled "The life of Pompey" he tells us about The Pirates of Cilicia — a small country in what would now be recognized as southeastern Turkey.

"The power of the pirates had its seat in Cilicia at first, and at the onset it was venturesome and elusive; but it took on confidence and boldness during the Mithradatic War, because it lent itself to the king's service. Then while the Romans were embroiled in civil wars at the gates of Rome, the sea was left unguarded, and gradually drew and enticed them on until they no longer attacked navigators only, but also laid waste islands and maritime cities. The ships of the pirates numbered more than a thousand, and the cities captured by them four hundred. ...They also offered strange sacrifices of their own at Olympus, and celebrated there certain secret rites, among which those of Mithra continue to the present time, having been first instituted by them."

It is important to consider the fact that Plutarch lived during New Testament times some eighty years after the time of Christ. Even so, he tells us that the secret rites of Mithra were still being celebrated in his day.

Most people do not know it but at that time Mithraism was the chief rival of Christianity. The followers of Mithra had their own versions of baptism and the Lord's Supper. December 25th was recognized as the birthday of Mithra and Sunday was his special day.

Theologians would tell us that during the fourth century the worship of Mithra mysteriously vanished at the same time Roman Christianity appeared on the scene. But what really vanished — Mithraism or Biblical Christianity? Did it have anything to do with the pagan precepts of Sunday and December 25th?

The truth never vanishes. Aspects of Mithraism are still found among the precepts of contemporary Christianity — and Biblical Christianity is still being practiced by the few who fear the LORD and keep His commandments — which preclude the inclusion of pagan rituals.

Earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the Saints. I'm Richard Rives with Just the Facts.

Richard Rives is the author a weekly e-mail newsletter called "Just the Facts." Richard is also author of the DVD series "Time is the Ally of Deceit," which is available through the BSA. Richard's Web site is toolong.com.

The Church in the World

Egyptian Convert Flees Potential Dangers in Syria



Maher El-Gohary and daughter Dina at one of their apartments in Egypt, where they lived in hiding.

(Photo: Compass)

Maher El-Gohary and daughter apply for asylum in France.

ISTANBUL, April 21 (CDN) — A father and daughter who fled Egypt to Syria after spending two and a half years in hiding for becoming Christians have arrived in France and yesterday applied for asylum there, human rights advocates said.

Maher Ahmad El-Mo'otahssem Bellah El-Gohary, 58, had become the target of Islamic ill will in Egypt after he tried to change the religious affiliation on his national identification card from Muslim to Christian. He and his daughter, 17-year-old Dina Mo'otahssem, arrived in Paris from Syria on March 30, after having fled to Damascus on Feb. 22, in the wake of the revolution in Egypt that deposed then-President Hosni Mubarak.

The Jan. 25–Feb. 11 protests in Egypt also weakened the Ministry of the Interior, an agency that had harassed El-Gohary and prevented him from leaving the country.

El-Gohary had fled to Syria because it was both the fastest and the easiest way to get out of Egypt, but he said he also feared Islamic opposition to converts in Syria and growing political unrest in Damascus.

“When we got to the French embassy in Syria, we were so scared because of what was happening in Syria at the time,” he said.

Eventually El-Gohary and his daughter hope to gain a visa to the United States and then emigrate.

Despite their newfound safety, El-Gohary and Dina are still shaken by their ordeal.

On Monday, April 18, El-Gohary went to the Embassy of the United States in Paris to apply for U.S. asylum as well.

Meanwhile, El-Gohary’s application for asylum in France qualifies him for an automatic three-month extension on his visa to France, which was set to expire at the end of the month. The extension can be renewed as long as his case is unresolved. It also qualifies him for certain government benefits.

“Miracle from God”

El-Gohary and his daughter were forced into hiding in August 2008 immediately after he filed his lawsuit to change his ID card’s religious designation. The suit caused uproar in a country where, according to a recent Pew Research Center poll, 84 percent of Muslims in Egypt believe those who leave Islam should be executed.

El-Gohary filed the suit, he said, because he wanted to spare his daughter the persecution he suffered when he became a Christian in his 20s. In theory, the religion listed on his ID card would be used to determine the religion listed on Dina’s.

In Egypt, it is illegal for adults not to have a national ID card, and it is nearly impossible to survive without one. It is necessary for opening a bank account, renting an apartment and obtaining medical care.

Freedom of religion, including the right to change one’s religion, is guaranteed in Egypt by law. But in practice, while it is easy for Christian converts to Islam to change the religion listed on their ID cards, it is impossible for a Muslim convert to Christianity to do the same.

For the time that El-Gohary and his daughter were on the run, they lived a marginal existence, moving from one safe house to another about once every month. On different occasions, he and Dina were attacked.

El-Gohary called his escape from Egypt a “miracle from God.”

(Compass Direct News)

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“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is the ways of death” (Proverbs 16:25). Many aspects of Traditional Christianity cannot be found in the Bible. They can however be traced directly to the worship of pagan gods which predate Christianity by centuries. How is it that precepts that have nothing to do with Christ and everything to do with pagan sun worship have found their way into our churches? History reveals that there is one very good answer:

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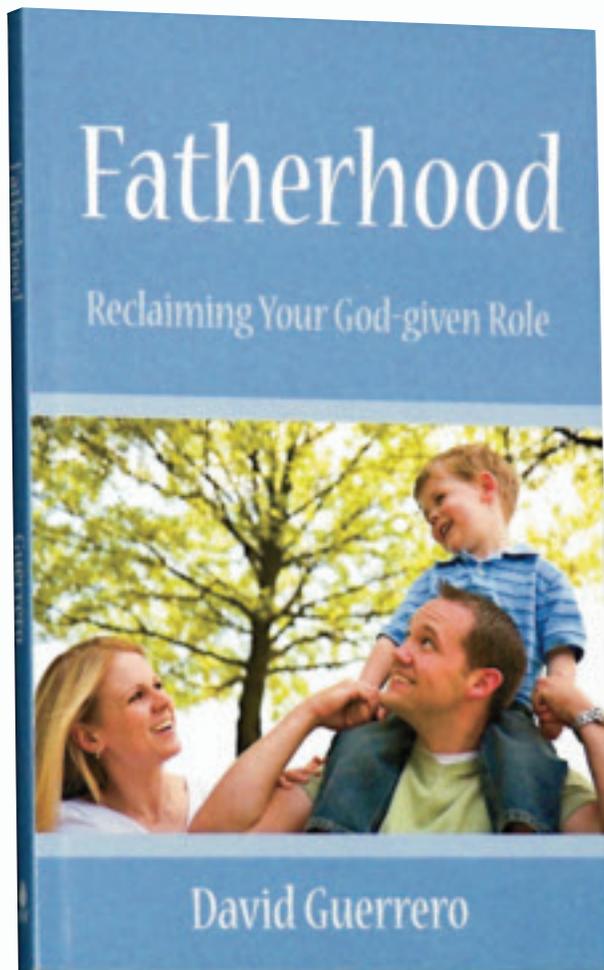
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In ***Fatherhood, Reclaiming Your God-given Role***, certified family counselor, David Guerrero, lays out a clear, concise path for men to reclaim their biblically-mandated roles as fathers and husbands. As a parent or grandparent, you will not want to miss Guerrero's analysis of what the Bible has to say about fatherhood.

The book is available from the BSA for \$18 for nonmembers and \$15 for BSA members.

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