

# The Sabbath Sentinel

May–June 2011



**A quiet place for meditation  
and time to commune with God**

**BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association**

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

# The Sabbath Sentinel

May–June 2011 Volume 63, No. 3 Issue 547

## FEATURES

- 4 **The Accidental Life**  
by *Kenneth Westby*
- 6 **The Perverting of Paul's Epistles**  
by *Dr. Daniel Botkin*
- 9 **Keeping Families Together by Meaningful Celebrations**  
by *David Guerrero*
- 11 **Toxic Faith, Healing Faith**  
*Loren Seibold*
- 15 **Let No One Judge You**  
*Kelly McDonald*

## DEPARTMENTS

- 3 Editorial: *"Meditation"*
- 8 New Every Morning: *"Search me, O God"*
- 10 Just the Facts with Richard Rives
- 14 Bible Study: *"How Well Do You Know the Book of Esther?"*
- 21 Bible Q & A
- 22 The Church in the World
- 23 Notices and Advertisements

**Our Cover:** *"Be still and know that I am God."*

(Source: *iStockPhotos.com*)

*The Sabbath Sentinel* is published bimonthly by The Bible Sabbath Association, 802 N. W. 21<sup>st</sup> Ave., Battle Ground, WA 98604. Copyright © 2011, by the Bible Sabbath Association. Printed in the U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited. Nonprofit bulk rate postage paid at San Dimas, California.

**Editor:** Kenneth Ryland, [tss\\_editor@mac.com](mailto:tss_editor@mac.com).

**Associate Editors:** Julia Benson & Shirley Nickels

**BSA's Board of Directors for 2007-2011:**

**President:** John Paul Howell, [jphowell@cablespeed.com](mailto:jphowell@cablespeed.com)

**Vice President:** Marsha Basner

**Vice President:** June Narber

**Treasurer:** Bryan Burrell

**Secretary:** Calvin Burrell

**Office Manager—Battle Ground, WA, Office:** Shirley Nickels

**Directors at Large:** Darrell Estep, Calvin Burrell, Bryan Burrell, Rico Cortes, John Guffey, Dusti Howell, Tom Justus, Earl Lewis, Kenneth Ryland

**Subscriptions:** Call (888) 687-5191 or write to: The Bible Sabbath Association, 802 N. W. 21<sup>st</sup> Ave., Battle Ground, WA 98604 or contact us at the office nearest you (see international addresses below). *The Sabbath Sentinel* is sent free of charge to all who request it in Canada, the U.S., and Mexico. If you live outside of North America, please send us a donation of \$25 (US) to cover overseas postage. Voluntary contributions to the Bible Sabbath Association make publication of *The Sabbath Sentinel* possible.

**Donations** are gratefully accepted and are tax deductible in the United States. Those who choose to voluntarily support this international work to promote the Sabbath and proclaim gospel of the kingdom of God are welcomed as contributors.

**Annual membership contributions:** individual membership is \$25; Family Membership \$30; Life Membership \$500. All memberships include an annual subscription to *The Sabbath Sentinel*. Make all checks, drafts and money orders payable to *The Bible Sabbath Association*. (Visa and MasterCard accepted).

**The Bible Sabbath Association** is dedicated to promote the seventh day Sabbath. As a nonsectarian association for Sabbath-observing Christians, BSA accepts members who acknowledge Jesus Christ (Yahshua the Messiah) as their Savior, believe the Bible to be the Word of the Eternal, and uphold the seventh day Sabbath. BSA takes no official position on other theological issues, and publishes *The Sabbath Sentinel* as a forum to promote understanding and to share items of interest to Sabbath observing groups and individuals.

**Opinions expressed** in *The Sabbath Sentinel* are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Editorial Staff or of *The Bible Sabbath Association*.

**BSA Worldwide Web Site:** [www.biblesabbath.com](http://www.biblesabbath.com).

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

**International addresses:**

**Australia:** Materials and magazine subscriptions available at [www.biblesabbath.com](http://www.biblesabbath.com).

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

**Philippines:** Enrique M. Gabuyo, 398 Kinville Subdivision, Calamba Laguna 4027, Philippines, [cogemg007@yahoo.com](mailto:cogemg007@yahoo.com)

**Address Service Requested:** If moving, please update your address.

## Our Mailing Address

Bible Sabbath Association  
802 N.W. 21<sup>st</sup> Ave.  
Battle Ground, WA 98604.

**Ask for a FREE subscription to *The Sabbath Sentinel***

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

For all other inquiries, dial (360) 687-1541.

E-mail us at [biblesabbath@comcast.net](mailto:biblesabbath@comcast.net).

Visit our Web site at [www.biblesabbath.org](http://www.biblesabbath.org).

# Meditation



It's a lost art among Christians. There is a stigma about meditation because of the popularity of Eastern Hindu-style meditation, but that is only a symptom of the problem that Christians have with meditation. I can't think of any Christian that I know who practices Eastern meditation. That's for the New Age crowd, yet Christians continue to shun one of our most important ways of understanding God and His will. The excuses for avoiding meditation are rooted in our modern culture. Maybe Christians need a new perspective on meditation.

The key to proper meditation comes from the pen of King David in the Psalms: "Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth" (Psalms 46:10). This verse strikes at the core of our modern human problem; we have lost the art of being still.

There was a time not long ago when people would take time to go into the woods, sit under a tree or along the bank of a stream just to be alone and reflect on life. There they would ponder nature and the heavens, and all the work of God's hands. Many would take walks alone just to regain their "balance" about life and its demands.

Today, people loathe being alone and hate the silence of isolation. The solitude of one's own thoughts is frightening to most people. There is a fear of confronting head-on one's thoughts and earthly passions, hence the clamor for an ever more dizzying array of distractions to prevent the self from confronting the self. There is never any peace in our pursuits, only a yearning for the next distraction to keep us from seeing ourselves as we really are — and as God sees us. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid," (John 14:27). This is a gift and a promise from Christ. Nevertheless, I defy anyone to find five Christians out of a hundred who know true peace as Jesus described.

Meditation is pondering, wondering, musing, contemplating, and at times, just being still. It is leaving God time to catch up with us instead of fleeing from one distraction to the next. The Holy Spirit is a great teacher and problem solver, but it is only when we have cleared our minds of distractions that we can allow the Holy Spirit to do its work. Have you ever wondered why "sleeping on it" is such a good idea? Our

subconscious is working all the time, even when we sleep. It is during sleep when there is an absence of distractions that God often does His best work in reaching our minds and hearts with just the right answer presented in just the right way. We can also create those times of solitude with God when we separate ourselves from television, the computer, or the cell phone and simply be alone with our Creator. Make no mistake; our Heavenly Father relishes those moments of undivided attention that we give Him when we are alone, and I don't mean when we are praying. Praying involves talking; meditation is that time when we are listening for His counsel, when we hear His voice ringing in our minds. For He is love, and He loves to commune with us in our silent moments.

Meditation should be a regular, daily practice. You say you don't have the time. Maybe that's why you are having trouble in your relationship with God and why you don't understand His will. How about spending a little less time in front of the TV or at the computer, and more time alone with Abba, your Father? Are you serious about walking in His ways and being the best Christian you can be? Then eliminate some of the distractions in your life, and fill that vacated space by fellowshiping with God — just being alone with Him. Bible study and prayer are important and should never be neglected, but don't just learn about God or spend time on your knees detailing a laundry list of petitions for Him to fulfill. Be still and by yourself alone, come to know who He is. Stop talking and distracting yourself with your worldly needs; just listen to Him as He renews your mind and communes with you through the Spirit that He has made to dwell in you.

## The Power of Boredom

I would like to look at some Scriptures related to meditation, but first I need to discuss an often overlooked key to good meditation — boredom.

I know what many of you are thinking, "How could boredom have anything to do with meditation?" The answer is fairly simple if you think back to your childhood. Do you remember when you got into trouble or were just being pesky? What did your parents do? Most of you were probably sent to your room and told to stay there quietly until you could think of something

*Continued on Page 13*

# The Accidental Life

by *Kenneth Westby*



Socrates' famous dictum, "The unexamined life is not worth living," is overstated for sure, but there is truth to it. Logically, we should be living "The Examined Life" — examined with the wisdom and insight that the Maker of Life offers us.

Sadly, many of us stumble through life with nary a plan much less a notion of a divine direction, a purpose to fulfill. Accidental living is the norm. We didn't choose our parents or the location of our birth. It just happened and we found ourselves growing up in a house we didn't pick. Your parents (or parent) may or may not have planned for your birth. You may have been their "accident." Nevertheless, they were living somewhere and likely made most choices that formed the growing ground for your young life. They were your human life-givers.

Life is our received gift. We didn't order it, buy it, or even understand it. But it is everything to us—it is all there is. We sense its value, its mysterious force, and we try to understand how it works. We ask, "How shall I live?" We look around us for clues and to others for guidance and examples. And as children we dream of the direction our life might take.

Typically, children nurture delightful dreams of how their lives will unfold. They fantasize lives filled with excitement, travel, adventure, and romance. They dream of attaining things and doing things. Childish daydreams we call them, yet behind them are innocent emotions and appetites for the beautiful, the ideal, and the fun associated with them. In the journey toward adulthood most if not all of these childhood dreams are lost or reluctantly abandoned as improbable or impossible.

Lamentably, many children grow up in angry homes, broken homes, or in such destitute poverty where beautiful dreaming is limited and difficult, a luxury for "rich kids." For these less fortunate and those millions in ages past, dreams were likely more mundane, less expansive, and perhaps more realistic. Children accepted that they would grow up and plow fields like Poppa does, or have babies and churn butter like Momma does. They would hard scabble for food and clothes like other peasants, servants, and slaves. The good life was not easy to dream.

My wife, JoAn, tells me of her little girl dreams to become a magazine editor in New York City. No doubt such dreams were formed from her voracious reading habits devouring everything in print that would be brought into that tiny farmhouse on a hill in the Quachita Mountains of Arkansas. She told of the nights under bed covers reading by flashlight so Daddy or Mamma

couldn't see that one of their three girls all sharing that bedroom was still up. She would have made a fine editor, but as the years passed she made decisions that took her in other directions.

I had plans to become either a businessman or a doctor. It is a mystery why those professions so attracted me as a boy. I didn't know any businessmen. I was told my father was planning to get into business some day, but he died when I was four. My mother became a nurse, but I never knew any doctors. After high school I still hadn't decided which course to pursue when I enrolled in the University of Washington. First, I had to get a job, work a year or two saving up money to go.

Then, another prospect interrupted my life. After listening to a radio preacher for many months, I was captured by the prospect of actually discovering God's Grand Plan and the purpose of life. Well, that was a heady prospect, and it pointed me in a totally new direction, one I didn't know even existed. It meant going to a different college and then on to paths I could never have dreamed. Yet, here I am still pursuing that prospect of discovering God's Grand Plan. It has been a most exciting journey with great rewards.

We wonder how much of what happens to us in life is accidental. If we believe in a God that involves himself with his creation, we wonder about how his hand has directed our life at important crossroads. Sometimes we have the strong feeling, if not evidence, that he has. Other times it seems as if life is just a lot of time and chance. This pondering is well worth our time as it helps us see our lives "from above" as opposed to our normal ground-level thinking.

## Examining Your Life

I expect most us spend too little time taking careful inventory of where we are on the path toward eternity. A spiritual GPS would be a handy thing if such a device could be invented. But alas, we have to do the hard work of examining ourselves—and it is hard work—to find out where we have trod on the path God has for us.

I suggest the divine path that God would have us walk is a unique path, ours alone, suited to our

---

*Continued on Page 18*

## Judaism—Revelation of Moses, or Religion of Men?

by Philip Neal (2010)

York Publishing Company,  
P.O. Box 1038 Hollister, California, 95024

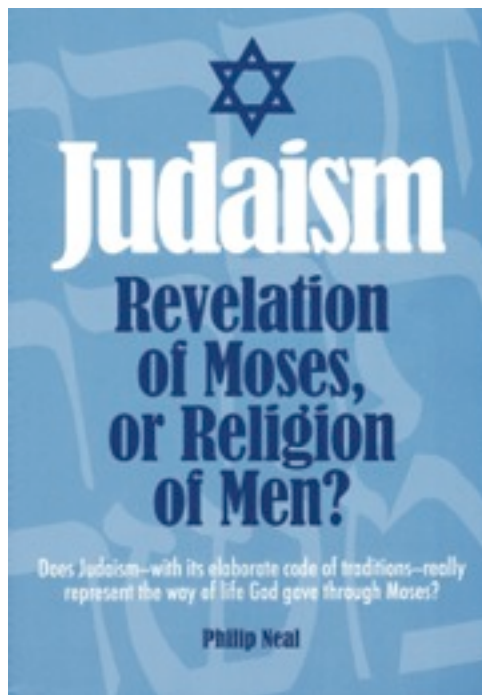
(Review by BSA board member, Dr. Dusti Howell)

In *Judaism*, Philip Neal takes the reader on a behind the scenes documentary style look at Judaism. Step-by-step, Neal walks the reader through the history of the Jews. From the first Diaspora and rebuilding of the temple through the work of Nehemiah and Ezra to the Hellenization of Palestine after it was conquered by Alexander the Great.

I'll admit that this book changed my personal perceptions about Judaism. When I went to Bible college, I always tried to take classes that were taught by those like the Apostle Paul, former Pharisaic Jews that had converted to Christianity. I thought that because the Jews were given the oracles of God (Romans 3:2) and that Rabbinic Jews had special cultural information and a deeper knowledge of the Torah and God that gentile teachers did not have. From a historical perspective Neal shows that understanding of the Torah began to erode with the Hellenization of Palestine by Alexander the Great and the generals that followed him. This was followed by the development of the Talmud, the writings that contained the supposed "oral law" of Moses. In the end, different sects of Judaism emerged, and the conflicting world of Judaism was as varied and as secularized as many Christian churches are today. When Jesus arrives in Judea, the pagan traditions of the Jews had become a veil of blindness for the nation. It is fascinating to see how Christ addresses the fallacies of each sect with differing beliefs. It is also easy to see why the average Jew had little interest in the religious sects of first-century Palestine.

In reviewing my notations in the book, I find that nearly a dozen times I wrote, "Wow," in the column. From the fact that the vast majority of Jews in first century Palestine were not interested in religion to the fact that in rabbinical Judaism, the Talmud rules over the Torah, I found myself surprised often.

Neal does a fantastic job of sharing key elements of the Talmud, the "Oral" Torah, which contains the words God supposedly whispered into Moses' ear. From ritual hand washing to how many steps one can journey on the Sabbath, Neal gives a behind the scenes look at how these traditions developed. In the end, he reveals how these traditions were encapsulated into the Talmud.



The resulting internal nature of Jewish religion is far different from the previous paradigm that I held, which looked more like Hollywood's production of "Fiddler on the Roof."

At the end of the book, there are several appendices that are of great value. It is here that Neal takes a deeper look at a number of key concepts such as the Jewish Code of Law, Kabbalah—Judaism's dark side, and the Judeo-Christian myth. The appendix on Paul's perspective on Judaic "works of law" was a gold mine. After Philip Neal introduces this topic, he includes a full paper on the topic by Fred R. Coulter. This detailed 50-page section is excellent. Although I studied this topic in college, I can't say that I have ever been comfortable with Paul's difficult scriptures. In this appendix, Coulter brilliantly begins by analyzing "works of laws" from the perspective of Paul's easy-to-understand Scriptures. Then Coulter works his way through scriptures of increasing levels of difficulty. I now feel much more ready to give an answer for the hope that is in me after studying this appendix in depth.

Overall, this is a fantastic book. I give it two thumbs up. It changed my views and perspectives on Judaism. It also helped sharpen my sword in a big way. I recommend it wholeheartedly.

**To order your copy of Neal's book**, send \$11 (\$8 for BSA members) to the BSA at:

Bible Sabbath Association, 802 N.W. 21<sup>st</sup> Ave., Battle Ground, WA 98604.

# ***The Perverting of Paul's Epistles***

Dr. Daniel Botkin



I recently read through all the Epistles of Paul again for the umpteenth time. Every time I read Paul's Epistles, it becomes increasingly clear to me how horribly the devil has twisted the meaning of these inspired writings and misrepresented the purpose for which they were written.

I do not claim to understand everything Paul wrote. Anyone who makes such a claim is saying that he understands Paul even better than Paul's fellow-apostle Peter did, because Peter said that some of Paul's writings were "hard to be understood" (2 Pet. 3:16). If they were difficult for Peter to understand, they are going to be even more difficult for us.

Furthermore, Paul himself admitted "we know in part" and "we see through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor. 13:9, 12). Our partial, cloudy understanding of spiritual truth certainly applies to the truths that are expressed in Paul's Epistles. So I do not claim to understand the meaning of everything Paul wrote. However, there is one thing I do understand about Paul's writings. If Paul's writings are inspired by the Holy Spirit (which they are), then they must be interpreted and understood in a way that agrees with the rest of the Bible. If an interpretation of Paul's writings leads to a conclusion that contradicts something that the rest of the Bible consistently teaches and affirms, then that interpretation must be rejected. Either that, or Paul must be rejected as a heretic.

By misrepresenting the purpose of Paul's Epistles and by twisting their meaning, the devil has convinced Christians that Paul taught against keeping Old Testament commandments. The Deceiver has deceived Christians into thinking that being "under grace" and "not under the law" means that they can disregard the laws that God gave in the Old Testament. The devil presents this poisoned perversion of Paul to Christians, and most of them eagerly and happily swallow the concoction. This anti-Torah theology is absorbed into Christians' minds and spiritually sickens them. The only Christianity they have ever known is a weak, watered-down, sickly faith that is devoid of a love for the Torah. Because this is all they have ever known, they erroneously assume that this is normal, that this is what Biblical faith is supposed to be.

The devil has indeed performed a masterful job of deception. The junior demons no doubt marvel at the

clever, wonderful web of deception that the Master Deceiver has spun. And he used the inspired writings of an Apostle to provide the material for his web — the very Apostle who warned of a soon-coming apostasy that would be characterized by antinomianism (lawlessness)! What chutzpah!

Satan has misrepresented the purpose of Paul's Epistles. He has convinced Christians that the purpose of Paul's Epistles is to provide a textbook (an updated, corrected, revised version) to formulate theology that contradicts God's Law. Look at typical Christian theology — especially in regards to God's Law — and you will see that it relies more on the writings of Paul than on the teachings of Christ. If it is real Christianity, should it not be based more on the teachings of Christ than on the occasional letters that were written by one of Christ's Apostles?

Don't misunderstand. I'm not suggesting that Paul's Epistles should be torn out of the Bible. Not at all. Or, as Paul would say, God forbid. I'm not even minimizing the importance of Paul's Epistles. What I am doing is emphasizing the importance of understanding the real purpose of Paul's Epistles and understanding their correct meaning.

What is the real purpose of Paul's Epistles? When you read through Paul's Epistles, it is obvious that a great deal of the text is corrective and remedial in nature. Paul wrote his letters to real flesh-and-blood people who were in real congregations that were experiencing real problems — problems such as false teachers, incorrect theology, unsound doctrine, unacceptable behavior, carnality, backbiting, envy, strife, division, disunity, disorder, etc.

It is clear from the text that much of what Paul wrote was written for the express purpose of correcting doctrinal and behavioral error. The thing that is not always so clear is exactly what the errors consisted of. Sometimes the text provides us with enough information to make an educated guess, but we do not really know for certain exactly what was going on in these first-century congregations. The people to whom Paul was writing knew what Paul was talking about, because they were involved in the situations that Paul was addressing. But, we were not there, so we do not always know for certain exactly what Paul was writing about. As someone once said, "Reading Paul's Epistles is like

listening to just one side of a telephone conversation." We can speculate and surmise, but we do not know all the details. Therefore we are going to find Paul's writings "hard to be understood" even more than Peter did.

Christian theology, especially in regards to the Law, relies primarily on Paul's hard-to-be-understood Epistles. Was this really the purpose of Paul's Epistles? Certainly not in Paul's mind. Paul never told first-century disciples to collect all his letters, bind them together, canonize the whole collection, and then use his writings to formulate anti-Torah theology that contradicts what the rest of the Bible teaches about God's Torah.

No, I am not in favor of de-canonizing Paul's writings. God forbid. They are inspired by the Holy Spirit, and they contain a lot of inspired instruction that is not hard to understand. When that is the case, the Lord expects His children to obey those instructions. Even the corrective, remedial instructions are to be obeyed when it is clear that the problem Paul was addressing is the same problem that exists in a current situation.

The issue here is not about the canonicity or non-canonicity of Paul's writings. That question has already been settled; they are part of the canon of Scripture. God watches over His Word to perform it, and He likewise watches over His Word to preserve it, to make sure that the right books are in the canon. No man has the authority to de-canonize any of the books that are part of the canon of Scripture.

The issue here is not about the question of canonicity, but about the purpose of this particular part of the New Testament canon. One of the main purposes of Paul's letters to various first-century congregations was to bring correction. It was not to provide anew, updated textbook to tell Christians how to revise and correct defective, Torah-based theology. Yet this is what Christians have done.

Let me give you a parable to show how nonsensical this is. Suppose an appliance company produces and markets a new appliance. Let's say it's a bread machine to make homemade bread. People start buying and using the bread machine. Some of the customers have various problems with the operation of their bread machine, so they contact the manufacturer and describe their specific problem. The manufacturer writes a personal letter to each customer and tells them what to do to remedy their particular problem. In each letter, the manufacturer writes the solution, but he does not have to describe the problem, because the customer already knows what the problem is.

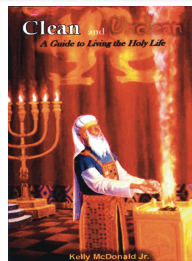
You buy a bread machine for yourself. Then you decide to collect all the personal letters that the manufacturer wrote to help other customers with their problems, letters which just give solutions without describ-

ing the problems. Then you staple all these remedial letters together and use them to try to figure out how to operate your bread machine, instead of simply consulting the owner's manual that the manufacturer included with the appliance.

Ridiculous, of course, but no more ridiculous than Christians basing their theology of God's Law primarily on Paul's remedial letters rather than on the Torah, the Prophets, and the teachings of the Messiah.

Paul's remedial letters to first-century congregations presuppose a number of things. First, they presuppose a knowledge of the problems Paul was addressing. Secondly, they presuppose a familiarity with oral teachings that Paul gave in person at a prior time when he was living with the recipients of these letters. Thirdly, they presuppose a familiarity with the Torah ("for I speak to them that know the law," Rom. 7:1). We can familiarize ourselves with the Torah, but there's not much we can do about the first two presuppositions. Therefore we should not be surprised when some of Paul's writings are difficult (or even impossible) for us to understand.

Continued on Page 8



## Clean and Unclean: A Guide to Living the Holy Life

By Kelly McDonald, Jr.

This is a great book about the need for contemporary Christians to follow the Dietary Laws of Leviticus 11. These Laws are established by God for the greater good of all mankind. In this work Kelly McDonald Jr explains the common misconceptions about the dietary laws. He also teaches from the ancient Greek language how the New Testament instructs us to follow these laws. This book is a "must have" for anyone who has ever been interested in this topic. Order your copy today for a donation of only \$10.00 (includes shipping). Call (731) 736-1055, or write Hungry Hearts Ministries, P.O. Box 10334, Jackson, TN 38308.

Kelly McDonald, Jr., is a teaching deacon at the Hungry Hearts Church in Jackson, Tennessee. Kelly is also a regular contributor to *The Sabbath Sentinel*, *Christian to Christian Connection*, and *Pursuit Magazine*. Kelly is a graduate of Lambuth University and is available to speak and teach in your area.



The devil has used many of Paul's statements about the Law to make Christians think they can ignore God's Torah. But to come to this conclusion requires very sloppy scholarship. To come to this conclusion, Paul's statements have to be taken at face value; the original Greek has to be ignored in favor of an English translation; the context has to be ignored; the historical background has to be ignored; the fact that we lack knowledge about the problems has to be ignored; the rest of the Bible, which contradicts the antinomian view, must be ignored. This is worse than sloppy scholarship. It is remaining in a state of denial, like the proverbial ostrich that buries her head in the sand when she feels threatened.

I can understand and interpret just about any of Paul's seemingly "negative" statements about the Law in a positive, pro-Torah way, a way that affirms rather than abolishes the Torah. If I come across an ambiguous statement that I cannot reconcile with the Torah and with Yeshua's teaching about the Law, I'm not going to throwaway Paul's Epistles. But I'm not going to throwaway the Torah and the teachings of Yeshua either. I'm going to retain the Torah and Yeshua's teachings and Paul's Epistles in my Bible, but I'm not going to let Paul overrule the Torah and Yeshua. I'm going to let the clear commandments of the Torah and the teachings of Yeshua overrule Paul's occasional ambiguous statements about the Law.

If a statement in one of Paul's remedial letters appears at first glance to contradict the Torah or Yeshua, and I cannot understand it in a way that affirms the Torah and Yeshua, I have to conclude that we simply do not have enough information to know what Paul was talking about.

This is not a cop-out. It is a sensible decision based on the overwhelming weight of evidence. The pro-Torah message proclaimed throughout the Bible (some of it by Paul himself) greatly outweighs a small amount of text that seems to say that there is something wrong with God's Law.

If you want to let some of Paul's hard-to-be-understood statements overrule the inspired words of God's Law and the inspired words of God's Son, go ahead. As for me and my house, we are going to understand Paul in a way that agrees with the Law of God and with the Son of God.

---

*Reprinted from "Gates of Eden," Mar-Apr 2011, p. 18. "Gates of Eden" is a bimonthly newsletter 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](http://www.gatesofeden.org).*

## Search Me, O God

*"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23, 24).*

Are you one of the many Christians who have made promises to God and have realized that within only a few days those promises were quickly broken? Christians worthy of the name want to do what is right, but with many their promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand. Why? Is the Christian life supposed to be a kind of treadmill on which we are forever trying to make progress but never getting anywhere?

Let us examine an incident that took place during Jesus' Galilean ministry that suggests the cause and solution to this problem. It had been a busy day. Jesus had fed five thousand men, not counting women and children, with five loaves and two fishes. Now night has fallen, and twelve weary men are rowing their little craft toward Capernaum. Suddenly, out of the darkness, a furious storm bursts upon the lake. The disciples, some of them experienced seamen, strain at the oars, trying to reach shore, but it is useless. Toward morning they give themselves up for lost. A flash of lightning stabs the darkness, revealing a mysterious figure walking over the waves. For a moment the men think the figure is a phantom, whose presence bodes evil, and they cry out in terror. But, the figure is Jesus, and their fears subside. As Jesus advances toward the boat, Peter, always the boldest of the disciples, calls out, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water" (Matt. 14:28). Jesus bids him come. Peter steps out of the boat and actually walks on the water for a few moments. Then he begins to sink. Why?

The reason is that Peter forgot who was giving him the ability to walk on water. He took his eyes off Jesus. When we stumble in our Christian experience, it is never God's fault—never! Not only does He not want us to sin, but He is able to keep us from falling (see Jude 24). Who, then, is to blame for our failure, since Satan cannot overcome us without our consent? It can only be ourselves! Could it be that the commitment we made to Christ yesterday, which we thought was total, was less than total? It could be. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). We cannot know it, but God can.

Has your heart deceived you? Do not give up. Instead, confess your sin, renew and deepen your commitment, and follow God as He leads you in His way everlasting. God will do His part. Will you do yours?

---

*Donald Mansell, New Every Morning, page 8. Review & Herald Publishing Association. 1981.*



# Keeping Families Together by Meaningful Celebrations\*



By Pastor David Guerrero

As a husband and father of four I am always seeking creative and meaningful ways to spend time with my family. One of the most wonderful resources to discover methods of building healthy Christian families is the Bible. Yes, as we look into the Bible we will find that God in His infinite wisdom has given the family days and ceremonies to keep families filled with the richness of His presence, power, and love.

## The Sabbath

If you would ponder one of the significant reasons for the Sabbath, you would realize that one important reason the Sabbath was given to mankind was to enhance family life. Sabbath means rest. The first time we find the mention of the Sabbath in the Bible, it was God resting as one satisfied in the work that He had done in the creation of the World. That first Sabbath with His creation included a time of celebration with Adam and Eve. It was a time for building relationships. It was a time for the created to honor and spend time with the Creator. We too can take this lesson and joyfully experience family time with our Creator on the Sabbath.

## Friday Night

At my home Friday nights are special. The Sabbath is approached with a family meal. During this meal the entire family is involved in ushering in the beauty of the Sabbath. There is a candle lighting ceremony at the table. While my wife silently lights the candles, she prays in her heart for each child. Once the candles are all lit, she closes with a prayer of blessing as an introduction to the Sabbath evening.

After the candle lighting ceremony is completed, as the father I lead out in a special time of prayer. I do this by praying while walking around the table, placing my hand on each child's head and praying out loud a prayer of blessing upon each child. The smiles and looks of joy on each child's face are absolutely priceless. I conclude this time of prayer by praying over my wife as I read a portion from Proverbs thirty-one. This is then followed by one of my children leading out (they take turns each week) in a special song that lifts up and honors the Christ of the Sabbath. As the child leads, we all follow by joining in and singing softly around the

table. These blessings produce all kinds of emotions in us and bind us in very special and meaningful ways.

At this time I recite what is called the *Kiddush*, a Sabbath prayer, over the wine (grape juice) and place a small portion (about 2 oz.) into each person's glass. Afterwards, as I give the cue, after reading a short Bible passage, in unity we sip the grape juice together. This is followed by what is called *Hamotzi*, the blessing of the *Challah* bread. We then take turns tearing off a small portion of bread (hands have been washed, of course) and eating bread together. The meal is then served leisurely as we enter into the Sabbath rest. Our meal closes with grace, a prayer which is offered by one of the children.

## Sabbath

On Saturday morning we all wake up remembering that we are in the presence of God. All that we do on this special day of rest, we do to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31)! On the Sabbath day we take meaningful time to read, meditate, and study God's word as a family. We also make the Sabbath significant to our family as we walk in nature and talk about God and the wonders of his creation. Later, we attend church services and fellowship with the family of God.

As the sun begins to go down on Sabbath afternoon, the family gathers around the table again. This meal is a simple one; it is sort of a light refreshment. After we partake of this meal as a family, we go outside (all my children just love this part) and have fun looking at the sky waiting to see the first three stars in the evening sky, which means Sabbath is coming to a close. My wife then prays a closing or farewell prayer to the day.

We then go inside and have what is called the ceremony of the *Havdalah*, which means the separation. This ceremony concludes the Sabbath and introduces a new week. This is a candlelight ceremony in which we use a twisted candle which represent creation and redemption. After the candle is lit, one of the children holds the candle while another child holds a spice box called the *bessamen*. At this time we read together a scripture that refers to Christ as the light of the world, when He lay in the tomb, and when He was resurrected on the first day of the week (John 1:1-7; Luke

23:54-56; Luke 24:1-8). After our reading, the head of the home pours grape juice into a glass until it overflows as a visual sign of the fullness and completion of the week. Then there is a time of prayer, thanksgiving and the extinguishing of the candle by dipping it into the glass of grape juice. The spice box is then passed from person to person. This signifies the fragrance of life that has been experienced during the Sabbath. This weekly experiences deepens our Sabbath experience as it improves the bond of our family.

During the year we celebrate the Passover and other biblical holy days in the same fashion. We take our Bibles during these set times of the year and recall the experience, and connect them with how Christ met them through His life and ministry. This deepens the family's understanding of God's Word, the relevance and the significance of the holy days (as they are to be celebrated in Christ), and it deeply bonds the relationships inside our family. These are wonderful occasions to especially lead our children to have a greater love, respect, adoration, and appreciation for their faith as well as the gospel of Yeshua.

\* *A wonderful resource for celebrating the biblical Feasts in a Christ-centered manner is the book **Celebrating the Feasts** by Martha Zimmerman. This book has been a blessing to me and my family.*

*David Guerrero is the director of Rekindle the Flame Ministries, a non profit 501c3 Christian organization that seeks to aid the body of Christ in experiencing transformation of life through faith-based counseling, seminars, training, and newsletters. Please contact us at (715) 310-2196 or on the web at [www.rekindletheflameministries.org](http://www.rekindletheflameministries.org) for more information how we can help you or your organization.*

### **China rejects US report on religions**

BEIJING rejected a US commission report accusing China and other countries of seriously violating religious freedoms, saying the board that wrote it should "abandon its prejudices."

"We advise the so-called 'US Commission on International Religious Freedom' to abandon its prejudices, respect facts and stop intervening in China's domestic affairs," foreign ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said in a statement today.

In an annual report released last Thursday, the commission said it found serious violations in nations including China, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam and highlighted what it called a sharp deterioration in Pakistan.

## **Just the Facts**

### **Dear Friends and Fellow Servants,**

In 1990, I had the opportunity to visit a site in southeastern Turkey known as Nemrut Dag. Nemrut Dag is a seven thousand foot mountain and on top is the burial site of Antiochus I Theos, King of Commagene. Commagene was a kingdom bordering on the area Cilicia. Claiming the title Theos or God, Antiochus thought it only right that he should be buried upon a high place-the dwelling place of the gods. Antiochus is buried in a tumulus style of burial, under 150 feet of rocks on top of Nemrut Dag. There, both Greek and Persian gods were worshipped-demonstrating syncretism-a blending of all the pagan religions during the time of the Grecian Empire.

On the east side of the mountain there is a terrace overlooking the Euphrates River valley. Here the sun was worshipped as it rose. On the West there is another terrace where the sun was worshipped as it set. Statues of the gods line the terraces and, in a central location, we find a depiction of Antiochus shaking hands with the sun god Mithra.

There upon Nemrut, we find irrefutable evidence of the Persian sun god Mithra's influence upon the Grecian Empire.

In 17 A.D., the Roman emperor Tiberias Caesar annexed the small country of Commagene in which the mountain Nemrut Dag is located. It was the policy of the Roman Empire to send soldiers from one area of the empire to another in an effort to create a more homogeneous population. As the soldiers from Commagene were sent out to other parts of the empire they took their worship of the sun god Mithra with them. The worship of Mithra was a man's religion and Mithraism soon became the faith of Roman soldiers. Mithraic shrines are most numerous at locations of military encampment.

Some historians are perplexed by the similarities between traditional Christianity and Mithraism. One historian states, "There are striking coincidences with Christianity. Mithra was born in a cave on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December and was venerated on Sundays." The truth is, there is no reason to be perplexed. It is no coincidence that a December 25<sup>th</sup> birthday and a Sunday observance were incorporated into Christianity. They are elements of a cleverly devised Satanic scheme to combine pagan sun worship with the worship of the biblical Creator, Yeshua of Nazareth, Jesus Christ. The very same scheme is followed throughout the Old Testament-the combination of the worship of the sun god under the name Baal, with the true worship of the Creator.

Now these unpleasant facts are easily documented. Scholars and theologians are well aware. Even so, most of them will do anything possible to avoid having to discuss them. Will we defend the things that we have been taught by those who withhold vital information? Or, will we think for ourselves and apply the truths of Scripture which plainly warn against such deception?

Let us heed the words of the book of Colossians: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

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

# Toxic Faith, Healing Faith

by Loren Seibold

**God asks us to trust him, believe in him, have faith in him.  
Unfortunately, some people get it wrong.**

Imagine holding in your hands a knife. A strong knife, with a shiny steel blade and a sturdy handle. The blade tapers to a keen point, the edge as sharp as a razor blade.

Here's the question: is this knife a good thing, or a bad thing?

The answer, of course, is simple: It depends on how you use it. If you're cutting up cucumbers for a salad, it's an essential tool. If you're a surgeon, a sharp knife can save someone from dying of a ruptured appendix. With a knife you can carve wood, cut rope, or graft scions onto a tree.

If, on the other hand, you were robbing a gas station, that same knife would be an instrument of evil.

Same tool. Different application. Faith, too, can take different forms, depending on how it's used. At its best, faith in God makes people happier, healthier, and holier.

However, you don't have to look far nowadays to find examples of unhealthy, hurtful faith. Newscasts often make reference Muslim extremists who kill randomly in the name of Allah. Other stories tell of manipulative, charismatic Christian leaders — people like Jim Jones and David Koresh — who under the banner of faith, controlled, coerced, and ultimately destroyed their followers.

How can something as affirming and lovely as faith in God become a toxic, destructive force?

Let me remind you that Satan, the author of evil, is an expert on religious faith. He learned first hand: he began his career as a leading angel in heaven! Though he rebelled and was forced out of heaven, that experience gave him knowledge that he still uses. He knows intimately about God and God's purposes for this world. Having been present for the creation of humankind, he knows how our minds work too. He studies religions and their leaders, and knows just how to subvert their good intentions.

With all that inside knowledge, Satan is a dangerous foe.

## Toxic Faith

Any thoughtful person can see that a philosophy of life based on pure selfishness would ultimately be self-destructive. Who would fall for Satan's temptations if the outcome of evil were made clear?

So Satan sometimes takes a more subtle tack: he twists religious faith to undermine God's purposes.

Let's start with a foundational biblical truth: God wants us to live happy lives. Jesus said it often: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you .... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). His reassurance extends beyond the bounds of this life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have *eternal life*" (John 3:16; emphasis supplied).

Rather than seeing God as a loving Father, Satan wants us to think God is angry and frightening. The Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards became famous for a sermon called "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." In graphic detail and with theatrical delivery, Edwards described a soul hanging over hell like a spider on a thread. "Thus it is that natural men are held in the hand of God, over the pit of hell; they have deserved the fiery pit, and are already sentenced to it; and God is dreadfully provoked ... the devil is waiting for them, hell is gaping for them, the flames gather and flash about them, and would fain lay hold on them, and swallow them up."

The sermon was a success: people screamed, wept, and passed out. Thousands came to the altar. Unfortunately, they were responding, not to God's love, but to a distorted picture of God. While it is true that God cannot abide wickedness, it is also true that He wants everyone to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4) and is quick to forgive those who ask Him (1 John 1:9). While some preachers use fear to turn people to God, that motivation eventually ceases to work, for who would want to serve such a sadistic God, much less be with Him for eternity?

Another distortion is that God only accepts perfection. I once visited a woman who was terrified because way back when she was a teenager, she had told a lie. It had been only a bit of bragging, but it haunted her that she couldn't confess to the person she'd lied to — who (if she could have managed to find him) would have only been puzzled by a confession of such minor significance.

God, wanting us to live happy lives, filled the Bible with good rules: so good that many of them (not killing, not stealing, not lying) are reflected in virtually every legal code in the world. Inevitably, though, we are going to

make mistakes and commit sins. That's why the Bible repeats that through Jesus, God willingly forgives us! "In [Jesus] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace," insists Paul (Ephesians 1:7).

I assured this woman that God was much more understanding of her youthful indiscretion than she was of herself.

### The Burden of Fear

As a young man, Martin Luther was haunted by a fear that some sin would remain unconfessed, and he would be lost. He talked to his confessor so often, about such minor transgressions, that his pastor finally said, "Martin, don't come back until you commit some real sins!" His fear of God haunted him for years until, while performing a rigorous penance in Rome, a passage from the prophet Habakkuk came into his mind: "the righteous will live by his faith" (2:4). Luther began to see that God was not unreasonable and demanding, but generous and understanding. All God desired was that we human beings should trust Him. So began the Protestant Reformation with its encouraging message of righteousness by faith in Christ alone.

The most toxic kind of faith is one in which believers come under the control of religious leaders, to their own harm. Back in the 1970s, a Christian pastor in San Francisco began to build a following. Jim Jones was handsome and charming. People naturally gathered to him. He led in such a way as to bring people under his power. Jones insisted on absolute obedience. He taught his followers that he himself was a manifestation of God, and their lives and happiness depended entirely upon him. The story ended in 1978 in what was intended to be utopian settlement in the jungles of Guyana, when hundreds of his followers committed suicide at his command.

Be on guard if you hear phrases from religious leaders such as, "You can only be saved by following me." "God told me he wants you to give all of your money to my ministry." "God demands that you do whatever I tell you, even if it seems wrong." "You cannot understand the Bible for yourself. Only I can tell you what it means."

I once knew a man who was so convinced that he was right in every aspect of his religious understanding that he beat his children, deprived them of sleep and privacy, and demeaned them.

A healthy faith never oppresses others. On the contrary, Jesus described a healthy faith as one that makes you "free indeed" (John 8:36).

### Healing Faith

The right kind of faith will lead you in the direction of peace and wholeness. That doesn't mean a life following God is always sunshine and roses. "In this world you will have trouble," Jesus said. Not every moment is happy; not every prayer is answered. But Jesus also added, "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). In those five words is the promise of a happy, healthy faith. Here are just a few ways that a healthy faith in God can make you happier:

- Believing that God loves you supremely puts life's difficulties into perspective. Though unemployed, afflicted with pain, or experiencing family problems, you can take heart that God is always with you, even "to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). While God may not choose to rescue us from every misfortune, He does see and care (Matthew 10:29-31).

- No one is beyond the reach of forgiveness. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," wrote Paul (Romans 3:23). No doubt you, along with nearly every other person on earth, regret things you've done or said. Yet even when a transgression must be punished by the law, God can still forgive, as many in prisons can attest.

- What are you most afraid of? The majority of people would no doubt say "death." And why not? It seems so final. Yet the Christian faith promises that there is more to life than the life we live now. Beyond death is a better life, with no sickness, no pain, and no tears (Revelation 21:3, 4). Is it possible that the dead can live again? God, by the resurrection of Jesus, proved that He has power even over death! (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). Death can't win (1 Corinthians 15:55). God will!

- Eternal life isn't just a promise, but a certainty. "I write these things to you," says John, "so that you may know that you have *eternal life*" (1 John 5:13; emphasis supplied). Not hope you have eternal life, or want eternal life, or think maybe there's a possibility of eternal life. No, you can live your life right now knowing that if you were to die this moment, the next thing you see will be the face of Jesus. What confidence that gives us! What courage! "If God is for us," writes Paul, "who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). Even death can't separate us from Him! According to a *Time* magazine cover story (February 12, 2009), scientists have discovered that faith has a powerful influence on our health. "People who attend religious services do have a lower risk of dying in any one year than people who don't attend. People who believe in a loving God fare better after a diagnosis of illness than people who believe in a punitive God. No less a killer than AIDS will back off at least a bit when it's hit with a double-barreled blast of belief."

A great churchman, Augustine of Hippo, opined that each of us has "a God-shaped void in us that can only be filled by Him." God hard-wired our brains to want to know and trust Him. Is it any wonder, then, that we feel lost without Him, and that we feel complete when we finally let Him into our lives?

So don't be content with a toxic faith. Instead, seek that full, happy life that Jesus promises, by placing your confidence in our good and loving God.

---

*Reprinted from Signs of the Times, November 2010, p.32. Loren Seibold writes from Worthington, Ohio. Loren is the Senior Pastor of the Worthington Seventh-day Adventist Church. He also edits a newsletter for North American Division pastors called Best Practices for Adventist Ministry.*

Editorial: "Meditation" cont. from page 3.

more constructive to do. Well, that is "the boredom key" to good meditation. The only difference is that there is no one telling you to go to your room and sit quietly until you can think of something constructive to do. You have to do that all on your own.

People often become bored when they don't have something to distract their attention away from some irritant, problem, or difficult situation. However, most of us need time to regroup when we are upset or confused. We frequently choose some distraction like television, loud music, or "the bottle" to divert our attention from the present unpleasantness. If our problem is something that needs to be dealt with constructively, we should really be heading toward our place of quiet retreat, clearing our mind of distractions, and waiting for God to talk to us about a solution — or our attitude — or both. Remember, good biblically based meditation is more about listening than it is about talking. It is about surrendering ourselves to our Heavenly Father, putting our focus back on the wonders of His being, and listening to what He might say to us in that "still, small voice." Until we can successfully pull our focus away from ourselves and our own problems, we are really not in a frame of mind to hear much of anything else, let alone a solution that God would like to communicate to us.

So, when boredom comes, let it run its course without succumbing to the persistent yearning to make it all go away through diversions and other mental gymnastics. Be willing simply to "be still and know" that the Lord is God and that He is much bigger than any problem that we may experience. He has the solution if we will only listen.

### **Scriptures Relating to Meditation**

When most Christians think of biblical meditation, they think of King David's Psalm, "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me" (Psalms 119:97–98). However, there is much more to meditation than just dwelling on God's law. In fact, there is a great misconception about "the Law" (*torah* in Hebrew) that most Christians overlook. *Torah* is not just "the Law." *Torah* encompasses a broad spectrum of biblical concepts that most people miss. That is unfortunate because it limits understanding of God and underestimates His accomplishments.

*Torah* in its essential form means "instruction," not law. The view of God as some harsh, unyielding Judge who takes delight in condemning people to hell is a view of our Heavenly Father that was bred during the Dark Ages when the Catholic Church controlled all thought and theology on the European continent. That view of God simply does not square with the Scriptures.

*Torah* in its broadest context refers to the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch. This alone shows us that *torah* is not limited to "law." If you look at *torah* as the writings of Moses, it's easy to see that the word can signify a variety of things. It means the mighty acts of God from the creation of mankind to the deliverance of His people from slavery in the Exodus to their inheritance of the Promised Land. *Torah* is the chronicle of God loving, defending, and delivering His people from slavery and death to life. For that matter, *torah* could extend to the delivery of God's people through Christ's death to the ultimate redemption of His people into the Promised Land of eternal life. The books of Moses are full of allusions to the coming of Messiah and eternal life.

With this background in mind, let's look at some Scriptures on meditation.

Meditation by God's faithful servants throughout the ages is recorded many times in the Bible. Isaac went out into the field in the evening to meditate (Genesis 24:63). The Psalmist meditated on the mighty works of God (Psalm 43:5). In this Psalm the writer uses "mediate," "muse," and "remember" almost interchangeably. In Psalm 63:6, the Psalmist mediates on God "in the night watches." After the death of Moses, God comes to Joshua to instruct him to carry on the redemptive work that Moses started. In those instructions the Lord tells Joshua, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8). God was not telling Joshua about the Law, as is the common misunderstanding. He was telling Joshua to mediate on the Book of the Law (the five books of Moses, the *Torah*) which included all of the mighty and wondrous acts of God, not just the writing of the Ten Commandments at Sinai.

In the New Testament the apostle Paul instructs Timothy to mediate: "Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all" (1 Timothy 4:15).

Meditation is communion with God, reaching out to Him and hearing back from Him. It is as important as prayer and Bible study. Meditation focuses our attention directly on our Heavenly Father and away from our worries and concerns that often interfere with hearing His counsel and instruction. It is quiet time to listen to His voice while calming our agitated spirit. Don't short-change your relationship with God. Add meditation to your routine and reap the rewards of greater satisfaction in your walk with God.

—Ken Ryland

# ***Bible Study: How well do you know the book of Esther?***

## ***Bible Challenge***

1. True or False God is not mentioned in the book of Esther.
2. True or False Esther was an orphan. (Esther 2:7)
3. The story takes place in Susa, capital of what empire? (Esther 1:1-3)
4. What was Mordecai's relation to Esther? (Esther 2:7)
5. What Jewish feast annually celebrates their great deliverance in this book? (Esther 9:21-26)
6. True or False The book of Esther was found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. (<http://tinyurl.com/3srebh6>)

## **Introduction (Esther 1 and 2)**

Esther is a book that showcases the power of God while at the same time does not mention God's name. An orphan girl rises to become queen of the Medo-Persian Empire and her cousin Mordecai is divinely protected from being sentenced to death to become second to the king (Esther 10:3). The setting takes place in the capital of the Medo-Persian Empire, located in modern day Iran. In the first two chapters of the book, Esther wins an empire wide beauty contest and is made queen (Esther 2:17) to replace the former queen who refused a summons to appear before the king (Esther 1:12). At the same time, Esther's cousin, Mordecai, who adopted her after her parents died, uncovers a plot to assassinate the king (Esther 2:21-3).

## **Unbreakable Royal Decrees (Esther 3)**

A valuable key to understanding some of the seemingly insurmountable scenarios that challenged biblical figures was created by irrevocable decrees of leaders of the Persian Empire. More than a generation before Esther, the most famous of these royal decrees landed Daniel in the lion's den. Even though the king worked all day to figure out a way to save Daniel, the decree could not be reversed (Daniel 6:11-16). Similarly, Esther became queen because the king made a royal decree to depose Queen Vashti (Esther 1:19). However, the royal decree to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews was the most destructive decree of all (Esther 3:8-15). This decree was proposed by Haman, the king's right hand man (Esther 3:1) who was angry with the Jew Mordecai for not bowing down and honoring him (Esther 3:5-6). The plot thickens, as the king doesn't know Queen Esther is also a Jew (Esther 2:20).

## **Does History Repeat Itself?**

The Mordecai-Haman feud may go back hundreds of years. To understand the depth of this feud, it is critical to remember Amalek. Amalek was the first country to war with Israel, just days after their miraculous Red Sea crossing. Moses reveals that Amalek struck at those that were weak and feeble who lagged behind the main body of Israelites. In the ensuing battle, Israel prevailed against the Amalekites. God told the Israelites to remember this incident, and that at some point God would give Israel an opportunity to blot out the Amalekites. They were not to

forget (Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-19). It appears that King Saul had an opportunity to wipe out the Amalekites. The story shows that Saul completely destroyed the Amalekites but left Agag alive (1 Samuel 15:8). The next day Samuel visits Saul and informs him that his failure to completely fulfill God's command (1 Samuel 15:1-3) means he is rejected from being king of Israel (1 Samuel 15:26). Samuel kills Agag and leaves, never seeing Saul again (1 Samuel 15:33-35). Although it appears that Amalek has been completely wiped out, Jewish sages believe that in the night that Agag remained alive, before Samuel arrived, Agag impregnated a woman who continued the line of Amalek. This is feasible because somehow the Amalekites survived. In Esther, we find that Haman is an Agagite (Esther 3:1, 8:5, 9:24). Jewish Sages believe that Haman is a direct descendent of the Amalekite King Agag. They also believe that Mordecai and Esther are related to King Saul, the first King of Israel. This is also possible as Mordecai is labeled a Benjamite, of the line of Kish (Esther 2:5). King Saul's father is Kish (1 Samuel 9:1-3). Are the sages correct? (<http://www.njop.org/html/PurimHanging.html>)

## **A Feast of Deliverance**

The royal decree to kill the Jews was not reversed, nor could it be by Persian law. However, deliverance comes in the form of an additional royal decree that allowed Jews to gather together to protect themselves, and to kill anyone that attacked them, and to plunder the property of anyone that tried to kill them (Esther 8:8-14). Purim is the Jewish feast celebrated in remembrance of this great deliverance (Esther 9:26-32). It is not a holy convocation because it is not an ordained feast listed in the Torah (Leviticus 23).

## **In the News**

In February of this year, an article in *Jewish World Review* reported that an orthodox rabbi traveled to Iran to highlight the plight of endangered shrines after "...Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad ordered Esther's and Mordecai's tomb destroyed. The Iranian media followed up Ahmadinejad's edict with a campaign claiming that Esther and Mordecai were responsible for the murder of 170,000 Iranians." (<http://tinyurl.com/6g8fnkg>)

—BSA board member, Dusti Howell

# Let No One Judge You

by Kelly McDonald



The one issue in Paul's letters that seems to be more controversial than any other is Paul's stance concerning the seventh day Sabbath. People say of these passages that Paul taught against Gentiles observance of traditionally 'Jewish' customs. One of the passages that has been widely used to say that Paul abandoned belief in the seventh day Sabbath is Colossians 2:16-17. In these verses, Paul says, "So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (NKJV). Paul instructs the Colossian believers to let no one judge them in eating, drinking, with regard to a religious festival, new moon celebration, or the Sabbath. There are several ways that people have looked at this verse to say that he is denouncing the seventh day Sabbath.

The first view is that Paul is instructing us to let no one judge us for what day of the week we want to keep the Sabbath, whether it is Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, or any other day of the week. The second view is that the seventh-day Sabbath is just a shadow foretelling Christ, and therefore, is not applicable to us now that Christ has been revealed. An important point to note about Paul's lifestyle is that it always matched up with his teachings, and his lifestyle was mimicked after Christ's. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul says to the Corinthians, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." What was Paul's example? Paul's example in the Bible is to be the template of how we should act and how Christ acted on earth. His teachings, then, will be that much easier to understand.

In Acts 13:13-52, Paul and Barnabas enter into the region of Galatia to preach in Psidian Antioch. While there, the entire city gathered to hear the word of God on the Sabbath. "On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord" (Acts 13:44). The Sabbath to which he refers is the seventh-day Sabbath, which is the only Sabbath that would be observed by Jewish people. After Paul and Barnabas preached, the text reads, "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord..." (Acts 13:48). Both Jews **and** Gentiles were present to hear the word of God on the Sabbath. Paul did not insinuate in any way when preaching to these people that there was another Sabbath for Gentiles to worship on—one separate from Jews. Paul and Barnabas

then went to another city in Galatia, Iconium, and the text reads that "At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish Synagogue" (Acts 14:1a). Just as in Psidian Antioch, we find both Jews and Gentiles in the synagogue learning the word of God: "There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews **and** Gentiles believed" (Acts 14:1b).

The epistle to the Galatians is a book typically used to say that Paul "did away with the law" and especially that he did away with the Sabbath. Interestingly enough, while in this region of Galatia, Paul preached on the Sabbath! While in another city, Thessalonica, he preached again on the Sabbath. "As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures..." (Acts 17:2a). A large number of God-fearing Greeks and prominent women believed the word of God that was preached on the Sabbath (verse 4). We can clearly see from these examples and others not listed here that Paul was a Sabbath-promoter, not a Sabbath breaker.

Keep in mind that Paul was a teacher and apostle to the Gentiles. He even calls himself "...a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles" (1 Timothy 2:7). Apostle means "one sent with a message to a group of people." Paul was sent with the message of Christ to the Gentiles. It is true that Paul went to the Jewish Synagogue first, but he did that only to provoke some of his fellow brothers to be saved while he preached to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13-14). So, whatever Paul says in his letters, he says it primarily to Gentiles because his mission was to preach to them. Paul's example shows that he was not opposed to the Sabbath, even for Gentiles. Paul was also a bold man. He was once stoned and drug out of the city of Lystra and then later got back up and went back into the city (Acts 14:19-20). He stood before often hostile crowds of people to proclaim the gospel. He stood before governors, a king, and even Caesar himself. If Paul wanted the Gentiles to worship on a day other than the Sabbath, then Paul would not have been shy in doing so. Moreover, he had ample opportunity to plainly tell us.

In light of Paul's example, how are we to understand what Paul is saying to the Colossians? Even for someone who studies the Bible, Paul's letter can sometimes be confusing or hard to understand. Even Peter, the Apostle to the Jewish people, says concerning Paul's writings, "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means

salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:15-16). Peter attests that Paul's writings can sometimes be hard to understand. Paul was the second leading Rabbi in Judaism before His conversion to Christianity, so he was a very educated person. This was especially true of subjects pertaining to the law. Another point Peter makes is that we must be careful not to distort the writings of Paul. When Paul writes, he writes assuming that you already have a background in the Old Testament Scriptures. As Peter points out, if we distort his writings, then we are also distorting other Scriptures.

There are three keys to understanding the verses that Paul writes to the Colossians. The first key is to read the passage in context. The second key is the Greek words that Paul uses. The third key is placing the meaning in the context of what Paul is saying within the entire Bible story. The Bible is a single, continuous story, so any conclusions we make will line up with the entire Bible. We know that Paul is pro-law by his example, so our conclusions should follow suit.

One of the main heresies in the Colossian church was the false teaching of asceticism. Asceticism is a philosophy that views any kind of physical enjoyment such as rejoicing or feasting as morally wrong or sinful. To give an example of this, Paul says in Colossians 2:20-23 that: "Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!' These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (NKJV). These ascetics thought that abstaining from physically enjoyable activities was the key to piety. The problem is that they were relying on their own power and not relying on the Holy Spirit. As Paul says, their human teachings "lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence."

Therefore, in Colossians 2:16 Paul lists some of the physically enjoyable things that the ascetic teachers began to judge the Colossians for doing. Paul starts by saying, "...let no one judge you in food or in drink..." The Greek word Paul uses for food in this verse is *brosis*, word that refers to the animals that God declares to be food in the book of Leviticus, especially Leviticus 11. The ascetic teachers taught against eating animal meat that is permissible to eat according to Levitical law (lamb, beef, etc.). The apostle continues in

the second half of verse 16 by saying that the Colossians should not allow anyone to judge them "regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths." The Greek words Paul uses for festival (*heorte*) refers only to the Holy Days in Leviticus 23; the word for new moon (*noumenia*) refers only to the New Moon Celebrations in Numbers 28:11-15; and the word Paul uses for Sabbath (*sabbaton*) is used to refer to the seventh-day Sabbath in Genesis 2:1-3. Paul is not instructing the Colossians to let no one judge them for keeping the Sabbath when they want to keep it. He is actually telling the Colossians to let no one judge them for keeping in the seventh-day Sabbath!

Paul gives us his reasoning for saying this in verse 17 by stating that these things, "...are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ." The Sabbath is a shadow of prophetic events in the future, but the substance is in Christ. Some translations say that the reality is of Christ. Jewish people still keep the Sabbath to this day, even though it is merely a shadow to them. How much more are we as Christians required to keep the Sabbath now that we have the reality of Christ? In some ways, the Sabbath has not been completely fulfilled because it represents the millennial reign of Christ. Just as God worked for six days and then rested on the seventh, so man has been ruling for about six thousand years. Christ will rule the seven-thousandth year. Truly, even though Christ has come and we understand the meaning of the Sabbath in Him, we are still waiting for its final fulfillment.

There is not a passage in either the Old or New Testament that contradicts Sabbath observance. It was established long before the law was given in Genesis 2:1-3, and in Isaiah 66:22-23 God tells us that even in the New Heavens and New Earth the Sabbath will be kept: "'As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,' declares the LORD, 'so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,' says the LORD." Everyone will worship God on the Sabbath in the New Heavens and New Earth. If the Sabbath will be kept by everyone in the New Heavens and the New Earth, how much more should we keep the Sabbath now? No one should judge us for our celebration of the Sabbath, and we should not let them do so. This day represents one of the great promises of Christ, which is that He would return to rule and reign. Do we want Christ to return and clean up this mess we have made on earth? Of course! Then we should also celebrate his Sabbath.

The Sabbath, Holy Days, and New Moon celebrations are supposed to be a time of celebration and feasting in the Bible. This means that the Sabbath contradicted the ascetics' teaching against physical enjoyment. God wants us to enjoy the Sabbath with



food, family, and church friends. He wants us to sing songs of praise to him and to worship him. As Paul says, Christ was God the Father's agent to create all things, even the invisible things (Colossians 1:16a). The Sabbath is one of the invisible things created by Him and for Him. Let us worship our Savior on the Sabbath, and let no one judge us for it.

---

*Kelly McDonald, Jr. is a deacon and featured speaker at Hungry Hearts Ministries in Jackson, Tennessee. Kelly recently graduated summa cum laude from Lambuth University in Jackson, Tennessee, where he earned a Bachelor of Science with a double major in Political Science and Sociology and a minor in Legal Studies. Kelly considers the work of the Kingdom of God to be the single most important goal to which his life is dedicated. Kelly is the author of a new book, **Clean and Unclean**. See the ad on page 7.*

### **Fuller Theological Seminary Approves the Common English Bible for Official School Use**

*by Brandi Lewis, Fuller Theological Seminary*

**"We've approved the Common English Bible because it's an academically excellent translation, because it communicates the underlying Greek and Hebrew texts in a clear and accessible fashion, and because it reflects the reality that the communities for which the Bible was written consist of both women and men." —J. R. Daniel Kirk**

Combining scholarly accuracy with vivid language, the Common English Bible is the work of more than 200 biblical scholars and church leaders, including members of more than 20 denominations, who translated the Bible into English directly from the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. More than 500 readers in 77 groups field-tested the translation. Every verse was read aloud in the reading groups, where potentially confusing passages were identified. The translators considered the groups' responses and, where necessary, reworked those passages to clarify in English their meaning from the original languages.

The Common English Bible is an inclusive translation, using male and female pronouns where appropriate to indicate the meaning of the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek text when referring to general human beings. Pronouns for God, Lord, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit are translated as He, His, or Him.

Another unique feature of the Common English Bible is the inclusion of exclusive, detailed color maps from *National Geographic*, well known for its vibrant and accurate map making.

(BCN — *Breaking Christian News*: [breakingchristiannews.com](http://breakingchristiannews.com))

## **Morning Companion**

# **We're Not Turning Back**

Freedom has its price, but the Israelites weren't so sure it was a great bargain. They had come out of slavery with a celebration of joy, but soon they realized that in order to reach the Promised Land, they first had to cross the wilderness, and it was a wilderness of dry places. They were hungry and thirsty, faced in front by an impassable sea and behind by a pursuing Egyptian army.

Their reaction betrays a people accustomed to slavery. "It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness" (Exodus 14:12). The price was high, and in their minds it was better to be alive as slaves than dead as free men. Because they were unwilling to sacrifice for an ideal beyond themselves, their cry was to turn back to the system that had enslaved them.

These days we aren't tempted to go to Egypt for sustenance, but the New Testament speaks often of the temptation to go back into the bondage of sin. Just as Israel wanted to go back to the land of slavery, we too can be tempted to go back into the slavery of sin. Paul mentions how, if we offer ourselves to sin, we become slaves to it (Romans 6:16). The Way to which we have committed is often like a walk in the desert, and sometimes discouragement is such that we want to lament the difficulties and go back to familiar territory, even if that territory is self-destructive.

But God has something better for us, and he is not about to let go of us without a battle. As he said to the Israelites in this hour of discouragement, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward" (Exodus 14:15). You are not turning back, Israel. There is too much at stake.

To bolster that point, the Angel of God left the front of the camp and took up a position behind them. While this certainly was a rearguard action to protect them from their enemies (and God is the greatest Protector we can have), this also kept the Israelites from fleeing back to the Egyptians and a descent back to slavery.

Sometimes God forces us to have freedom for our own good. We owe a debt of gratitude for the assurance that we have not been left comfortless. God will, in fact, protect us, and he will intervene mightily to keep us from returning to the slavery of sin. We cannot do it on our own, but he is there to do what we cannot, even in times of discouragement.

—Lenny Cacchio

---

*Lenny Cacchio lives in Lees Summit, Missouri, and attends the Church of God, Kansas City ([kccog.org](http://kccog.org)). You can read Lenny's "Morning Companion" blog at <http://morningcompanion.blogspot.com/>.*

Westby: "Accidental Life" cont. from page 4.

capabilities, background, knowledge, temperament, and potential. It is not unique in the direction the path will take us. Our path moves Godward the same as the paths of others who fear and love God. But our life is our life, no one else's, and our path is our path, unique, with its own challenges and rewards.

It is doubtful that any human, save Jesus, has perfectly kept on that divinely ideal path each could potentially navigate. All of us who have started on God's Way have strayed off it, have zigzagged as if drunk, stumbled into ditches, and even gone backwards. Yet our faithful Father, as in the parable of The Prodigal, anxiously longs to see us back on the path leading home<sup>1</sup>. Then there are the many souls never even to set foot on the path to begin their Godward journey. Their calling awaits.

If God has given us free will, as human events from Eden to now demonstrate, then you have free will. This means that you have choices about how you will live your life, what path to take, and how you understand your world. Choices by the thousands have brought you to the place where you now stand. Only you can assay which ones were bad, terrible, neutral, good, or spectacularly good. For me, one spectacularly good choice was to marry JoAn. Another, most important, was to pursue after God's Grand Plan. I won't offer my long list of bad choices; I'm sure you can supply your own.

King David's impassioned plea to God: "Test me, O Yahweh, and try me, examine my heart and my mind."<sup>2</sup> He wanted to focus on God's love and "walk continually in your truth." He wanted to follow The Path so that, "My feet stand on level ground."

If we want God to examine us, give us our spiritual GPS location, we had better be willing to examine ourselves. Paul advises:

*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?*<sup>3</sup>

Jesus' example is premier to living the examined life. He stayed on the purposeful path that his Father gave him to walk. He didn't deviate even under the greatest pressures to do so.

Our question to answer: Am I living the purposeful life God wants me to live, or am I living an undirected, accidental life? This is a defining question.

### **The Purposeful Live**

The purposeful life is an examined life. We must ponder what is most important in life and then examine ourselves to see if that is the direction we are living. An examined life, examined in the light of God wisdom, is a mature life, a life that has a mature picture of the world and God's relationship with it. The examined life

is more than wealth and happiness. It has to do with the content of our character, our growth into the fullness of our created design, our innermost spiritual thoughts, and our acts of kindness. It is living a life pleasing to the eyes of God.

Once upon a time, sound philosophy promised more than airy thoughts. Socrates expands on his "unexamined life not worth living" comment in his speech to fellow Greeks.

*Citizens of Athens, aren't you ashamed to care so much about making all the money you can and advancing your reputation and prestige, while for truth and wisdom and the improvement of your souls you have no thought or care?*

Sadly, many of us wait until we're composing our Last Will & Testament to give an examining look back over what we've done with our lives. Typically, our own death doesn't become real to us until after the death of both our parents. Now, it becomes "our turn."

Sociologists claim that a person's readiness or unreadiness to die, his peace or regret, is influenced greatly by what his life has left undone. It is measured by the ratio of important things he has left undone (that once he could have done) to the important things he has done. It follows that his regret is greater the more he has left undone, or the less he has done. "His degree of *satisfaction* with his life might be fixed by just the opposite ratio, so that his satisfaction is greater the more he has done, or the less he has left undone."<sup>4</sup>

Measurements cannot be made precise, but putting first the important things in life and doing them relates directly to how we perceive living the good and fulfilled life. We don't hear, for instance, a man on his death bed lamenting that he didn't spend more time in the office instead of playing and loving his children. I doubt many of us will look back and lament that we didn't spend more time watching TV and less time learning of God and aiding people.

The starry universe has an eternal quality to it reflecting the glory of the One who brought it into being, who alone is immortal.<sup>5</sup> The gift of God is eternal life<sup>6</sup> and he wants us to live an examined life with eternity always in view. Eternity lasts for a very long time, and to the extent this is possible, we ought to live now in that eternal life mode. We want our motives, virtues, and character to be of a permanent nature. We must develop them to that end. This requires purposeful living, moving in a specific direction, acting in eternal ways—toward God and man.

One of the basic truths of human psychological and spiritual growth is this: If you want to change something about your life, you must first acknowledge and accept what's true about your life right now. This examination calls for brutal honesty and can be painful.

Another way to think of the purposeful, examined life is to think of becoming *holy*. We are familiar with Jesus' call for his followers to "become holy as his Father in heaven is holy."<sup>7</sup> He is actually quoting his Father as recorded in the book of Leviticus: "Be holy because I, Yahweh your God, am holy."

In other words, we are to take on the Divine Character of God, the Divine Image of God<sup>8</sup>. This is the purpose for which we were made. Nothing accidental about it. It has been God's Intelligent Design from the very beginning.

In Hebrew religious tradition, the 613 commandments (*mitzvot*) of Torah are guides to raise every portion of life to sanctified, holy living. Jesus summarized all the commandments into two great commandments: Love God with all one's heart, soul and mind; love your neighbor as yourself.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, the examined life is a life lived in light of these commandments. Such living before God yields holiness.

Becoming holy is a process with a beginning and a path leading toward an end. It is the process of willingly taking on the values of God and acting them out in the way we live. It is discovering what is truly important in life, what is worth our time and our sacrifice and our commitment. This discovering of the important things is what examining life is all about. It is discovering God's purpose for your life and how He expects you to live it.

Jesus found that God-designed purpose and walked the path which ultimately led to fellowship with his loving Father and sharing eternal life with him. He bids us follow him into the Father's Eternal Kingdom.

It is a purpose too wonderful, too high, and too fantastic to digest at one sitting. Nay, it will be your continual amazement for all your days: "What is man that you [God] are mindful of him..."<sup>10</sup> I wonder before God, who am I that You God should know my name and have such interest in my life and how I live?

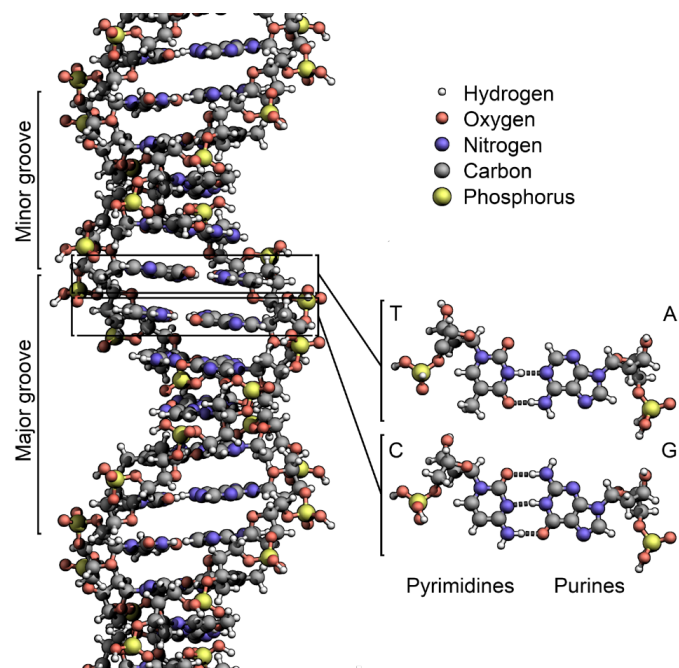
Do you believe that God really concerns himself with the nitty-gritty details of your life, where you daily place your feet on the path of life, which things you esteem important, which things you spend your energy accomplishing? I do, and I believe scripture affirms it.

Yahweh's creative work is not locked back in the past, not ended with the days of Genesis One. John H. Walton writes of the dynamic aspect of God's creative work ongoing "because he continues to sustain the function of creation moment by moment (see for example, Neh. 9:6; Job 9:4-10; Job 38; Ps. 104; Ps. 148; Amos 4:13; Mt. 6:26-30; Acts 17:24-28; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:3). Creation language is used more in the Bible for God's sustaining work (i.e., his ongoing work as Creator) than it is for his originating work."<sup>11</sup> God is still doing what he does best, making into his image one son and one daughter at a time.

## Junk DNA?

Most people live their lives in harmony with the theory of evolution—an unguided and random process of accidental events and changes. Darwin's book, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, claimed to explain the marvel of life as the result of "natural" or accidental modifications over eons. Neo-Darwinism has expanded his thesis attributing changes to the result of differences in genes, and genetic mutations. Given enough time, according to evolutionists, new species, organs, and body parts can "emerge."

The ax has now been put to the evolutionary tree and it stands teetering and ready to fall. I don't know if we will yet hear the science departments at our great universities holler "timber," but they might want to clear their throats. A brand new book (2011), *The Myth of Junk DNA* by Jonathan Wells may be the ax swing that fells the chimera tree of evolution. Wells and many scientists have been examining DNA and their findings dispel the accidental life theories.



The structure of the DNA double helix. The atoms in the structure are color coded by element and the detailed structure of two base pairs is shown in the bottom right.

The new science of Intelligent Design (ID) has put evolutionists on the defensive with their backs mere feet from the edge of the abyss. Their last icon of defense is their loud claim that DNA<sup>12</sup> (in humans and all living things) is filled with worthless junk. To them this is evidence that there could be no intelligent Designer, no Intelligent Design.

Michael Shermer echoes fellow evolutionists like Richard Dawkins, Philip Kitcher, Jerry A. Coyne and others when he sarcastically writes:

*We have to wonder why the Intelligent Designer added to our genome junk DNA, repeated copies of useless DNA, orphan genes, gene fragments, tandem repeats, pseudogenes, none of which are involved directly in the making of a human being. In fact, of the entire human genome, it appears that only a tiny percentage is actively involved in useful protein production. Rather than being intelligently designed, the human genome looks more and more like a mosaic of mutations, fragment copies, borrowed sequences, and discarded strings of DNA that were jerry-built over millions of years of evolution.”<sup>13</sup>*

Apparently these staunch evolutionists who claim to speak for “science” have actually been promoting an anti-scientific myth that ignores the evidence and relies on theological speculations. The past two decades have seen hundreds of scientific papers evidencing various discovered functions for the so-call “junk DNA.” It is hard for materialists to give up their theological speculations, abandon evolution—secularism’s god—and have to admit that there is intelligent design and purpose to creation.

### **Not Junk!**

Molecular biologist Emile Zuckerkandl writes that the “large amounts of ‘junk DNA,’ contrary to common belief, must be assumed to contribute to the complexity of gene interaction systems and organizations.”<sup>14</sup> Scientists have discovered many different functions for non-protein-coding DNA. Those functions include regulating alternative splicing in brain cells and playing an essential role in placental development. These “junk” DNA seem to have critical functions at three levels of the hierarchical human genome and have roles to play in the complex RNA interactions and in the replication process.

The DNA is not a strictly linear sequence. In fact, an international team of genome researchers has identified 40 human genes that probably have “overlapping coding regions,” a feature that the researchers concluded “is nearly impossible by chance.”<sup>15</sup> What we have is information densely packed and multilayered, discrete information imbedding multiple codes in a single gene, like sending secret messages, a form of cryptography. “Thus, ‘dense, multilayered embedding of information is a prediction of intelligent design’.”<sup>16</sup>

The genome is actually a multilevel computational device in which many of the operations occur as interactions among components. The organization of DNA strings along the genome is optimized for the establishment of multidimensional codes at all scales maximizing the information its genome can carry. All this wouldn’t work without the so-called “junk”—which makes up over 50% of the genome’s DNA.

How arrogant to call these life-carrying design marvels “junk.” How ignorant, even blasphemous, of secular materialists to think life itself is accidental, purposeless, and undirected. Life comes forth from the brilliant mind of a thoughtful and loving Creator. The evidence cries out from the ends of the universe. Trillions of examples from galaxies, to humming birds, to little bugs,

exhibit mind-numbing irreducible complexities and are marvels of intelligent design. And you and I are the zenith of all that God has designed, for we have been made in His Image. We are not accidental junk! We must not live as if we were. God is purpose-driven, and our lives work best when we too are purpose-driven and pursuing God’s design for us.

God is concerned with every little corner of your character and by his spiritual guidance he is determined to see you fulfill your potential. We cannot see with our eyes the powerful replication and differentiation process minutely causing a baby to form in its mother’s womb, nor can we see God’s hand as he is “coding” his character in us. Yet it is happening. But the speed and effectiveness of this unique spiritual growth path is limited only by us, by our levels of yielding, submission, and obedience to Him.

There is a reason why Jesus could say at the end of his ministry that if you had seen him you had seen the Father, for they were alike in love, and mercy, and justice. Jesus’ secret to taking on the Divine Image and passing from mortal life to eternal life is in his words: “I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, *for I always do what pleases him.*”<sup>17</sup>

Jesus lived the examined life before his Father. Let us abandon accidental living, examine our lives, and strive to honestly proclaim that “we always do what pleases Him.” If we can do it for a day, we can do it for a week. And, if a week, then a month, then for the rest of our days. When we stumble, he is with us to help us back on the path. And we can count on the help of Jesus to lead us into the Father’s presence. He knows the Way.

### **End Notes:**

1. See Luke 15:11-32, the parable of the lost son, or Prodigal Son.
2. Psalm 26:2-3, 12
3. 2 Cor. 13:5
4. Nozick, Robert, *The Examined Life, Philosophical Meditations*, Simon and Schuster, 1989, p. 21.
5. 1 Tim. 6:16
6. Rom. 6:23
7. Matt. 5:48, 1 Pet. 1:16, Lev. 19:2
8. Gen. 1:26
9. Matt. 22:37-40
10. Heb. 2:6, Psalm 8:4-6
11. Walton, John H., *The Lost World of Genesis One*, IVP Academic, 2009, p.120.
12. DNA: DeoxyriboNucleic Acid, which consists of nucleotides containing four bases (adenine, cytosine, guanine and thymine). In living cells DNA occurs as a double helix composed of two complementary strands; during replication the two strands separate and serve as templates for the synthesis of new strands. (from *The Myth of Junk DNA*, p. 162.)
13. Wells, Jonathan, *Myth of Junk DNA*, p. 23
14. Wells, p. 93-94
15. Wells, p. 105
16. Wells, p. 106
17. John 8:28-29

## Questions & Answers

**Question:** Since 1 John 4:18 says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear...,” how are we to understand the Bible’s frequent advice to fear God, who is love?

**Answer:** This question offers a fine example of the need to rightly divide the Word and balance biblical statements, not all of which harmonize well when read in an absolute sense.

Yes, the Scriptures are replete with counsel urging God’s people to fear Him. *My Thompson Chain Reference Bible* offers lists of 35 or more texts where fear is a positively recommended quality.

For example, Moses taught Israel to fear the Lord — one of His few requirements (Deut. 10:12). The psalmist says that the Lord pities, takes pleasure in, and has great goodness laid up for those who fear Him (103:13; 147:11; 31:19). Both Job (28:28) and Solomon (Prov. 1:7) affirm that wisdom begins with the fear of God. Among the prophets, Isaiah (8:13) and Jonah (1:9) echo the same truth.

Fear as a Christian virtue prevails in the New Testament also. Find it in Luke 1:50 and 23:40; in Acts 2:43; 5:11; 9:31; 10:2; and 10:35; in Romans 3:18 and 11:20; in 1 Peter 1:17 and 2:17; and in Revelation 11:18 and 14:7. More verses could be added to this list.

On the other hand, it is easy enough to compile a second, longer list of texts in which the Word’s counsel is not to fear: not man (Deut. 1:17; Ps. 118:6; Prov. 29:25), nor night terrors (Prov. 3:24; Ps. 91:5), nor storms (Matt. 14:30, 31) — not even death (Heb. 2:15).

This half of the truth becomes weighty as we count the occurrences of commands against fear. “Fear not” occurs about 90 times in the King James Version and “be not afraid” more than 30 times, when nearly identical phrases are included.

A good concordance will lead the student to all of these, and more. The sheer volume of such texts provides a mountain of evidence favoring courage, confidence, and trust as improved responses to “scary” situations, rather than the common human reactions of fear and dread, worry and doubt.

The difference between the two Scripture lists is obvious. The first list recommends only the fear of the Lord, properly understood *not* as cringing terror but as fitting reverence for God’s awesome attributes and an obedient respect for His sovereign authority.

The second list urges that those who rightly fear the Lord according to the first list need fear nothing else.

Scriptural harmony, then, requires that 1 John 4:18’s fear — the kind that “perfect love casts out” — be among the human fears of the second list, not the godly fear of the first. Confirmation of this conclusion is found in the near context.

The preceding text (v. 17) identifies a specific terror — fear of judgment — that the writer wants to assure his readers that God’s perfect love deletes. Because God’s love has been perfected among us in Jesus Christ (see vv. 9-16), we can be bold, not frightened, as we near judgment day. The final verdict — justified and forgiven forever! — has already been declared upon those who remain in Christ by a true and living faith.

As we reverently and obediently fear our loving Father through His Son the Savior, John says we have no more reason to fear the judgment He brings at His return. We no longer fear judgment day nor the many other threats that may terrorize others, but we continue to hold and practice a true fear of the Lord, as Scripture everywhere teaches.

— Elder Calvin Burrell, Editor, *Bible Advocate*  
(Reprinted from *Bible Advocate*, March-April 2011)  
Calvin Burrell is a board member of the BSA

# The Church in the World

Sunday, May 8, 2011

## Muslims Attack Christians in Egypt, 12 Killed, 232 Injured

Horror show by group that espouses violent Jihad against civilians

By Dan Wooding

Founder of ASSIST Ministries

**CAIRO, EGYPT (ANS)** — Christians Copts in the area of Embaba, a suburb of Giza, Al Jizah, Egypt, were attacked Saturday evening by Muslim Salafis, a group that espouse violent Jihad against civilians as a legitimate expression of Islam, and are also known as the so-called Salafi Jihadis.

Mary Abdelmassih, a respected Middle East journalist, writing for the Assyrian International News Agency ([www.aina.org](http://www.aina.org)) said that the attacks lasted for 14 hours. The Muslims fired guns and rifles and hurled Molotov cocktails at Coptic churches, houses and businesses. 12 Copts were killed and 232 injured.



*Firefighters dousing the flames during one of the attacks*

She went on to say that the Saint Mina Church was the first to be attacked. According to its pastor Fr. Abanoub the attack started at 5.30 PM on Saturday, May 7, 2011, when church parishioners noticed a large number of Salafis, estimated at 3,000 men, congregating near the church. Anticipating trouble, the army was called.

“The Salafis went to the church and asked to search it because they believed a Christian girl named called Abir, who had converted to Islam, married a Salafi and wanted to revert back to Christianity, was hiding inside the church,” said Abdelmassih. “The Muslims circulated a rumor that the husband of Abir received a call from her asking him to save her as she was being ‘tortured’ inside the church.

“The governor of Giza said that there are no girls hiding in St. Mina Church. He falsely claimed that things were under control and a ‘reconciliation’ meeting will be arranged for tomorrow. The army later cordoned off the entire district of Embaba.” Her story said that Father Yohanna Mansour from Giza Bishopric confirmed that no one knows this alleged girl called Abir. He said the congregation was meeting at church and the Salafis wanted to break into the church and force a search to look for this alleged convert, he said in an interview with the Egyptian State TV. “Muslims always come invited to church, but this would have set a precedent that Muslims would use to search our churches.” He refused the “reconciliation” meeting and insisted on the application of the law.

According to Fr. Abanoub, the Salafis started shooting at 5:30 PM but the army arrived at 10 PM. “I called everyone, but no one bothered to come.” He said six policemen came and left when they saw the shooting. There were also snipers shooting the parishioners from rooftops. “I mourn all those young people who died. We now must ask for international protection.”

The second church attacked by Salafis was St. Mary and St Abanob, also in Embaba. Muslims prevented the fire brigade from reaching it. Copts were also shot. This video shows the wounded brought inside the church.

The third church attacked was St. Mary Church in Wehda Street in Embaba, the ground floor of which was completely torched. (See this video: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQ4CNFoz-xk&feature=share](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQ4CNFoz-xk&feature=share))

---

*Dan Wooding, 70, is an award winning British journalist now living in Southern California. He is the founder and international director of ASSIST (Aid to Special Saints in Strategic Times) and the ASSIST News Service (ANS) and was, for ten years, a commentator, on the UPI Radio Network in Washington, DC. He now hosts the weekly “Front Page Radio” show on KWVE in Southern California which is also carried on the Calvary Radio Network throughout the United States.*



# Notices and Advertisements

## “FREE: ‘ACCEPTABLE YEAR (HOLY) OF THE LORD (CHRIST JESUS)’ 2011 (5771)

The Gospel of Christ, days to do, Presidents’ Proclamations, and sketch in the likeness of Him (John 1:1-2, 14, 17; Philippians 2:5-11; Isaiah 53:2; Acts 1:9-11).

How many for you and others, let us know as soon as possible. Write to: Church of God (New Testament), At Large, P.O. Box 493; Kailua-Kona, HI 96745, USA.

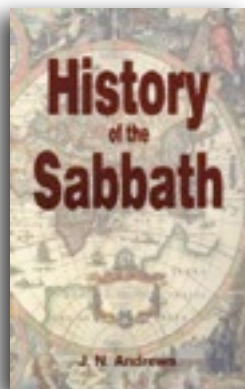
## History of the Sabbath

by James N. Andrews,  
548 pp.

The history of the Sabbath stretches for almost 6,000 years. The Creator rested on the Sabbath, He placed His blessing upon the day; and He sanctified a divine appointment of the day to a holy use.

The Sabbath dates from the beginning of our world's history. This book shows the record of the Sabbath in secular history and the steps by which Sunday has usurped the place of this the Bible Sabbath.

[ ] **B206** \$15.00 (BSA members)  
[ ] \$18.00 (nonmembers)



## The Change of the Sabbath by George Butler

*The Change of the Sabbath* is designed to answer the questions of those who desire information concerning the change of the Sabbath, a subject which is attracting more attention at the present time than it has for years.

[ ] **B213** \$6.00 (BSA members)  
[ ] \$8.00 (non members)



## BSA Facebook

You are invited to join the Bible Sabbath Association on Facebook. Just type “Bible Sabbath Association” in the search box and join us there.

Post announcements of events you are having in your local church.

Add photos of your events.

Make your comments about the posts made by others.

This is where Sabbatarians can socialize online.

## Advertise in The Sabbath Sentinel

**Classified ads** (20% discount for second time, 30% thereafter) are available at the rate of \$1.00 per word (including each word and each group of numbers in the address; telephone numbers count as one word) for each issue in which the ad is published.

**Display ads** are available at \$150 per quarter page for each issue the ad is published. Where possible your camera-ready copy will be utilized, or we will design your display ad for you. Send copy for all ads and payment to The Bible Sabbath Association, 802 N.W. 21<sup>st</sup> Ave., Battle Ground, WA, USA.

**Discounts:** Advertise in the TSS Classified Ads section for more than one issue and receive discounts: \$1.00 per word 1<sup>st</sup> issue, 20% off for 2<sup>nd</sup> issue, and 30% off for subsequent times.

Ad copy without payment will not be accepted for publication. Deadline is two months prior to publication (i.e. if you want your ad to appear in the September/October issue we must receive it before July). BSA reserves the right to reject or edit any ad copy. Publication does not necessarily imply endorsement by the *Bible Sabbath Association* or *The Sabbath Sentinel*.

# *The Sabbath Sentinel*

*A Bi-monthly Publication of*

*The Bible Sabbath Association*

*802 N.W. 21<sup>st</sup> Ave., Battle Ground, WA 98604 USA*

*Return Service Requested*

NON-PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
SAN DIMAS, CA  
PERMIT NO. 410

---

## **Judaism** **Revelation of Moses,** **or Religion of Men?**

*by Phillip Neal*

Most Christians believe that Judaism is the legitimate heir to the Old Testament religion of Moses and the prophets. Accordingly, Jews are held to be "almost Christian" — if they would only accept Jesus as the Messiah.

But, are these assumptions accurate? Is Christianity really an offshoot of Judaism?

Jewish scholars candidly acknowledge that Judaism is the successor of ancient Pharisaism. Yet, Jesus was in constant conflict with the Pharisees of His day. How could Jesus have found such fault with the very religion that was supposedly representative of the Old Testament?

This book is an eye-opening must-read for every Christian who desires to fully understand the answers to these questions.

**\$11.00 (\$8 for BSA members)**

**Bible Sabbath Association**  
**Battle Ground, WA 98604**  
**(Toll free) 888-687-5191**  
**[www.biblesabbath.org](http://www.biblesabbath.org)**

