

The Sabbath Sentinel

September–October 2011



Is this our midnight hour?

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

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

The Sabbath Sentinel

September–October 2011 Volume 63, No. 5 Issue 551

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Our Cover: Matthew 25 — Parable of the 10 Virgins

1 “Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. 3 Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them,.... 6 “And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ 7 Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ 9 But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ 10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. 11 “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ 12 But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ 13 “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

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Our Mailing Address

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

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E-mail us at biblesabbath@comcast.net.

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Editor: Kenneth Ryland, tss_editor@mac.com.

Associate Editors: Julia Benson & Shirley Nickels

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BSA Worldwide Web Site: www.biblesabbath.com.

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

International addresses:

Australia: Materials and magazine subscriptions available at 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

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Be Different, or you shall all likewise perish

What makes a Christian congregation distinct from a group of people gathered on a street corner or those who have attended a political rally? Are members in your church getting a weekly dose of pop psychology or the latest trend in “moral” social issues, such as multiculturalism? What do you see Christians doing and preaching that is masquerading for the gospel of Christ? How do you feel about Christian churches that participated in a recent nationwide campaign to read the Muslim Quran (Koran) from the pulpit during worship services? That’s right; Christian churches were openly reading from the Quran during their worship services. According to the “Faith Shared” project, 66 churches in 32 states read portions of the Quran from the pulpit on June 26, 2011.

What has become of Western Christianity? We have gotten ourselves so mired in Babylon that we are now accepting our secular societies’ definitions of what Christianity should be. When you leave Scripture behind, you have nowhere else to go for morals and values than the society that surrounds you.

Fortunately there were Christian leaders who mounted a counter-movement to blunt the effects of the Quran reading. Thanks to the courage of Pastor Mark Biltz of El Shaddai Ministries, a Sabbath-keeping Messianic ministry, a grassroots movement was started to encourage congregations in the U.S. and the Western World to read the *Shema* on the weekend of August 13 and 14. The *Shema* and verses following (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) were read in conjunction with the standard reading in Jewish synagogues throughout the world.

No Other Gods

I’m sure you have read this portion of the Torah many times. It is an affirmation that there is only One True God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 reads as follows: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in

your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” When the Scripture states in verse four that “the LORD is one,” it means that He is the only One. There are no others.

Scripture says that Christians are to be a “peculiar people,” that is, a distinct people. This means that we are to be different from the society that surrounds us. If we are the same, we surely cannot influence people to turn from their sins and follow the path that we have chosen. Too often we are afraid of what others will think of us if we are different from those around us. Those reading from the Quran in church were undoubtedly fulfilling some compulsion to “be nice” and show the Muslim world that “they care,” whatever that means. The only cure for Islam is the gospel of Christ, not niceness. While these congregations are fulfilling what they believe is some moral obligation to show compassion on the Muslim community, Christians are being slaughtered, driven from their homes, and imprisoned by the hundreds each day throughout the Muslim world. Again, the answer is not niceness, it is the gospel of Christ and the supremacy of Christ in all human relationships.

The title of this editorial is taken from Jesus’ admonition, “Repent, or you shall all likewise perish.” Jesus’ warning, taken from Luke 13:1-5, is as follows, “There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you shall all likewise perish.’”

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Eden, the Sabbath, and the Golden Cube



by Kenneth Westby

The Grand Plan of God holds the secrets of why the earth exists and the purpose of human life. What is that Grand Plan? What is the meta-story¹ of Scripture that illustrates God's Grand Plan? The title above should give a clue. In the Bible's first three chapters and in its last three chapters a remarkably unified story unfolds giving shape to the ultimate Plan of Plans.

The search for the Holy Grail obsessed the superstitious religious for years and today provides storyline inspiration for a never-ending genre of religious mystery movies from the *Raiders of the Lost Ark* to Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*. The legend holds that Joseph of Arimathea, the rich man who buried Jesus, used the wine vessel (grail) from the Last Supper to catch some of the blood that flowed from Jesus' side at his crucifixion. Finding it and possessing its magical powers is what occupied King Arthur's knights, so the story goes.

Mysteries and secrets attract humans like August fruit flies to overripe peaches. Why this overwrought preoccupation with conspiracy theories, hidden treasures, science fiction programs, demons and angels, zombies and vampires, and the big secret that holds the key to unlock the greatest of mysteries? We humans are curious and driven to know what really is going on in our world.

What amazes me is how little of this human penchant for knowing secrets translates toward a quest for knowing God—for discovering his Grand Plan for mankind. Why ignore the symbols and clues provided to unlock the Divine Mystery? These biblical markers are thoroughly captivating, other worldly, colorful, scary, suspenseful, and possessing heady information beyond anyone's wildest dreams. Why have only a few of the billions of people who have lived embraced the Bible as the key to unlock the greatest of all mysteries?

The Bible needs to be liberated from the motel room drawer, the dusty bookcases, and from the pews of stained glass cathedrals; the Bible needs to be picked up and seriously read by every person with an interest in the purpose of life. Who wouldn't want to discover the real reason they exist and what, according to their Maker, is their destiny? Is it possible that people could be as excited to discover God's Grand Plan as to be en-

tertained by vampire stories, hidden treasures quests, the latest unsolved mystery, or what really is hidden in Area 51? Fiction is fine, but the Truth is even better ... and far more fantastic.

Maybe a fresh look at Eden, the Sabbath, and the Golden Cube will stir up some excitement.

The Really, Really, Big Picture

I'm not alone in wanting to know the "theory of everything," the explanation of the "Big Why?" Why am I here? Why do life, the earth, and universe exist? What is the purpose of it all? This quest for these answers has motivated me for most of my life and you probably share a similar quest. For me it has come down to three big questions to answer: Who is God? Who am I? How then shall I live? The answers to all three flesh-out the "theory of everything"—the ultimate purpose of life and the universe.

This is no climb-the-mountain quest to sit cross-legged before some Tibetan guru contemplating life while staring at one's navel. This is a holy quest to see God and discover from Him what *IT* is all about. Many have devoted their lives to sifting Scripture searching for the big picture. I wonder how many found it. Have you? Are you still looking? I'm still hard on the quest.

My colleague, the late Charles V. Dorothy, Ph.D., was a Bible scholar of the first rank and he too was on such a quest. He came up with a very helpful phrase to summarize the Grand Plan—he called it *Torah-Christ Story*. He wrote extensively to illustrate how this summarized the Bible's big message of what God was doing.

"Story" is a good word, for it implies events taking place over time, characters and a plot. The Bible is

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Why the Gospel?

by *Brian Knowles*



It is well-understood that the Great Commission of the Church is to preach the Gospel “to all nations” (Matthew 24:14). Why do we need to do this? What’s the point? What is the Gospel anyway, and what effect is it supposed to have on those who hear it? Why is it “good news”? What’s so good about it?

I know a Bible scholar who claims that he can preach the Gospel in under ten seconds. Here it is: “Christ died, was buried, rose again the third day, ascended to the right hand of God the Father, and salvation is available to all who come to God through him.” Did you time it? I’ve heard it done in as little as eight seconds. Suppose you preached that brief message to a pagan who had never heard the name of Christ, what effect would it have? Probably very little. While that brief statement may contain the essence of the Gospel, there’s not really enough information in it to which to respond.

Let’s take this terse statement of the Gospel and break it down into its component parts.

Christ Died

Who was “Christ” and why did he have to die?

The name “Christ” is the Anglicization of the Greek *Christos*. That in turn is a translation of the Hebrew *Mashiach* meaning “anointed” or “an anointed one.” Transliterated into English it is “Messiah.” Christ is therefore not a proper name but a title. He is anointed (chosen, authorized and empowered) by God to play the central role in the divine plan of redemption. Put another way, “Christ” is not Jesus’ last name, it is who and what he is: God’s Anointed One.

The Messiah’s given name is “Jesus” — again, an Anglicization of the Greek *Iesous*. This in turn is translated from the Hebrew *Yeshua* or *Y’hoshua* (Joshua). In Galilee, where Jesus was from, it may have been pronounced *Yeshu*. It means “YHVH Saves.” YHVH (sometimes spelled YHWH) is God’s name (Exodus 3:13-15). Since there are no vowels in Hebrew, we have a four-letter name made up of consonants. It’s called “the Tetragrammaton” (from the Greek τετραγράμματον, meaning “[a word] having four letters”) In Hebrew, it likely means “the one who will be, is, was” — or something close to that. (Incidentally, “Jehovah” is an incorrect pronunciation as there is no “J” sound in Hebrew or Greek.)

The reason the Anointed One was named “Jesus” (YHVH Saves) is explained in Matthew 1:21, “And she [Mary, Jesus’ mother] shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.” So Jesus’ name signifies that he is anointed by God to save mankind from its sins. This brings us to the next part of our subject: why did God’s anointed one have to die to save us from our sins?

God, for his own reasons, has decreed that “without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22). The wages of sin is death and all of us have sinned (Romans 6:23; 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10; Galatians 3:22). The world in general lives in spiritual darkness presided over by *Ha Satan* — the Adversary. Every human being has wittingly or unwittingly incurred the death penalty. We were all on God’s “Death Row.” Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, describes the spiritual condition of all of us, and of the world in general, apart from the Gospel, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is at work in those who are disobedient,” (Ephesians 2:1-2).

Our original parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed a simple command from God, “...the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree in the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall surely die, (Genesis 2:16-17). You know the story: Eve checked out the fruit of the tree, found it appealing, and took a bite of it. Then she offered it to her husband, Adam. He too chomped down on the forbidden fruit and both immediately found themselves on God’s Death Row.

The Role of Ha Satan

The role of the “serpent” (Hebrew *nachash* = corrupter, poisoner) in this story is both significant and precedent-setting. Here’s the pattern: God instructs (*Torah* = instruction, teaching); Satan corrupts the teaching and rationalizes sin; man takes the bait and sins; death enters. So the “work of Satan” is to seduce mankind into sinning by corrupting God’s teaching. In this instance, the devil challenged God’s instruction by

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Joshua and Caleb

Men of Destiny and Determination

by Daniel Botkin



Joshua and Caleb are two Bible characters who really inspire me. These were two men who were willing to stand against the tide. They insisted that Yahweh could give them victory when everyone else insisted it was impossible.

For readers who may not be familiar with the story, here is a brief summary. When it was God's appointed time for Israel to invade Canaan, Moses sent Joshua and Caleb and ten other spies to spy out the land. After forty days the spies returned and told the Israelites that it was indeed a land that flowed with milk and honey. They even brought back some of the fruit of Canaan: pomegranates, figs, and a cluster of grapes so large that it took two men to carry it between them on a staff.

A land that flowed with milk and honey the spies said. But, they said, it was also a land inhabited by giants who lived inside great walled cities. "We're no match for them," said ten of the twelve spies.

Caleb stilled the people and tried to convince them to go up at once and possess the land. "We are well able to overcome it," Caleb said. Caleb and Joshua tried to persuade the people that God would give them victory "If Yahweh delight in us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it to us," they reasoned,

But their reasoning fell on deaf ears. The congregation was about ready to stone Joshua and Caleb, and God was about ready to wipe out the entire nation and raise up a brand new nation from Moses.

Fortunately Moses interceded on behalf of Israel, and God let Israel live. But that entire generation, except for Joshua and Caleb, would die in the wilderness and never set foot in the Promised Land. Because of their unbelief, they would wander in the wilderness for forty years — a year for each day the spies were in the land until everyone twenty years old and up had died. Then their children's generation would enter in.

God's testimony of Joshua and Caleb was that they had another spirit and wholly followed Yahweh. What made Joshua and Caleb different from their peers? What were the reasons they wholly followed Yahweh?

You might answer "Faith and courage!" That's true, but why did they have more faith and courage than their peers?

I don't know the reason Caleb had so much faith and courage, but it might have been partly due to the fact that Caleb was apparently not a native-born Israelite but a Kenezite, a non-Israelite who joined himself to the people of Israel and to the God of Israel. Oftentimes converts to a faith are more zealous than people who are born and raised in that faith and take it for granted. We cannot say for certain, but it's very possible this might be one reason Caleb had so much faith and courage.

The reason Joshua had so much faith and courage is probably due to the fact that he apparently spent a lot of time in the presence of Yahweh. How do we know this? In Exodus 33 Moses pitched a tent outside the camp. It was inside this tent where "Yahweh spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Ex. 33:11a). Sometimes when we read this, the thrill of this statement is so glorious that we overlook the significance of the rest of the verse: "And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle" (Ex. 33:11b).

Here we see Joshua as a young man remaining inside this tent, shut up alone with God in this tent where Yahweh spoke to Moses face to face. I suspect some of the afterglow of Moses' encounters with God was absorbed by young Joshua, and transformed him.

I believe that being alone in the presence of God gave Joshua a sense of destiny and the determination he needed to fulfill that destiny. I also firmly believe that if we will spend time alone with God in our prayer closet, we will get a sense of destiny and the determination we need to fulfill our destiny. Yeshua said that if we enter into our prayer closet, shut the door, and pray to our Father in secret. Then our Father will openly reward us. (Matt. 6:6)

Joshua's and Caleb's faith and confidence were not in themselves. "If Yahweh delight in us, then He will bring us into this land," they said. Their faith and confidence was in the One who had taken them out of Egypt in order to bring them into the land of Canaan. If God brought them out of Egypt for this purpose, then surely God was more than able to equip them and empower them to take the Land. If need be, God could do miracles for them as He had done in Egypt.

We should have the same attitude. If God sent His Son to redeem us by His death, then surely God is more than able to equip us and empower us to overcome temptation and walk in holiness and victory by the indwelling and indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

If you, like Joshua, spend time shut up alone with the Lord, you will soak up the glory of God and be transformed by the renewing of your mind. The thoughts of your mind and even your thinking process will be transformed. You will begin to think more in harmony with God's thoughts and ways; you will discover that your priorities are shifting and coming in line with God's priorities; you will be filled with a sense of destiny. You will become more and more determined to make whatever sacrifices you need to make to fulfill your destiny. You will have the faith and courage you need to do the things God has called you to do.

Joshua and Caleb were determined to enter Canaan and take the land. And they did it. They had to wait forty years because of the unbelief of their peers, but they did it. Even though there was a forty-year delay, God preserved their strength. There is a story I love in the Book of Joshua.

Joshua and Caleb are in Canaan dividing up the land. Caleb comes to Joshua and reminds him of what happened forty-five years earlier when God promised them the land because they wholly followed Yahweh.

"And now, behold," Caleb said, "Yahweh hath kept me alive, as He said, these forty and five years, even since Yahweh spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness: and now, I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war both to go out and to come in. Now therefore give me this mountain" (Josh. 14:10-12).

In Psalm 103:5, one of God's benefits is that God will satisfy you so that "thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." Centuries before David wrote these words, Caleb experienced this very thing. He was as strong at 85 years old as he had been at 49. Imagine this 85-year-old geezer with the strength of a 40-year-old man saying to Joshua, "Give me this mountain! I'm strong enough to take it!"

For most people, 40 plus 45 equals 85. But for Caleb, 40 plus 45 equals 40.

God had a plan for Joshua and Caleb, and He has a plan for you. You may be called to a leadership role or to a non-leadership role. You may be called to earn your wages by doing ministry work or by working at a regular job. You may be called to go to a foreign land or to stay in your native country. You may be called to fame or to obscurity.

If you do not know God's plan for you, get alone with God. Get a sense of destiny and ask him for the faith and courage you need to do His will. Then ask Him to reveal the details to you one step at a time as you need to know them. Don't draw back from your destiny, because "if any man draw back," the Lord says, "My soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Heb. 10:38).

When people try to avoid God's calling, sometimes God gives them a second chance. Jonah tried to run from his call to Nineveh, and God gave Jonah a second chance. But Joshua and Caleb's generation got no second chance, even though they asked for a second chance the very next morning. They even admitted they had sinned. In effect they said, "We were wrong. Joshua and Caleb were right. We'll go up and take the land."

But Moses told them it was too late. "Go not up, for Yahweh is not among you," Moses said, "that ye be not smitten before your enemies" (Num. 14:42). They had already had their chance and they blew it, Moses said.

They ignored Moses' warning and "presumed to go up" and were smitten by their enemies, just as Moses said.

Some opportunities are now-or-never, once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. Be determined, like Joshua and Caleb, that by the grace of God you will be and do whatever God wants you to be and do.

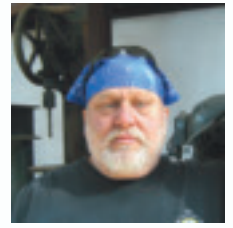
I believe this is what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote, "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Messiah Yeshua" (Phil. 3:12). Paul knew that when he was apprehended by the Messiah on the road to Damascus, it was for a reason beyond just his own personal salvation. Paul was determined to apprehend that reason, to lay hold of the purpose for which Messiah had laid hold of him. If I may take the liberty to give a DBV paraphrase of this verse, here is how I would put Paul's statement in modern English: "I pursue the fulfillment of my destiny."

Pursue the fulfillment of your destiny. Find out what God wants you to be and do, then pursue it, whether God is calling you to a leadership or a non-leadership role, to full-time ministry work or to a regular job, to a foreign land or to your own country, to fame or to obscurity.

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Are You in a Cult?

by Terrell Perkins



What constitutes a cult? How do we identify a cult? The word cult used to be synonymous with the word church. The word culture came from it. A culture is a society formed by the influence of a church or cult. In modern times the word cult has taken on a darker meaning. It now means an organization whose focus is more on itself, or its leader(s), than on its message.

If you care to research the subject of cults these days, you'll find a good deal of literature on the subject is bent towards the perspective of the denomination behind the writing. For example an evangelical writing a book describing what constitutes a cult will usually identify groups that disagree with them doctrinally. You may read in such a work that any group who declares one must actually keep the Sabbath to obey the commandments is a cult because such groups are Judaizers, denying the grace of God, etc. But just because one disagrees with a specific set of doctrines in a church doesn't necessarily make that group a cult. It is my contention here that what constitutes a cult is in *attitudes* not in doctrines. What constitutes a cult is what spirit one follows.

Christianity itself is sometimes considered a cult. It is the cult of Jesus the Christ. If it is lived as it should be, Christians should be primarily concerned with what Christ said and did and how to emulate His behavior. Christ set for us the ultimate example to guide Christians into obeying God and changing their own lives. Jesus the Christ, or Yeshua Ha-Mashiach if one prefers, is our sacrificial lamb and our High Priest interceding on our behalf before God the Father. We may go directly to God the Father through Christ. Looking to Christ in such a way is what makes one a member of the Body of Christ.

The danger arises in Christianity when we remove Christ as our focus. For a Christian the path to God the Father is through Christ. When we approach God the Father, we do it through, and in the name of Jesus the Christ. When God the Father, or Christ, is removed as our focus, we may then be in danger of finding ourselves in a cult.

I was once a member of a Sabbatarian church that placed more value on itself than on Christ. Members talked about the church itself far, far more often than they talked about Christ. It even encouraged its members to focus more on the organization, and its leader,

than they did on God. They didn't do that overtly, maybe not even consciously, but they did do it.

You see there is a very simple truth so often overlooked only children seem to remember it. *Anything that comes between us and the light finds us in darkness.* Anything that comes between us, and God the Father, except for Jesus the Christ, can be a spiritual danger to us. That can include a personality, a tradition or even, ironically, a church. Therein lies the danger.

(I will note here, just because a church focuses on Christ doesn't make it a Christian church. Christ Himself said: "Many will come in My name saying I am Christ and will deceive many." Far too many modern "Christian" churches focus on the person of Christ and ignore His message and the example He set for our lives.)

There are always two sets of beliefs in a church. The first is the official doctrines it holds—the face the church shows the world. These may be written down in things like the Apostolic Creed or some other official statement of doctrine. The other set of beliefs is found within the culture that develops within the organization. These usually aren't written down, at least for the general public. Often one has to join and be a member a while before the second set of beliefs becomes clear. No one sets out to join a cult. It is the second set of beliefs, the *culture* within the organization, that usually determines whether that organization is a cult or not. Those beliefs come from the spirit the organization listens to.

The Hebrew Scriptures were written to the nation of Israel. They are primarily about *Action*. They reveal what God's laws are and record the history of what happened when Israel obeyed God and what happened when they disobeyed God. The Greek Scriptures are writings directed mainly to the individual. They are primarily about *Intent*. That's why those that read only the Hebrew Scriptures, like those practicing modern Judaism, will often teach that what matters is what ones does, not so much what one believes. One can be an atheist and still be a good Jew.

Christ's gospel is built on the foundation of the Hebrew Scriptures. In the Greek New Testament Scriptures it wasn't necessary to restate God's laws, so Christ focused on the intent of the individual in his or her relationship with God. *It is the intent that separates a church from a cult.*

Sabbatarian churches are sometimes referred to as cults because of our departure from “mainstream” Christendom. Sabbatarians, or Primitive Apostolic Christians if one prefers, aren’t mainstream. We believe that mainstream Christendom has missed the mark in some ways. The Gospel has often been reduced by modern Christians to teach that what one believes is more important than what one does. Sabbatarians believe action and intent work together. The mindset that causes Sabbatarians to hang on to a view that most of Christendom rejects also causes us to look for other deviations from Scripture we believe the world of Christendom has made. We study the Bible a little closer because we don’t want to fall into the errors that other churches have made. One of our blind spots that some of us fall prey to is that we often ignore the Big Picture.

Did you ever put a jigsaw puzzle together? You may have opened the box and been overwhelmed by hundreds of small pieces that didn’t look all that different from each other. The thing that made your efforts possible was the picture on the top of the box. It was a picture of what the final product was going to look like. You got a sense of where all the smaller pieces fit in from looking at the Big Picture. Without that picture, you’d be lost.

When people first pick up the Bible to read, it can sometimes seem like a jigsaw puzzle. The history of the Bible is filled with people only seeing one small fragment of Scripture and not seeing the Big Picture of what God has revealed to us in His word. It’s easier to see one small piece clearly, but it’s often hard to see where it fits into the Big Picture. The history of Christendom is filled with people focusing on small pieces of the Scripture. In the process some have come to know their pieces very well. For example, the various Bible translations and study aids were all produced by people that knew their pieces of the puzzle very well. Still, somehow, most missed the Big Picture. God’s Holy Spirit is the only force that can give us a glimpse of that Big Picture.

There is a danger in not studying the Bible closely enough. It can cause people to “fill in the blanks” with non-biblical sources like cultural traditions, other religions and philosophies, and even personal prejudices. On the flip side there can be a danger in looking so minutely into the meaning of Greek and Hebrew words, for example, that we sometimes lose sight of the Big Picture. Doing so can make us vulnerable to a cult mentality. Modern Sabbatarian congregations often carefully search the Scriptures to glean more truth from them. That’s a good approach. It’s sometimes called a Berean attitude. But what happens all too often is the study of Scripture becomes so minute that it causes us to become myopic. We lose sight of the Big Picture. Study can become righteousness instead of being one part of it. That was common with another group in history too...the Pharisees.

(One may remember the famous study of the Good Samaritan done at the Harvard Divinity School. Students became so engrossed with the study of that story that they passed up people in need of help. Talk about missing the Big Picture!)

I had a discussion some years back with a woman who was a member of a small Sabbatarian church. She pointed out a Scripture to me that convinced her that God automatically sent a newborn child, who died with unbelieving parents, into the lake of fire—because the child never accepted Christ’s sacrifice. I explained to her that she was ignoring all the hundreds of times God is revealed as righteous, just, and merciful in His judgment, and such a God would never condemn a completely innocent child to spiritual death. He wouldn’t want us to be that way and Scripture reveals He isn’t that way. This woman saw only the one Scripture and ignored the greater context of the Scriptures. She missed the Big Picture.

Did you ever notice the human proclivity to see only what we want to see? (If you haven’t, you probably just didn’t want to!) All of us will sometimes construct theories about something, then look for evidence to prove our hypothesis and see only those things that support our point of view while ignoring contrary facts. We all do that to some degree. It’s a function of our brains to give us a sense of order and some measure of control over our environment. Just like within other human endeavors it also happens in our theology. That’s why one Muslim can see the Koran as a book promoting peace and another can use it to justify murder.

As Christians, we’d like to believe we’re different, but we’re not. We can get it in our heads that the Bible means one thing and then unconsciously ignore any evidence to the contrary. It’s why two people can read the same Scriptures and come away with two different ideas about what they mean. They are listening to different spirits. Just think about how many different churches claim to base their faith on the same Bible. Often it’s the reader who sees only what he expects to see. It may also be that God is opening the eyes of one person or group and not another.

Let’s be honest for a minute, the Bible has been used to justify slavery, murder, racism, sexism, domestic abuse, and a host of other abuses against our fellow man. The Bible has been the inspiration for more serial killers than any other book in history. People have seen whatever they’ve wanted to see in the pages of the Scriptures since there have been Scriptures. Satan is the great deceiver, and it’s in his interest to make sure that as many as can be deceived are deceived. Cults are led by spiritual forces but most aren’t led by the Holy Spirit. Only the cult of Jesus the Christ can make that claim.

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Westby: "Eden, Sabbath..." cont. from page 4.

largely narrative in style, telling a story of events over time from creation to new creation. Often we get lost in the details of a thousand stories and lose sight of the bigger story, of which Daniel in the lion's den, Elijah's chariot, etc. are but parts.

"Torah," as you good Bible students know, means "instruction," "teaching," "the true path" or "the way," and of course, includes the aspect of "law." It is God's Way for man to live and reflects the very righteous character of God himself.

Torah-Christ Story combines God's instructions (*Torah*) to take on his spiritual image by following the example of his son, Jesus Christ, the true Adam who fully imaged his Father's perfect character. The message of *Torah-Christ Story* is, Follow Christ to experience how a human can fully please his heavenly Father and become like him. Follow Christ into fellowship with the Father and join Him in ruling the cosmos for eternity. Torah-Christ Story is in a few words a good summary of what the Bible pictures God doing with his sons and daughters.

Another useful summary, or theory of everything, is what I call the **Universal Covenant** (UC). It is the big promise that overshadows the entire story of God and man. All other covenants² are subordinate to the Universal Covenant. It is expressed dozens of times in Scripture with little change in wording³. Paul quotes the Old Testament (OT) when repeating the Universal Covenant:

"As God said, 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people...I will be a Father to you and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty'" (2 Cor. 6:16-18. See also Deuteronomy 26:16-19 for a more complete treatment of the UC as presented by God to Israel).

The UC is God's ultimate arrangement: He will be our God; we will accept him as our God by walking in his ways and obeying him, thus becoming his people. It is a mutual agreement (covenant), one in which God offers to be our God (with all that that implies: fellowship with him, protection, honor, blessings, eternal life, "his treasured possession"), and we are willingly asking Him to be our God (with all that that implies: living in His Way, obeying him, loving him, honoring him), and thus becoming his sons and daughters in his image. The UC, God's goal from Eden to New Jerusalem, will finally be realized:

"Now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God....He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" (Rev. 21:3-5).

Torah-Christ Story and the *Universal Covenant* are both big picture summaries of the theory of everything and basically say the same thing in different ways. These are useful and provide a teaching outline toward discovering God's ultimate purpose for life and the universe. Recently, I discovered another big picture summary of what *IT* is all about. What I like about this one is that it comes with beautiful, colorful pictures attached.

Eden, the Sabbath and the Golden Cube

I received inspiration for this *meta-story of everything* from a book I recently read by T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*⁴. It is an amazing book making surprising connections to facts I knew but had not linked to what I now see was an obvious structure being described in Scripture.

It was like having a lot of familiar puzzle pieces lying on your desk, yet not seeing how and where they fit in the big picture. The Bible, unlike a puzzle box you purchase at the store, does not have a picture on the cover showing you how the completed puzzle should look. Apparently, God wants us to figure that out, he just provides the pieces. He did warn us that we must "seek" him with all our being.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares Yahweh, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me *when you seek me with all your heart*. I will be found by you." (Jer. 29:11-14)

By drawing near to our Maker and pondering His works, the process of discovering God's Grand Purpose will be guided and coached by His spirit. Things clarify the more we seek God's wisdom and invest ourselves passionately to know Him. There is a profound purpose for Bible Study, for in it you find the Truth of God, and slowly, over time, a meta-story emerges.

Alexander in his book speaks of New Jerusalem as the glorious conclusion to the Bible's big picture, its central theme, it unified story of all stories, the last chapter of the ultimate narrative of what God is doing—the *meta-story*. I like his approach. It is picturesque and provides our minds a picture from which to attach the story, rather like a C.S. Lewis novel with a talking Lion called Aslan in a land called Narnia. This picture helps us remember the story—a Christian message packaged in a colorful children's fantasy novel. The Bible contains some "fantastic" pictures of reality—the two most dramatic and colorful are creation itself (Genesis) and the "new creation" (Revelation).

The Bible's first three chapters and last three chapters tell the beginning and the end of the *meta-story*. It begins with a beautiful almost magical Garden where

God dwells with his people (Eden) and it concludes describing an other-worldly golden garden-city with God in fellowship with his people (not just two as in Eden, but presumably with millions/billions of children from Adam and Eve, now made holy).

There is great value in seeing the big picture for it allows us to understand the details more clearly and appreciate their relevance and fit. You've seen the Google Earth GPS pictures that can zoom down from space to your continent, your state, your town, and to your house. On my iPhone I click on the Google Earth application and take that big picture journey from high above the earth right down to my house. It is an amazing perspective. Too often scholars tend to "atomize" biblical texts and stories losing all relevance to the greater contexts and meaning the authors had in their thought world, their world view. We should avoid this approach.

It is easy to get lost in religious details, do's and don't's, denominational traditions and expectations, systematic theologies, and the special traits and teachings that churches develop to set themselves apart for various reasons—marketing, doctrinal, or other. Perhaps we can step outside our "church box" and look at the big sweep of the Bible's Divine Story. Let's examine the first part of the *Eden, Sabbath, Golden Cube/New Jerusalem* big picture theory of everything.

Earth, Eden, and God

From the opening chapters of Genesis it is assumed the earth will be God's dwelling place. Many other passages also make this point. As presented in Genesis, Yahweh is already there before Adam and Eve are created. He formed a garden paradise in which his image-bearers could live in fellowship with him. It was complete with every type of food fit for life. It had rivers to provide waters for life, and at its center, a Tree of Life.

There was also another tree called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that the first couple was warned to avoid for its fruit was life threatening. That negative tree represented the opposite of life—death through disobedience (sin). It was a feature and symbol, in this otherwise beautiful garden; a symbol of the big decision mankind would forever face: Accept God as Creator and Savior, obey and follow Him and so become his people in his image, or ... follow selfish lusts, disobey God, yield to the Tempter, and reap the sad results.

The history of man till now is in the shadow of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and its contaminating fruit. This tree, however, is not a part of the final Eden, the New Jerusalem. By then all mankind will have tasted it, suffered for it, rejected it, spit it out, burned it, and turned to God and his Tree of Life.

The Garden of Eden functioned like a temple. A temple is wherever God's presence is: a garden, a burning bush, a tent-tabernacle, a person, a building, a city, the earth, wherever he dwells and has placed his name. The original divine blueprint was for the whole earth to become a garden-like temple filled with people who have a holy or priestly status. Adam and Eve failed in that mission as God's vice-regents to extend His rule throughout the earth, but the divine blueprint remains. Man was commissioned to fill the earth and rule over it with the intent of making the whole earth the dwelling place of holy people in fellowship with God. Jesus, the Son of Man, is now building a holy people for his Father's Kingdom.

The Garden of Eden was an archetypal sanctuary where God dwelled and man could freely talk with and worship him. The garden was attached to Eden, with Eden itself being the temple, the garden a Holy of Holies.

There is a striking parallel with later Israelite sanctuaries such as the tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple. Eden and the later sanctuaries were entered from the east direction, guarded by cherubim—actual or in artwork—and by Levites instructed to minister and guard the sanctuary, tabernacle menorah or lampstand symbolizing the tree of life, and arboreal decorations adorning almost every aspect of the later building (pomegranates, floral elements, stylized trees in columns topped with capitals of arboreal elements representing at the entrance of the temple the two trees from Eden).

Inside the Holy of Holies was the ark of the covenant, a golden rectangular chest that served a double function: as God's symbolic footstool⁵ to his heavenly throne where the divine king's feet touch the earth—the link between heaven and earth⁶; and as a storage chest of key evidences of his mighty works among his people—especially the covenant documents in stone, representing his Torah.

These parallels suggest that the construction of the tabernacle and later temple mark the continuation of God's plan for the ultimate Garden of Eden...the New Jerusalem. Most importantly, Eden and the holy shrines are places where God has dwelled with his people and the New Jerusalem pictures his eternal dwelling place with mankind.

Yahweh God walks in Eden as he later does in the tabernacle. The river flowing from Eden envisions the one in New Jerusalem (and that visionary temple of Ezekiel 47). Ezekiel calls "Eden, the garden of God" and "the holy mountain of God."⁷ Significantly, Ezekiel's vision concludes with "Jerusalem" being renamed *yhwh-šammā*, "Yahweh is there" — the entire earth will become God's temple, the New Jerusalem its Holy of Holies⁸.

In the New Jerusalem we again see trees of life now bearing fruit continually and having leaves that heal, a huge river of life flowing from God's throne, gold and precious stones in superabundance, sparkling like a brilliant star proclaiming glorious life when holiness fills the earth.

The Golden Cubes

There are only two perfect cubes described in the Bible: the holy of holies, that special inner sanctum in the tabernacle/temple that represented the presence of God (20 cubits long, wide, and high; 1 Kings 6:20); and the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21 and 22 (about the size of the continent of Europe at its base!—a greatly expanded Holy of holies). Equal measurements on all four sides and height—a perfect cube.

This symmetrically designed city of 1400 miles cubed is striking. Why that shape? The only other perfect cube in Scripture is the Holy of Holies. Both are made of gold—the inner sanctuary overlaid with gold; the New Jerusalem, “the city was pure gold.”⁹

The New Jerusalem is the apex archetype to which Eden, the tabernacle, and temple pointed. It is the Holy of Holies (God's presence with his special treasured ones—a kingdom of kings and priests) on earth which becomes God's temple. The earth becomes God's abode, hence God's temple, not in a literal sense since the temple only symbolized God's presence. When present in his holy city, New Jerusalem, John writes: “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Rev 21:23). To that we add that the city is full of the saints of God for it is to that city the “father of the faithful” had his spiritual compass set.

“For he [Abraham] was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10).

And what a beautiful place it will be. I spoke of this theory of everything as one that lends itself to being pictured. Free your mind to dream of what that Garden of Eden must have been like. God lavishly catered to all our human senses: sight—green trees, colorful fruits and flowers, birds, butterflies, gorgeous animals; smell—fresh earth, perfumes of flowers, ripe fruits; touch—perfect soft breezes, cool grass underfoot, textures of growing things and the soft fur of a newly made tiger; sounds—the bubbling clear waters, colorful birds singing songs written and scored by God, and then the best sound of all, “the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day.”

Now consider that no expense was spared in creating structures on earth dedicated to the presence of God¹⁰. Many chapters are devoted to describing their con-

struction. In Exodus there are about 100 references to tabernacle gold and 7 to onyx plus the priest's colorful bejeweled breastplate. Solomon's temple was many times more opulent. But now read the description of the golden bejeweled city of Revelation 21. Count the number of jewels. Identify the colors. Try to picture this huge city descending from space making earth into God's temple and throne.

John saw the descending city in vision and said, “It shown with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel....” There is not one building on earth a mile high (5280 ft.), much less 1400 miles high! This is other-worldly and requires us to read carefully its description, prayerfully stretch out our imaginations and construct our own vivid mental picture. Your picture need not be perfect; how could it be? Only the apostle John had the actual vision, but we have imaginations and we're given many specific facts, materials, and colors to work with. It is a garden city full of life and color, wealth, trees, fruits, music, angels, beautiful holy, happy people, the saints of old, your loved ones, and our God and his glorious son, our Lord Jesus.

Here is a picture waiting to take form and find root in your mind—a picture of eternity and where you will spend it. This vision John received and recorded was commissioned by God and Jesus Christ to share with us—it is a window with a view. Its value of the picture is beyond all wealth on earth. Reach out and grab it for it is the picture of the theory of everything, God's Grand Plan, the Bible's *meta-story*: God dwelling with his people.

The Two Sabbaths¹¹

We've briefly considered two Edens, two Jerusalems, two Golden Cubes. There are also two Sabbaths as a part of God's Grand Plan. The Sabbaths add a significant dimension to the picture of what actually happens when God comes to dwell with his people. Alexander quotes the theologian John Walton's observation that the first Sabbath hints that the earth will ultimately be God's temple.

“On the seventh day we finally discover that God has been working to achieve a rest. This seventh day is not a theological appendix to the creation account, just to bring closure now that the man event of creating people has been reported. Rather, it intimates the purpose of creation and of the cosmos. God does not set up the cosmos so that only people will have a place. He also sets up the cosmos to serve as his temple in which he will find rest in the order and equilibrium that he has established.”¹²

There remains much to be discovered about the Sabbath in God's grand design. Oxford scholar John C. Lennox notes in his excellent new book, *Seven*

Days that Divide the World: The Beginnings according to Genesis and science, "The Hebrew definite article is not used with the first five days, it is used for days six and seven."¹³ What is the significance of that? Further, it has been observed by scholars in ages past, including Saint Augustine, that since the seventh day of Genesis does not close with the mention of "evening and morning" as do the previous six days there must be a reason for this striking omission. Is it pointing toward something profound? Is the seventh day left open for a reason?

The Sabbath is God's rest and God's rest for man, but God is not resting from all activity. He is working, following his blueprint toward a grand and cosmic Sabbath celebration. Jesus, when accused of breaking the Sabbath, said this: "My Father is working until now, and I am working."¹⁴ The writer of Hebrews cites the Genesis Sabbath, discusses the nature of rest, and concludes, "There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God...."¹⁵

The first Sabbath that God and man shared was in Eden, at the conclusion of creation. That Sabbath pointed forward to the greater never-ending Sabbath that New Jerusalem images; peace and rest in that marvelous Holy of Holy, Golden City foursquare where God and man will achieve the equilibrium that the Sabbath pictures. Two Sabbaths: the Sabbath of creation and the Sabbath of the new creation.

What will be the nature of activity between God and man during this never-ending Sabbath? This is a discussion I must save for next time. Meanwhile, I challenge you to imagine how beautiful a picture you can create in your mind...of you and God in Eden, the New Jerusalem, enjoying an eternal Sabbath. This picture enshrines the Bible's theory of everything, the *meta-story*, the ultimate reason you exist.

End Notes

1. Meta is a prefix with several meanings including "beyond" as in "metagalaxy," the whole system of known galaxies...everything in the universe. Meta-story=the central theme, the broad brush, the general shape, the big picture, the unified story of all stories.

2. There are many covenants in Scripture. Some are grand and universal like the Universal Covenant and the New Covenant which supports it. Some are forever such as the promise/covenant God made to never again flood the earth, but it did not require mankind's agreement or participation. Others are specific to the earth, Israel, or to a person, or for a time period.

3. Of the dozens of occurrences of the Universal Covenant, here are a few examples: Exo. 29:45, Lev. 26:12; Deut. 26:16-19; 2 Sam. 7:8, 14; Isa. 44:5; Jer. 7:23; 11:1, 4; 30:22; 31:1, 33; Ezk. 36:26-28; Zech. 8:3, 7-8; 2 Cor. 6:16; Rev. 21:3-5, 7.

4. Alexander, T. Desmond, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem, An Introduction to Biblical Theology*, Kregel Academic & Professional Press, Grand Rapids, 2008, 208 pages.

5. Chr. 28:2; Pss. 99:5 & 132:7 offer an invitation to worship at God's footstool. See also Isa. 60:13, Acts 7:49. Lam. 2:1 associates Jerusalem with the footstool of God.

6. Solomon's dedication prayer makes mention of a special link between heaven and earth: 1 Kgs. 8:30-51; 2 Chr. 6:22-39.

7. Ezk. 28:13-16

8. Ezk. 48:35

9. Rev. 21:18 Gold is often associated with God's presence. The Holy of Holies was perceived as a microcosmos, a model of the God's universe. The New Jerusalem reaches high into the heavens like a high mountain as if to show the connection to the cosmos.

10. It should be noted that Paul also sees those that have God's spirit as being a "biological temple," as it were, a spiritual building of God united together in a spiritual body called the church. See Eph. 2:18-22.

11. Interestingly, that is a steady flow of new books hitting the market proclaiming the value and virtues of the seventh-day Sabbath. Just this month (8/11) a new book by Senator Joe Lieberman (with David Klinghoffer), *The Gift of Rest: Rediscovering the Beauty of the Sabbath*, Howard Books, 2011. The Sabbath is a gift that Senator Joe Lieberman, as an observant Jew, received from his parents who, in turn, received it from their parents, who received it from generations of Jews before them. According to ancient tradition, the line of transmission extends back to Moses at Mt. Sinai, who received the Sabbath as the fourth of the Ten Commandments. There is a resurgence of interest in the Sabbath. Why?

12. Alexander, p. 24. Quoting John Walton's article in the *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, p. 161.

13. Lennox, John C., *Seven Days That Divide the World: The beginning according to Genesis and Science*, Zondervan, 2011, p 52.

14. John 5:17

15. Heb. 4:9-10

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

Perkins: "Are You in a Cult?" cont. from page 9.

Our intent can often blind us to scriptural truths that an open mind, led by the Holy Spirit, would see. It is our intent, our attitudes about what we believe, that determines whether we are in a cult or not.

So what are some of the warning signs of being in a cult?

1) Cults typically claim to have all the truth or to only focus on one small part of the truth. An honest church seeking to know God will constantly search for more truth. It won't claim to have ALL the truth. No mortal organization has all the answers. Just as in the history of the Scriptures, God reveals His truths over time. Someone honestly seeking Him will recognize that.

No human being has all the truth. We have to allow for the possibility that some things we believe are incomplete, or even wrong, and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us. Everyone is in a different place along the path. Even among the apostles there was disagreement on some points, and they were taught at the very feet of Christ!

Additionally, I have come to believe that God judges us individually and collectively by how we handle the truths He has revealed to us. Do we readily accept them or do we ignore them? Do we do so humbly or arrogantly?

2) Claiming to have "all the truth" can cause people to ignore anyone outside of "the group." People can set out with the best of intentions and only want to obey God more completely and then, after some indoctrination, end up excluding everyone who doesn't believe everything that they believe. That is one definite sign of a closed mind and of a cult.

Even someone who doesn't understand things the way we do may still have some truth. They may understand their piece of the puzzle better than we do but, because they are not "in the group," they're dismissed. We should bear in mind, the folks that one so readily dismisses may, in God's eyes, be in the Body of Christ. Just because they aren't in our group doesn't mean that God isn't working with them. A cult will tell you that their organization and the Body of Christ are one and the same. (Remember, for God to call His people *out* of the Great Harlot in Revelation means that some of His people are *in* that counterfeit system.)

We have to learn that not everyone is at the same place in their spiritual growth. It is not given to us to know everyone whom God is working with and to what purpose. It is not for us to judge someone else's understanding. We have been given the Great Commission, we have to throw the seeds of the truth out there, but where they take root is up to God. We have our own walk with God. That's where our focus should be.

3) The head of The Body of Christ is Christ—period. In a cult the head of the organization is a human being or some group serving in a similar function. The "official" claim of most groups is that Christ is their head, but the reality is that human beings usurp that role in a cult.

I don't mean to imply here that a church has no authority. The church was given the keys to the Kingdom and has some binding and loosing authority. In a cult, individuals answer to a man or group of men based on the standards of the organization, not on Scripture.

4) A church will bring glory to God the Father. A cult will often endeavor to bring glory only on itself or its leader(s).

A church recognizes that nothing is equal to God. In a cult the organization becomes the focus in a way that makes its authority equal to that of God. Beware of any group that focuses more on its self than the One it is supposed to point to.

This attitude often becomes evident only after ones exits the organization. After leaving a cult one can feel like they've left God. They can feel like they're no longer allowed to approach God because they aren't doing so through the organization.

All that is necessary to go to God the Father is a relationship with His son Jesus Christ.

5) In a church, ministers do just that; they minister. They serve their members. In a cult the "ministers" lord over the members. The Scriptures specifically say NOT to be that way.

A minister of Jesus Christ, educated only in Bible study, isn't automatically an expert in any other field. In a cult the minister often assumes the position of an expert in everything from medicine to automotive mechanics. A true minister always remembers that he is there to *serve* God and His church.

6) The church exists for the sake of families and individuals. In a cult the individuals exist for the sake of the organization. This is a major difference in attitudes!

The church exists to help individuals to grow in grace and knowledge. The church helps them to be in the world. A church should make life easier to bear using the Scriptures to encourage us. Indeed it should force you grow spiritually. It should reprove us, and correct us to become better people. An organization that teaches you to feel good about yourself just as you are is not a church it's a social club.

The world is hard enough for a Christian to live in. We don't need an organization adding to that burden by adding do's and don'ts to biblical directives. A cult will

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No Other Gospel

Jesus was saying that the Galileans and those who died at the tower of Siloam were no different from any of us. The only difference that we can claim is that we have repented of our sins and are attached to Him personally. Our relationship with the Father through His Son is our only escape from a meaningless existence and an equally meaningless death. "...unless ... you shall all likewise perish," is a call to wake up and put our complete trust in Christ as the only solution to mankind's problems. When I hear that churches are doing pulpit readings from the Quran, I have to think that these people who call themselves Christians are terribly confused about what a Christian is. We have to stop looking outside the Church for answers to our confused and confusing lives. The answers are in the Book—the only book that gives the real answers to how to obtain eternal life. In the end we will be judged by what is in the Book which contains the books of the Old and New Testaments. Revelation 20:12, "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."

One of the things that struck me about this attempt to show the world that they are tolerant of others is that these churches wind up preaching another gospel. Like Esau they value the promises of God so little that they have exchanged His blessings for a bowl of lentils. By preaching tolerance, they become intolerant of other Christians who are calling men and women to a higher standard—a standard that claims that there still is a "right" and a "wrong," and that if we violate that standard, we are guilty of sin. Not all guilt is covered by "being nice to others." By their misguided tolerance they have made themselves hostile to those who preach that there is only one way to salvation.

Commitment to our God means forsaking all others, including the God of Islam. We do not present the works of other gods to our people because we love and worship only one God, the God of Israel, the Father of Jesus Christ. This is the God who said, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3).

No Other Savior

The purpose of the gospel is not to blend Christ's words with those of other religions, but to draw all mankind to the One and Only Savior, Jesus Christ. We

can only do that by being different from the world around us. "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the "stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone." Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved'" (Acts 4:8-12).

There is no other name but that of Jesus that leads to eternal life. If we as Christians dabble in the religions of other gods, we become like the Israelites of old who were cast out of their Promised Land for seeking false gods. My question to anyone who wants to entertain the thought of presenting the ideas and holy books of other religions in their worship services, Why do you seek what you already have? You already have God's Savior as your own; you have His Word; you have His presence through His Holy Spirit. Your lives are empty because you have not pursued the God of Abraham and Christ with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. You have turned God's wine into water. You have denied God's power to transform lives, and now that your lives are empty, you are seeking to be filled from wells that can hold no water, rather than returning to the only One who can give you living (life-giving) water.

Our world and all it has to offer is Babylon, and Babylon seduces, pollutes, and enslaves all that it touches. Babylon was a city, but it was and still is a system of living that brings mankind into conflict God's desire to save every human being if that were possible. It is a system that perpetuates the lies, the deception, and the sins committed in the Garden of Eden. It promotes rebellion against all of God's ways including obedience to the Ten Commandments. Here is what God thinks of Babylon and what He plans to do about it. "For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury. And I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her'" (Revelation 18:3-6).

"Come out of her my people" is God's plea to Christians that still want to keep one foot in the world and the other foot in the Kingdom of God. You cannot serve two masters. The above verse states that some of God's own people are involved in Babylon's sins. If we refuse to turn from our sins and live in Christ, we will receive Babylon's punishment. We Christians must give up all of our corrupting habits and behaviors, for we belong to a Holy God, one that seeks to make us worthy of His divine calling. Jesus is returning for a bride without spot or blemish. Our Lord desires to create in us purity of heart and mind through the transforming power of His Spirit in us. Our goal is to "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). That only comes through our total surrender to Him. It's all or nothing.

God appeals to us out of His love. It is a good thing to be different from the rest of the world, to be a "peculiar people." Our God sent His Son, Jesus, on a rescue mission to return us to our rightful Father: "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore come out from among them and be separate,' says the Lord. 'Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,' says the LORD Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:16-18).

—Kenneth Ryland

Perkins: "Are You in a Cult?" cont. from page 14.

add stresses to your life by adding extra-scriptural directives. These are to give the organization, and it's leaders, more power not to glorify God or make us better people.

A church will apply the principles in the Scriptures as their authority without unnecessarily adding to what they teach.

7) In a church disfellowshipping is a tool used to put sinners out of the body for their own good, so they see their own sins and repent. It is done for the individual and for the purity of the church. This is correctly exercising the power of 'binding and loosing' given to the church. In a cult, disfellowshipping is often used to control the membership. Anyone who questions or disagrees with the organization can be put out. There is no scriptural authority for this kind of misuse.

8) In a church the Word of God is the final authority. In a cult a man is. This may manifest in believers not believing what the Bible actually says but rather what some individual or group says it says. In a cult, often, the leaders opinions become gospel. In a church only the Scriptures contain the gospel!

9) In a cult thinking for ones self is not a good thing. The members are typically taught what to think not how to think. We must make our own decisions by exercising our own free will. That is how God the Father designed us.

In the culture of a church I once attended, we believed we were "the one true church." Most of us, before joining the church were drawn in by a kind of contract the church leaders made with us. "Don't just believe what we say, prove it in your own Bibles first." That's a good rule. God does not expect us to check our brains at the door before joining a church.

10) In a church we are to treat everyone, members and non-members, with love and respect. This is a basic Christian principle. Without it, one is not following the gospel of Christ. One major sign of a cult is if they often add to the Golden Rule. That is to say: "Do Unto Others As You Would Have Them Do Unto You" is *unofficially* followed by: "**unless they are not One of Us!**"

11) A church teaches the right and true principles of God then trusts the individual to make the right choices. (That's how God does it.) A cult enforces a standard of behavior instead of allowing individuals to exercise free will. (That's how Satan does it.)

12) In a church persecution comes from obeying God. The world hates God's way because the world isn't God's...yet. In a cult persecution is most often brought on by the un-Christian behavior of its members. Many cult members will treat non-members rudely or dismissively and when those people react by rejecting their message it will reinforce their belief that they are 'the one true church' because they're being persecuted!

In short, a cult puts someone else in Christ's place as the head of the church. A cult listens to a different spirit than God's Holy Spirit. Membership in a cult hurts its members. It doesn't help them grow in grace and knowledge.

In what may be the biggest irony of all, two people can belong to the same organization while one is in a cult and the other not. One worships and serves the organization. The other examines all things according to the Scriptures as the Bereans did and accepts only what edifies, and discards what is vain and useless.

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

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

Planning to Rest

by Glynnis Whitwer



"He said to them, 'This is what the LORD commanded: "Tomorrow is to be a day of sabbath rest, a holy sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning,"'" (Exodus 16:23 – NIV).

Preparing to go on vacation takes a lot of work. By the time I finish all the laundry, clean the house and get completely caught up at work before I can enjoy a break, I'm exhausted.

This year, my family vacation came two days after a huge deadline at work. By the time I locked the front door and turned towards the car, mental and physical fatigue overwhelmed me.

Once we arrived at our destination, I could have cried with relief. The months of planning and weeks of hectic last-minute preparation were worth it. After a few days of complete rest, I felt recharged and ready to go.

Although this pattern of planning before rest is common to holidays and vacations, it wasn't until recently I applied it to honoring the Sabbath. Every week I'm faced with the opportunity to rest. Actually it's more than an opportunity, it's a commandment from the Lord. But instead of planning for it to happen, I usually slip into a day of work.

For some reason, I expect a day of rest to happen with no effort. But it doesn't. The truth is I need to re-think how I approach God's commandment to rest. It requires intention for it to happen, or I'll just use it as a catch-up day.

For years God has been gently convicting me of dishonoring His day. Although I know it's one of the Ten Commandments, I've prioritized work over obedience too many times.

I've even tried to redefine work and call it rest, as if that could fool God. The truth is, I've created a seven-day workweek, and neglected to plan for rest.

It's easy to find excuses not to rest: I'm a mom of five children, my work is ministry-related, or it's just a few e-mails. Those excuses sound weak to my ears when weighed against God's request to obey Him in something that's pleasurable and for my own good.

The Sabbath is a gift from a loving heavenly Father to His children. It is a day to breathe a sigh of relief, and rest from our labors. It is a day to soak in the companionship of those we love. My spirit, mind and body long for rest. To reject this healing gift hurts me and those I love. It also sets me in direct disobedience to God.

Given my tendency towards work, I have to plan for a day of Sabbath rest to happen. It will take me spreading housework throughout the week, finishing the laundry a

day early and preparing meals in advance. It will take a weekly plan. But when I make the Sabbath a priority, I'm obeying one of God's caring commandments and teaching my children to do the same.

And when my thirsty soul tastes the refreshment of rest, I realize why God asks me to honor His day.

Dear Lord, forgive me for the times I have made excuses and dishonored Your Sabbath. I know You gave me this day as a gift, and I have often rejected it in favor of my own way. Help me to plan the rest of the week wisely so that I'm prepared for a day of rest. Thank You for forgiving me and giving me another chance to obey You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Application Steps:

What practices can you implement in your life this week to allow you to take a Sabbath rest?

Reflections:

What benefit does rest bring to me, mentally, physically and spiritually?

What are common reasons I neglect to honor the Sabbath?

Power Verses:

Genesis 2:3, "Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done" (NIV).

Ezekiel 20:11-12, "I gave them my decrees and made known to them my laws, by which the person who obeys them will live. Also I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us, so they would know that I the LORD made them holy" (NIV).

Matthew 11:28-29, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (NIV).

Glynnis Whitwer is on staff with Proverbs 31 Ministries as the Senior Editor of the P31 Woman magazine. She is one of the writers of Encouragement for Today, the Proverbs 31 e-mail devotions, with over 500,000 daily readers. Her newest book, I Used to Be So Organized, has just been released. Glynnis, her husband Tod, and their five children live in Glendale, Arizona. Visit GlynnisWhitwer.com or www.HerOrganizedLife.com to learn more.

Knowles: "Why the Gospel?" cont. from page 5.

telling Eve that she would not die if she ate the fruit of the forbidden tree (Genesis 3:4). Furthermore, he said that eating it would impart God-like wisdom to her (Genesis 3:5). Her own senses told her that the fruit looked appetizing (verse 6).

Though God's teaching was clear, yet negative (what *not* to do and what would happen if they did it), Satan's was more appealing to the senses and the intellect — and it was "positive." They could see apparent *benefits* to the nachash's approach. Consequently they were seduced into disobeying God and sinning. Of course they didn't die in that instant (if they had, there'd be no human race). They simply placed themselves at the head of the line for ultimate termination. They were dead while they yet lived.

The pattern of this story has been repeated by virtually every human being who has ever lived — except for *Yeshua Ha Mashiach*. God instructs, Satan corrupts those instructions, Satan seduces or tempts, man takes the bait, and like Adam, sins. Not that everyone sins the same sin Adam sinned. Each of us, yielding to the evil impulse, sins our own sins. This pattern has long been understood by religious Jews.

"The belief that in every human being there are two urges — the one to evil and the other to goodness — figures prominently in Rabbinic ethics...The character of a person is determined by which of the two impulses is dominant within him. 'The good impulse controls the righteous,'...The evil impulse controls the wicked...Both impulses control average people," (*Everyman's Talmud* by Abraham Cohen, p. 88).

The impulse to evil is called in Hebrew the *yetzer ha ra*. The good impulse is the *yetzer ha tob*. Satan is associated with the former impulse, "'Satan' is the personification of wickedness. A significant remark is: 'Satan, the *Jetzer Hara* and the Angel of Death are all one' (B.B. 16a, from the *Talmud*). It indicates that the prompting to evil is rather a force within the individual than an influence from without. It also explains why God permits Satan to be active and does not destroy him," (*Everyman's Talmud*, p. 54).

The evil impulse within us draws us toward sin — toward fulfilling the illegitimate desires of the flesh and the mind. Satan fans the flames. He pumps the bellows. He performs a number of essential roles in the process of sin, "Satan performs three functions: he seduces men, he accuses them before God, he inflicts the punishment of death (B.B. 16a). He is the seducer par excellence...(Everyman's Talmud, p.56).

We see this pattern of seduction, temptation, sin, accusation and death throughout the Bible and throughout human history. We observe, both in ourselves and others, what incredible lengths we will go

to, to rationalize sin — just as Eve did. It is a universal process. Paul wrote, "...as in Adam all die..." (1 Corinthians 15:22). The penalty of death, which is the result of sin, which our own flesh and mind produce, egged on by Satan, is the human condition. Apart from Christ, we're all dead in our sins. Paul wrote, "...for all have sinned..." (Romans 3:23).

The world (Greek: *kosmos*), as a system, is spiritually dead. Paul, the Pharisee, often speaks in his letters of the world system as "darkness." This is a spiritual darkness brought about by spiritual forces and by human sin. He wrote to the Ephesians and Laodiceans, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places," (Ephesians 6:12). These dark spiritual forces are aligned with the Adversary. They gain their power from the human sin that they encourage. When we sin, we enable unclean spirits to gain advantage in our lives. We open doors of opportunity for them to establish strongholds.

The apostle John writes, "He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work," (1 John 3:8). Jesus defeated the devil in the desert, in Jerusalem and on the "mount of temptation," (Matthew 4:1-10). Consequently, Jesus is *Lord!* The devil has no power to thwart anything the Lord does.

Jesus calls upon us, as subjects of the divine kingdom, to sever all ties with the devil, and pledge our allegiance to God. We are called to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). In Christ, we are reborn at the level of the inner man (John 3:1 ff.; 1 Peter 1:23); that is, born from above. Instead of serving the flesh and the mind, we now serve the Spirit.

The metaphor of the new birth upon conversion is not new or unique to the Christian faith. It was known and used in Judaism for centuries. The new life in Christ makes us Kingdom children. Our citizenship is now in heaven (Philippians 3:20), from whence we are reborn. As we honor and serve Yeshua, the advancing kingdom is manifested through us.

Our salvation is sealed in Christ and in the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). In the present, we are the vanguard of the advancing kingdom. Study the parable of the mustard seed to understand how something that began so small and insignificant can grow to fill the earth (Matthew 13:31 ff.).

Significance of Christ's Resurrection

In his Gospel, Jesus *proclaimed* the Kingdom of God, he *explained* it, in his parables he *illustrated* it, and he *demonstrated* it. All this was pump-priming for the apostles who were commanded to carry the same mes-

sage out into the world. He instructed them to make disciples — students or learners of the Gospel.

The period from Yeshua's resurrection to the time of his return represents a "day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). God looks with favor on those who turn to him in repentance following the preaching of the Gospel. Now is the time when the world ought to be taking full advantage of God's redemptive offering.

According to the Gospel, Jesus died, spent "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (the tomb), was resurrected, ascended to heaven, and he now sits at the right hand of God "to make intercession for us." Jesus' death paid the penalty for our sins, but his resurrection is essential for our salvation. "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith...if Christ has not been raised your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those who are fallen asleep in Christ are lost," (1 Corinthians 15: 14, 17, 18).

Christ has been resurrected, therefore we can be resurrected: "...Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep [died]," (1 Corinthians 15:20). When Jesus returns, all who belong to Christ will be "made alive" and given "imperishable" bodies just like Christ's resurrection body (1 Corinthians 15:42, 48-49). For us, "death will be swallowed up in victory" (v. 54). The natural fear of death will be a thing of the past.

In the Meantime

Before God the Father comes to dwell with men on this earth (Revelation 21), three things must happen: 1) This "day of salvation" must be completed; 2) A time of judgment must come, and 3) The time "the restitution of all things" must be entered into. Let's briefly examine these in order.

The Present Age

As we saw earlier, this is an age in which salvation is available to all who are willing to avail themselves of it. It commenced with the earthly ministry of Jesus.

At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus spoke in the synagogue in Nazareth, the Galilean town in which he'd grown up. In his sermon, he cited the book of Isaiah to explain his Messianic mission. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news [the Gospel] to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor," (Isaiah 61:1-2).

This is a description of the "day of salvation" of which we spoke earlier. Jesus set the pace for this redemptive time. He "went about doing good." He preached the good news of the in-breaking Kingdom,

he healed the sick, he delivered people from demons and he performed miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit. He taught his disciples to follow his example and to "make disciples" of their own who would follow suit. He said they would do even greater works than he did to advance the cause of the Kingdom (John 14:12).

The original Jewish apostles, carrying the Gospel as Jesus taught it, went out into the world to spread the good news of God's redemptive plan and of his advancing kingdom. Those who felt the call of the Gospel "...devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread [may mean the Lord's supper] and to prayer," (Acts 2:42).

Eventually congregations were formed. They were based on the synagogue model. They sprouted up all over Judea and the Roman Empire. [In those days, the whole Roman Empire totaled only about 50 million people. I heard recently that half the people who have ever lived are alive today!] What we now call "The Church" was born.

So long as the original Jewish leadership of the church was alive and functioning, a certain uniformity of teaching and practice was maintained (as per Acts 2:42 and Acts 15). Once the Greek and Latin leaders gained ascendancy, and the Jewish leadership died out, toxic influences began to seep into the Body. Platonism, the allegorical method of exegesis, Gnosticism and outright paganism began to dilute apostolic truth. The church began to take on strange and foreign traits. The metamorphosis was incremental. As early as Jude's time it was necessary to "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints," (Jude 3).

Today's eclectic ecclesiastical monstrosity would scarcely be recognizable to the first Jewish apostles. As I have written elsewhere, the Church, mutated creature that it is, needs a new reformation to return it to the original body of beliefs and practices. The Church has been paganized and Hellenized, politicized and commercialized. In America, it has become a giant marketing machine that has largely lost its moral authority and its spiritual power.

The Lord, who is the Head of the Church, has allowed his followers free agency. To a large extent, we have misused it by making bad choices. In the twenty centuries since Jesus offered his original teachings and example, Christians have created a confusing body of beliefs, doctrines, creeds, denominations and liturgies. A newly minted Christian is faced with the daunting task of sorting this out in an effort to "find the truth." Most quickly settle for an accessible denomination that seems to meet their needs or appears authoritative.

Within this uncertain cacophony of conflicting sounds, there are occasional notes of truth. When we identify one, we must cling to it and internalize it (1 Thessaloni-

ans 5:21). The original faith of the apostolic church has not been lost. It may be found in Scripture, but Scripture is subject to misinterpretation. To “rightly divide the word of truth,” we must know what we are doing. We should pick our teachers carefully. Ideally they should be able to “work with” the original languages of Scripture: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Furthermore, they should understand the history and nature of the Second Temple period. It was in this milieu that Jesus’ movement was formed. As a form of Judaism, it was known as “the sect of the Nazarene” (Acts 24:5) or simply “The Way.”

Acts 15 is a key to understanding what the Jewish apostles taught about the relationship of gentile converts to Torah. These subjects are all covered in other articles.

Appropriate Response to the Gospel

What did Jesus expect the preaching of the Gospel to produce in its hearers? This question is answered by the apostle Peter who had preached the Gospel to thousands of Jews in Jerusalem around 31 AD. His impassioned presentation elicited the response, “Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37)

Peter’s answer was explicit: “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,’” (Acts 2:38). On a somewhat later occasion, Peter embellishes his instruction: “Repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out...” (Acts 3:19).

The misery of the human condition is largely the result of sin. Sin is a failure to live up to divine standards — the word for sin (*hamartia*) literally means “to miss the mark.” Throughout history, God has communicated his *Torah* (instruction or direction) to mankind. He has sent judges and prophets to express his will. He sent Jesus himself and later Jesus’ apostles. Some have responded positively to the good news. Others have turned on those who have carried God’s message. Jesus has many martyrs. He will have more as the world turns against the Jewish and Christian faiths.

Time is closing in on the Church and on the world. The spirit of anti-Christ seems to be in the air. Many are speaking of this as a “post-Christian” era. Political leftists, professional atheists, militant Islamists, and even some of the pagan religions of Africa, India and Asia are openly attacking Christians and Jews with impunity. Windows of opportunity to preach the Gospel are closing. No one is running to the defense of the evangelizing Church. The murder of Christians seldom makes the papers.

If you are reading the Gospel for the first time through this article, I encourage you to seek out a Christian minister in your local area and get counseled for baptism. The Holy Spirit is imparted through the

laying on of hands (Acts 8:18). If you do not know of a minister in your area to contact, call the office of the Bible Sabbath Association at the toll-free number given on the inside cover of this magazine.

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

A Call to Righteousness

If you look to the East and West,
You can see how we’ve been blessed,
We were founded on the dreams of righteous men.
If we stay on this path were on,
God’s blessing will soon be gone,
God won’t bless a nation full of sin.

(Chorus) There’s a call to righteousness,
There’s a call to turn from sin,
To repent and confess,
A call to return this nation back to Him,
A call to return this nation back to Him.

We’ve been backing down,
Losing precious ground,
Where will honor and decency be found?
Will there be any good around,
When we hear that trumpet sound
Or will there just be the sins of wicked men?

(Repeat Chorus)

Time is running out,
The angels will soon shout.
Will you answer this call to righteousness?
We can’t go on this way,
Please listen to what I say,
Jesus is here to save and bless.

(Chorus with changes) There’s a call to righteousness,
There’s a call to turn from sin,
To repent and confess,
A call to say Lord Jesus, come on in,
Forgive us Lord and cleanse us from our sins.
A call to return this nation back to Him,
A call to return this nation back to Him.

©1991, Troy Pulver, Derby, Kansas

This song was written by a friend who lives near Wichita, Kansas. My friend hopes to produce a YouTube video of the music and lyrics in the near future. I will post that link when it is available. In the meantime, soak in the lyrics.
—Editor



Mail Bag



Hello! I would love to get the annual magazine subscription please. My address and information are below. We have been reading them for a while now because people bring them to church to share. There are always many wonderful articles! I especially loved the article by Dr. Daniel Botkin about "What Was Nailed to the Cross in Colossians 2:14." He explained that so plain that I printed it off to share it with our family members.

We are the only Sabbath keepers between my husband's family and my family. There is usually a debate over this very issue at least once a year. He explained it so well that I knew they could argue no further! Once again, thank you!

God bless,

Michelle Loncar
Corinth, Mississippi

Enclosed is our check to renew our BSA membership and for two books to be sent to our nephew, who is an inmate in Florida. We hope he enjoys the free subscription to The Sabbath Sentinel, which will help him realize how widespread Sabbath observers are.

Regarding your new item, *Judaism: Revelation of Moses or Religion of Men?*, we were pained that the BSA is promoting this "exposé." Reading the description you sent, it seems like a needless attack on our fellow Sabbatharians which belongs elsewhere, as it is hardly relevant to the core issue of the BSA. Please discontinue this offer ASAP.

Thank you,

Kenneth and Margaret Hawley
Rolla, Missouri

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Hawley,

First of all, thank you for your continued support of the BSA and for your membership renewal. We also hope that your nephew will open his heart to Christ and seek to know him. Many out there who read this letter will be praying for him—that he will find the path to eternal life with Christ in His Kingdom.

Regarding the advertisement we ran for the book on modern Judaism, we always run the risk of offending some of our readers who may disagree in one way or another with what we are presenting. This book was not intended to be offensive, but informational. You

will be interested to know that many Messianic Jews have come to the same conclusion about modern Judaism — that many (not all) of the practices and customs of today's Judaism came from the period of exile in Babylon, not from the Bible.

Also, please remember that modern Judaism is the religion of the Pharisees that persecuted Christ at every turn. Even today in the nation of Israel, Messianic Jews are looked down upon and often persecuted by religious Jews in that country. As the apostle Paul wrote in to Timothy, "...all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). Christ is always the dividing line. —Editor

Just finished reading "When Churches Split" in the current issue of The Sabbath Sentinel. Thank you, Ken Westby, for sharing your heart with your readers. It prompts me to draw nearer to you by sharing some personal history.

I am the oldest of five children. When I was about nine years old I started feeling like I needed to know God. There was no religious training in my family. Dad claimed atheism. For my 13th birthday I was given an AM radio. WIBC in Indianapolis carried the "World Tomorrow" program....

I worked in management with the dairy marketing industry in Arkansas. After 13 years in the dairy industry, I lost my job. By then I needed a new opportunity and place and ended up moving to Dalton, Georgia, for work in 1987. At this point in time I also learned and realized that no matter where we go on the face of the earth that the Spirit follows us, and no matter how many things have gone wrong in our lives, The One who gives that Spirit to us never quits loving us. I was baptized at age 18 by Burk McNair and James Ryer. I wrote it in my Bible. It was a special day in my life, and our gift of a portion of God's Spirit is truly a special thing.

In 1990 I moved again to Benton, Tennessee. There I met a widow. Her name is Carolyn. We were married in 1991. She and her deceased husband had been disfellowshipped from their congregation when everything was going crazy in the Worldwide Church.

Sincerely,
Mark Trueblood

Mark, thanks for staying faithful to God through all the turmoil of life. There is great reward in that. —Editor

The Church in the World

July 6, 2011, Liberty Council (www.LC.org)

ACLU's Reign of Terror Comes to an End in Santa Rosa County School District

Santa Rosa County, Florida — The ACLU reign of terror has come to an end in the Santa Rosa County School District (the District) in the panhandle of Florida. After intense litigation brought by Liberty Counsel, and on the eve of trial later this month, the ACLU and the District agreed to modify a prior Consent Decree.



There are a dozen constitutional freedoms that Liberty Counsel won back for teachers, staff, students, and members of the community as a result of this settlement. Students will be allowed to voluntarily pray, submit religious answers in homework, and freely participate in private, after-school, religious programs. Teachers will now be able to pray at school during their break times, pray during school events in a nonofficial capacity, attend and fully participate in baccalaureate services, have a Bible on their desk, wear religious jewelry, assign readings from the Bible to students when relevant to nonreligious academic assignments, and more. "God bless" is no longer forbidden.

The ACLU filed suit against the District and obtained a Consent Decree. The District rejected Liberty Counsel's offer to represent it pro bono against the ACLU. Liberty Counsel then filed a motion to intervene to become a party-defendant to provide an adequate defense, but the ACLU and the District opposed Liberty Counsel. Liberty Counsel then had no choice but to file a direct suit against the District to regain the constitutional rights taken away by the Consent Decree. Facing trial with damning evidence uncovered by Liberty Counsel, the District and the ACLU agreed to back away from the Consent Decree.

For three years the ACLU terrorized people with threats of contempt charges. Liberty Counsel had to defend Principal Frank Lay and Athletic Director Robert Freedman against criminal contempt charges, the penalty of which could have been a \$5,000 fine, six months in jail, and loss of their collective 70 years of retirement benefits. The alleged "crime" was a short blessing over a meal. Liberty Counsel also had to defend Michelle Winkler, a staff worker, against civil contempt charges (up to \$30,000 in fines) after her husband said a prayer in a neighboring county at a private event to honor non-instructional staff.

Burma (Myanmar): Kachin Flee Terror — a call to pray for the Kachin Church

By Elizabeth Kendal, Australia

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin (RLPB) 115

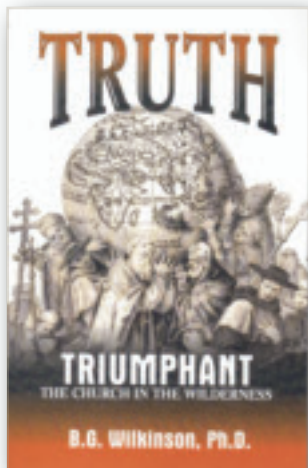
Special to ASSIST News Service

Kachin State, which borders China in Burma's far north, is home to Burma's ethnic Kachin minority. Most Kachin are devout Christians and the state is defined by its Christian culture. Like other ethnic-religious minorities in Burma, the Kachin are politically marginalised and persecuted on racial and religious grounds. When the junta wants to impose its will, it usually does so through extreme brutality fuelled by racial and religious hatred — a manifestation of militant Burman-Buddhist supremacy.

Burma Rivers Network reports: "Large dams are being constructed on all of Burma's major rivers and tributaries by Chinese, Thai, and Indian companies. The dams are causing displacement, militarisation, human rights abuses, and irreversible environmental damage, threatening the livelihoods and food security of millions. [...] Neighbouring countries benefit from this situation by gaining electricity without bearing the social and environmental costs." This is one reason why the junta has a renewed interest in controlling Kachin lands. As reported in RLPB 114 (June Update) China wants to build nine hydro-power mega-dams in Kachin State, even though the Kachin have warned China that the dams could trigger civil war in Burma.

Fighting erupted in the second week in June and reports of extreme brutality, ethnic cleansing and humanitarian crises are now emerging. The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), the political wing of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), reports that some 16,000 Kachin refugees are living in five camps in and around Laiza, a town still under KIA control. KIO adds, "So far no international humanitarian agency has offered any help to them." In Myitkyina, 220 displaced people have taken refuge in the Catholic Church of St. Joseph and 330 in the Baptist Church. The Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT) recently reported that at least 18 women and girls from age 15 to 50 were gang-raped in the war-zone by Burmese soldiers between June 10 and 18. Four of the women were killed after being gang-raped (one in front of her husband) while another died from her injuries. KWAT believes gang-rape is being systematically employed as a weapon of war and means of terror.

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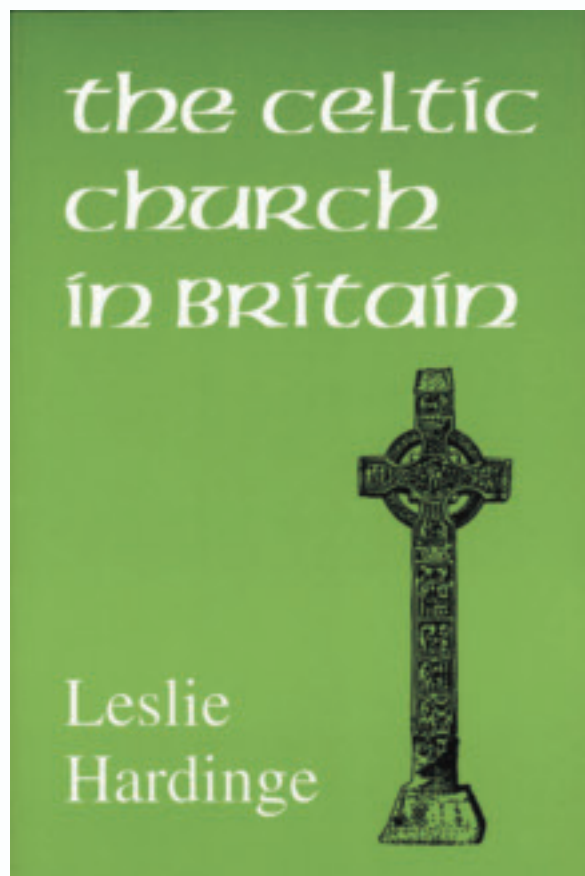
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