

The Sabbath Sentinel

March–April 2009



**What do you trust
when the money is gone?**

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

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

The Sabbath Sentinel

March–April 2009 Volume 61, No. 2 Issue 536

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Our Cover: "You shall have no other Gods before Me"
(Exodus 20:3).
(Source: iStockPhoto.com)

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In Times like These

December 23, 1776, from *The Crisis* by Thomas Paine

“THESE are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated.”

The world seems to be on a precipice, and it's impossible to say whether we will retreat from that precipice or lunge forward over the edge into a sea of chaos. Are you prepared for that eventuality? Whether we are standing at the border of the territory call “The Great Tribulation” or are just passing through another cycle in the vicissitudes of man's time here on earth, only God knows. Whatever the case, you and I were called into God's service for times like these. Are you up to the task?

One of my biggest fears right now is that the Church in the U.S. and other Western countries is not prepared physically, emotionally, or spiritually for the difficult days ahead. My appeal in this editorial is that we all get refocused on our Christian priorities—on the things that are important to God.

The idea that spawned this article came to mind long before my recent loss of employment due to a general layoff at my company. The company I worked for sent 2300 packing in one day—this after a previous layoff of some 500 about two and a half months earlier. It is strange being at home these days when most men go to work. I am better off than many because I have a wife who is employed by the school system, so until they close down the schools, we will have bread on the table.

I am very concerned about the social and political implications of our economic crisis. As a society we are not the same God-fearing people we were in the '30's during the Great Depression. Common civility is gone, and it seems that our citizens are much more inclined to expect others to take care of their needs. The Church in the West is not healthy, and we who recognize its spiritual infirmities are duty-bound to do whatever is within our power to lift up the weak and heal the sick. Let me give you an example of what I am talking about.

At a recent church service our pastor talked about his own past and the difficult, and at times abusive, home environment he grew up in. He wanted us to understand that God is the great healer of broken lives. He then gave an altar call, which is very rare in our church (about 350 members), inviting people to come forward to lay their brokenness on God's altar and cry out for His healing. Probably $\frac{2}{3}$ of the people attending church that Sabbath went forward to the altar.

Who would have expected that $\frac{2}{3}$ of the church would come forward to the altar? Many came with tears streaming down their cheeks, just thankful that someone recognized their pain and was seeking to help them reconnect their lives to our Divine Healer. Say what you will: We have work to do.

We as Christians have a great opportunity here. The world is reeling and a general sense of despair has gripped many people. We are the antidote to the world's despair. We are the antidote, that is, if we ourselves are truly healthy. We need to remember God's words toward us, his people: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jeremiah 29:11). The world is waiting to see how we, the children of God in heaven, respond to the times we live in. What's more, Abba, our Father, is waiting to see as well.

I would like to make a couple of suggestions for all of us who see the needs of our brothers and sisters, and our neighbors. First, it is incumbent on us to make sure that our own house is in order. Jesus said that there would come a time when there would be a much greater need for fasting and prayer. There is also a need for Christians to study the Bible a lot more

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The Ever-changing You

By *Kenneth Westby*



“Change,” beyond being a political slogan largely empty of substance, is the very heartbeat of life itself. Living things grow, move, and change. Whether plant or animal, living things change. Trees grow, form leaves, respond to the moving sun, paint their leaves brilliant colors and discard them, adding a ring to their trunk marking yet another year of life. And so moves your life as a dynamic, constantly changing creature of God. Consider the ways in which you are spiritually changing and the big question: Is that change moving in the best direction?

I shake my head in mock disbelief as I view old pictures of myself. Was that scrawny 7-year-old really me? Was I that slim, cool looking 25-year-old with the nice full head of hair? Then I look in the mirror.... What happened? Well, you know the routine. I rather enjoy seeing the pictures chronicling the change of my children and grandchildren over the years. It brings back a flood of pleasant feelings and memories. But looking at my own physical progression from youth to old age isn't quite as inspiring; it's actually rather depressing.

If you're past forty, have you mused on having your svelte twenty-something body back but with your present mature mind? Sure. I have, but I wouldn't for a moment give up the knowledge I've accumulated, lessons learned, and the God-given wisdom the years have provided—not even for my athletic body of forty-five years ago. The mental and spiritual changes have been hard fought and positive even if my physical body hasn't kept pace. How about you?

How about God? Is he a static, unmoving, unchanging God? Not hardly. Scripture testifies to his ever-active involvement in creation, particularly among those sons and daughters made in his image. God's created cosmos is constantly moving in complex orbits and cycles. The creation we see about us, the sky, the weather, the earth, the seasons, the seas and rivers, are always moving and changing. This dynamic of change is what gives life such value, such interest, such excitement, and provides challenges for us humans to continually adapt and change with it.

Man-Made to Change

What is fundamental to the relationship between God and man is that both God and man can change. Now, when I speak of God changing, I do

not refer to his righteous character. It will never change, for it is who God is. The core of God's divine nature is love as manifest by the purity of virtues that flow from him. But as God engages his creatures, he can and does change specific plans and actions. God invites us to pray and ask things of him—things he would not do if we did not ask. He adapts to how man uses, or misuses, his freedom and with brilliant wisdom continues to move the story along so that his purposes will ultimately be realized.

Man's character is another matter. It needs changing in all the ways in which it is unlike God's holy character. God's entire encounter with man is based on the premise that man can and must change. Change what? Change his nature and change his ways; change his heart and change his actions—the two operate in tandem.

Spiritual growth means change. Repentance is the entry door to spiritual change, and repentance itself is an acknowledgment that change needs to be made. God is holy and righteous, and sin is the opposite of all that God is and does. Sin is literally “missing the mark”—the “mark” being God's divine nature.

Repentance of sin means asking forgiveness for our sins and committing to become like God in heart and mind. When properly understood, repentance is not a stand-alone one-time action of being “converted” or “born again;” it is an on-going process of changing into the Image of God. It has a starting place that we could call conversion and associate with baptism, but repentance is a dynamic daily journey of moving away from selfish living toward a life of giving and loving. The Bible uses another word, “overcoming,”¹ to describe this process of change from manifesting works of the flesh, to manifesting the fruits of the spirit of God.²



Then: Westby's Wedding Day, June 1, 1964



Now: 2009

"I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Heb. 8:10; Jer. 31:31-34). This was the covenant God made with Israel, and it is also his universal covenant with mankind in general and is specifically entered into with every individual.

If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands...I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people" (Lev. 26:3, 12).

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The Universal Covenant

The deal God made with Israel mirrors the deal he offers to make with any individual, or for that matter, would strike with any nation: "I will be your God and you will be my people." How does that work out? Quite simple.

The 2009 BSA Scholarship Essay Contest

The Bible Sabbath Association 2009 Scholarship Essay contest begins January 1, 2009, and concludes April 1, 2009. Applicants are invited to contact June Narber for instructions and an application at her email address: junenarber@yahoo.com.

The scholarship is open to all Sabbath keeping individuals between the ages of 16 and 25 as of April 1, 2009. This year the contest is only open to citizens and legal residents of the United States and its territories and Canada. There will be one prize of \$1,000 for the best written essay. Applicants will write a five paragraph essay answering the question "How can the Sabbath best be safeguarded, protected, and preserved for future generations in consideration of the great lie that pervades the Christian world that the Sabbath is on Sunday, not Saturday?"

As in previous years, the essays will be judged by a panel of Sabbath observing judges and scored by a point system that guarantees fairness and focuses on how well the essay question was both answered and written.

Applications must be received no later than the deadline of April 1, 2009, not just postmarked by that date. The winning essay will be published in *The Sabbath Sentinel*, a publication of the Bible Sabbath Association. Previous winners include those from all the major Sabbath-keeping church organizations. Please contact the scholarship chair, June Narber, for further information at junenarber@yahoo.com or (919) 349-6425 late evenings or on Sabbath. Applications should be mailed to

June Narber, BSA Scholarship
6325-9 Falls of Neuse Road, #193,
Raleigh, NC 27615

Jesus, the Good Shepherd: Knowing Him and Following Him



by Rev. Terri Littrell, Ph.D.

I have never been content with the manner in which sheep are generally represented by preachers and teachers. They are often depicted as being stupid, prone to wander, and generally without good sense. The following information is taken from a manual on the care of sheep. It was not written with Christians in mind, or in any attempt to explain why Christ's people are called sheep. This simply alerts those who choose to care for sheep of their nature and things to do to safeguard them.

You will see at once how appropriate it is that those who are being led by Jesus, the Good Shepherd, are referred to as his sheep.

- Sheep are docile in nature, timid and nervous, highly social animals, and should be maintained in groups to avoid unnecessary stress.
- Sheep exhibit strong flocking behavior in pens as well as on pasture. Isolation of individual sheep usually causes anxiety. They tend to follow one another in grazing, bedding down, reacting to obstacles, and feeding. Use of these characteristic behaviors when handling is advantageous.
- During transport animals should be gated off into smaller groups to prevent pileups and death loss.
- Protection from predators such as dogs and coyotes is important in some geographic locations and during certain seasons.
- Artificial shelter is not always necessary because of their adaptability and the insulation of dry wool. For shelter from wind, sheep naturally take advantage of surrounding terrain such as trees and shrubs.
- Sheep are intolerant of mud; access to well drained shelter is desirable.
- Sheep are generally less aggressive than goats, so they should not be housed together in the same enclosure or the goats will harass the sheep.

Note that the proper care of the sheep depends upon an understanding of their nature. Also, perceive that they are docile in nature, not hostile, and that their tendency is to be together. See how they are prone to danger when isolated from the other sheep, while such isolation tends to anxiety. It is also inter-

esting to note they do not require high and formidable fences to keep them in a given area. Further, inappropriate containments can harm them.

Sheep are ruminants, spending many hours every day chewing their cud. They are also grazers, tending to eat continuously. Food given to them should be of a high quality, providing a complete supply of nutrients. They should be given fresh water that is available at all times.

To catch a sheep that has strayed, it is necessary to block its wayward path, lift its head, and handle it gently. Once the sheep is captured, it will stand still, not fighting the one who captured it, whether friend or foe. When the sheep is off balance, it will cease to be mobile, sinking under its own weight.

Stupidity, therefore, is not a hallmark of sheep, and it certainly is not comely to depict them in such a manner. That also is not an appropriate view of those who are living by faith and following the Good Shepherd. Such people are attracted to each other, requiring quality nourishment and fresh water. They are also given to meditation, or spiritual rumination.

It is amazing how the Lord compares us to simple sheep which follow their shepherd. In his words, "and they follow me," suggests recognition. Sheep will not follow anyone who is not the shepherd. The shepherd knows his sheep, and they know him.

I once heard an impressive story of an actor who was asked to recite the 23rd Psalm. He knew it well and moved his audience to great feeling. As a result he received great acclaim for his oratory. Then a godly, white-haired man was asked to come to the stage and recite Psalm 23 as well. He did not have the fluency, nor did he lift the audience as the actor had done. But little by little, tears began to trickle down the people's faces, and even the actor was affected. After it was all over, the actor said: "I can see the effect of the reciting of the psalm. I moved you to feeling, but the old man moved you to tears. I'll tell you the difference: I know the Psalm, but he knows the Shepherd."

What a difference! We follow Him not because we have heard about Him, but because we know Him. We are strong in our Christian life as we are strong in our personal relationship to Christ. St. Paul said,

“that I might know him, and the power of his resurrection” (Philippians 3:10).

I am glad that we can know Him—and follow Him. A woman was singing a solo part in Handel’s Messiah and was doing well when the conductor stopped her and asked: “Do you believe what you are singing, I know that my Redeemer liveth?” She replied, “I do.” “Then sing it as if you knew it,” he said. And what a tremendous difference it made when she sang from her heart! Yes, we follow him because we know him.

It takes faith for sheep to follow their shepherd, faith to believe that His ways are better than ours. In the East the shepherd always goes ahead of his sheep. Suppose that some of his sheep would think that they knew better than their shepherd and say, “He is taking us over that winding field again, the same way he took us yesterday. Why doesn’t he let us decide for ourselves once in a while? We have about finished up that old pasture area.” No, they follow him! They who follow Christ have faith in Him and are absolutely at rest with no anxiety. One rendering of Philippians 4:6 is, “be anxious for nothing.” That is the way of the sheep.

It is good to have faith, not in circumstances, but in Jesus. The sheep follow their shepherd because they trust him. They will not follow a stranger. You cannot hire a child of God to take any other course than that of following Christ.

To better lead us, the Good Shepherd did the most extraordinary thing: He became one of the sheep. The Good Shepherd became the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. All of his life on Earth was for you, that you might follow Him. He experienced everything you will, including temptation, and yet without sin, that He might go before you and lead you safely to the promised land.

Because, left to ourselves, we will ruin ourselves and the earth around us, turning oases into deserts and Paradise into parasites. The Good Shepherd keeps us moving as we follow Him. We cannot stand still in the spiritual life: we are always moving. Either you follow the Good Shepherd or you wander from Him.

The good shepherd also leads his sheep by protecting them. First, he protects them from their enemies. There are outside predators, ravening wolves, waiting to devour the sheep. They are the offspring of Satan, the roaring and ravenous lion, and they will use any means possible to devour the sheep. But just as David defeated both bear and lion, Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, has defeated and will defeat Satan and his wolves.

The Good Shepherd leads his sheep to a place where all of their needs are met: not necessarily their desires, but their needs, which the Good Shepherd knows better than the sheep themselves know. He

prepares a table for His sheep; a table can mean a mesa or table, a plateau, which is a sought-after grazing ground for sheep. The shepherd must go before his sheep and pull up all poisonous plants, take supplies of salt and minerals, distribute them, and chase away predators. He must also find good food and water there for the sheep. Thus, the shepherd prepares the table for his sheep; he leads them that his sheep may safely graze.

Christ, of course, prepares the Lord’s Supper —Himself — for our heavenly food. We, as a sheep, feed upon the best food on Heaven or on earth. Christ gives us life abundantly through Himself, and we are well fed and healthy. No sheep in the universe are as well provided for as those of Jesus Christ. We partake most fully of Him in the Holy Communion with Him, but we are also privileged to feed off Him who is our daily bread. Jesus turns out to be not only the Good Shepherd, but also the food off which we graze.

From all these—from wandering, from spiritual starvation, from those who would devour us, from our own foolishness, and from death—the Good Shepherd delivers us. He desires to lead us to a good place. Jesus, the Good Shepherd promises us: “you shall go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9). This is the satisfaction to the hungry sheep.

The sheep are entirely dependent upon the shepherd. They rely on him for four essentials—pasture, shade, rest, and water. In our Christian life we too need pasture, streams, shade, and rest. If we lack any of these, we suffer. God says He will feed us day by day. I like the account in the Old Testament of the gathering of manna. “Don’t gather enough for the morrow,” God said. “I will give it to you fresh every day” (Exodus 16:16–18). In the days of our Savior in the flesh, a poor man fed himself first, the mother came next, the children then ate what they could find. Finally, if there was anything left over, the dogs got it. Of course, there was not much left over, and, consequently, the poor dogs were skin and bones. Many so-called Christians are like that. They do not feed on Christ and His Word. They live a rushed life instead of coming under the shadow of the Almighty. They are as the skinny dogs instead of fat sheep.

Which are you? You are whichever you choose to be. I choose to follow Jesus, obedient to His word, and feast on the food that He provides for his sheep.

This sheep automatically go with the shepherd, but we make a choice to follow the Lord wherever He leads us. The Israelites had gone round and round a certain mountain, and God said to Moses: “you have compassed this mountain long enough: turn you northward” (Deuteronomy 2:3).

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Three New Commandments



Part 2 — Pray without Ceasing

By Bryant Buck

In my previous article I observed that Sabbath keepers love to emphasize the Ten Commandments. I also noted that the Ten Commandments are the basis of Yahweh's law and that they are an eternal standard for righteous behavior. And I observed that Yahweh has more commandments than just ten and that three of these other commandments can particularly help us towards a more victorious life.

Three new commandments of particular benefit to believers in Christ are found in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (NAS) In the first article in this series we considered the commandment "Rejoice always." In this article we shall address the commandment "Pray without ceasing."

Since we have other things that we must do in life, many Christians consider obeying this commandment an impossibility. While we are working at our jobs, how can we be praying at the same time? While we are reading or studying, how can we be praying at the same time? And while we are engaged in a conversation with someone else, how can we pray at the same time? If "pray without ceasing" means that we pray out loud at all times, then it might be an impossibility. But I don't believe that that is what this command means.

Prayer is an action, but it is also an attitude. We can always be in an attitude of prayer even if we are not actually praying verbally. If we set our hearts toward the Almighty, even if we are not consciously praying, we can still be in an attitude of prayer because our hearts are directed toward Him. Moreover, if we do this, we will find ourselves consciously praying more because we have determined to direct our hearts toward our Father in heaven.

However, I must add that a daily devotional life will help you get going in the direction of praying without ceasing. Devotions consist primarily of prayer and Bible reading, but taking some time to just listen to the Lord speak to your heart can give extra depth to your time with Jesus. The critical thing for successful devotions is to set some time aside every day to spend with the Lord. If you have no habit formed in this area, start small. One minute a day of consistent devotions will do more to improve your spiritual life than 15 minutes yesterday, nothing today, 10 minutes tomorrow, and nothing the next day. If "pray without ceasing" means nothing else, surely it means pray every day. The devil will resist you doing this; so if you fail for a time, just start your devotions again. I failed at having successful

devotions so many times that I don't care to remember, but because I didn't give up, I finally made devotions a habit. And the habit of daily devotions has profoundly changed my life, particularly in giving me consistent peace of heart and mind.

The great English Christian George Mueller did more than run an orphanage that saved many children. He prayed without ceasing. No, he didn't consciously pray every second of every day, but he was always in attitude of prayer. Moreover, there were certain sinners whom he knew that he prayed for every day. When he died, two of these people still hadn't given their lives to Christ. Some doubters pointed this out as evidence that God hadn't answered all of George Mueller's prayers, but within ten years of his death these two whom he prayed for also found Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. Praying without ceasing is more than a good spiritual idea; praying without ceasing gets results.

I have a friend in my church who exemplifies what praying without ceasing is all about. Elden Shisler never completed high school and never had a good career job, but as a boy he formed the habit of praying on a regular basis. By the time he became an adult he was directing his heart toward heaven every day; in effect, he was praying without ceasing. Because he made prayer the habit of his life, he has more answers to prayer than any other Christian I know. Plus, some of them are absolutely amazing. In fact, Elden Shisler has so many answers to prayer that I finally wrote a book about him to motivate other Christians as to what Yahweh can do for them if they develop a consistent prayer life. (*If you would like to improve your prayer life, get a copy of my book about Elden, **The Prayer Warrior**. See the ad on page 21.*)

I'll take just one of Elden's prayers as an example. Since he was a boy, Elden has prayed that Yahweh would protect him and those around him from the violent forces of nature. He didn't wait for an earthquake or a tornado to pray this prayer; he just prayed it consistently for years. In the summer of 1982 a tornado headed directly towards where Elden was living at the time. But at the edge of the property where Elden resided, the tornado split into two tornadoes which then took off in different directions. Neither of the new tornadoes crossed onto the farm where Elden was living. Praying without ceasing gets results beyond even our wildest expectations!

I believe that a lot of commandment keepers hide behind the Ten Commandments. It certainly is easier not to put up an idol or not take the Almighty's name in vain than it is to "pray without ceasing." However, we will certainly see more sinners saved and more tornadoes stopped if we obey this commandment. PRAY WITHOUT CEASING! Both heaven and earth are waiting.

*Bryant Buck is assistant minister of New Beginnings Church near Rock City, Illinois, and is the author of the currently selling book **The Prayer Warrior**.*

Understanding Galatians 4:8-11

by Kelly McDonald

“Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature (by the order of things) are not gods. But now that you know God – or rather are known by (under) God – how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable (lacking) principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you” (NIV).

Many Christians believe that the Letter to the Galatians is addressing several congregations of Jews who have ‘gone back’ to following the Law. Usually they make this assumption because Paul addresses works of the law and adult circumcision in the letter. On the other hand, scholars tend to believe that Galatians is a letter written to Gentile converts who have been influenced by Judaizers. Scholars then argue that these Judaizers were forcing the law on the Gentiles, especially adult circumcision, as a requirement for salvation. From these two perspectives, many Christians and scholars have cited Galatians 4:8-11, mainly due to the phrase “days and months and seasons and years”, as Paul condemning observance of the Sabbath, Holy Days, New Moon Festivals, or Sabbath years. While the Judaizers in Galatia were promoting adult male circumcision as a necessary part of salvation (an issue to deal with another time), a deeper examination of this passage reveals that no connection exists between this passage and any observance of the Law.

First and foremost, we must understand that Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles, not to the Jews. While Paul often went into a city’s Jewish synagogue before preaching to the Gentiles, Paul always affirms himself as a preacher and apostle to the Gentiles. In Gal. 1:15-16, Paul says that his calling as a believer in Jesus Christ was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. In Gal. 2:1-10 Paul tells the story of how the gospel he preached among the Gentiles was accepted by those who preached the gospel to the Jews. Furthermore, one of the issues in Galatia was adult circumcision. Were Paul speaking to a group of Jews “going back” to law-keeping, the issue of circumcision would not have arisen because they would already be circumcised. Paul even begins this particular passage by saying, “Formerly, when you did not know God, you served those gods who were by nature not gods.” Clearly, Paul is addressing a group of churches who at one time worshipped other gods.

Since Paul is addressing congregations of people who once served pagan gods, how can they turn

back to customs such as the Sabbath or Holy Days that they never observed in the first place? Also, the language used in this passage does not support any claim that Paul is going against observances found in the Hebrew Bible. The phrase Paul uses - “days and months and seasons and years” - does not contain any of the Greek words used throughout the New Testament for the Sabbath (Sabbaton), New Moon celebrations (Neumeneia), or Holy Days (Heorte). The Sabbath or Jubilee year is not mentioned in the New Testament. Though some of his letters can be hard to understand, Paul is an Israelite by birth and at one time a high-ranking rabbi in Judaism. If Paul desired to reference the Sabbath, Holy Days, or New Moons, he would use the words specifically related to these feasts. Paul’s own example in the Bible shows us that he did not condemn any observance of the law, but that he continued to keep and reverence the Sabbath and Holy Days after his conversion to Christianity (for a few examples: Acts 13, Acts 20:16, Acts 27:9, and 1 Corinthians 16:8). In 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, Paul tells the Corinthians to keep Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. To the Colossians, Paul says to let no one judge them for keeping the Sabbath, Holy Days, and New Moon Celebrations (Col. 2:16). Paul uses the specific terms in these passages (and others) that refer to the Holy Days in Leviticus 23. Paul in no way condemns churches for keeping the Holy Days. On the contrary, Paul instructs the churches in Corinth and Colossae to keep these Holy Days, understanding that Christ is the purpose (or reality) of them all.

So then, what are the “days and months and seasons and years” to which Paul refers? To understand this we have to review some of the history of this region (keep in mind that Galatia is in modern day central Turkey). Between 279 B.C. and 189 B.C. the Gallic peoples of this region were influenced by their own traditions of pagan worship as well as Greek mythology.¹ Between 189 B.C. and the time of Paul (around 50 A.D.), the region was conquered by the Romans and even declared an official Roman prov-

ince. The days, months, seasons, and years Paul refers to are the Greek and Roman worship practices that had permeated Galatian culture over 200 years before Paul's visit to Galatia (see Acts 14:8-20). For instance, the Romans dedicated every day to a specific god or goddess. In fact, the naming of every day of the week comes from this custom and similar customs. The day we know as the second day of the week (Monday) was dedicated to the moon god, and thus was called the "Day of the Moon." The Romans also held celebrations on certain days throughout the year to lesser gods of the home, agriculture, or family (days).² In addition to these days, the Romans also dedicated each month to a specific god or goddess and held ceremonies during the month to commemorate a particular god or goddess. The month we know as January was a month dedicated to the goddess Janus, who was said to have two faces. In fact, the Roman New Year was moved from March to January to commemorate Janus, who was said to be looking back to the past with one face and into the future with her other face. The month of March derives its name from the Roman god Mars who was honored during this month (*months*). The Romans also kept certain seasons or times of celebrations to their gods that coincided with events in nature. For instance, the Saturnalia was a seasonal festival held to commemorate the god Saturn during the winter solstice (*seasons*). The combination of observing all these events makes up years (*years*). These ancient celebrations involved worship practices such as feasting on food sacrificed to other gods and/or making vows to these gods, which are the "weak and miserable principles" that Paul refers to in Gal. 4:9.

Again, Paul links these days, months, seasons, and years to a time when the Galatians served or worshipped other gods. Paul even uses common words in describing these observances because he is referring to observances that he considers common or unholy. Paul is denouncing common or unholy observances that worship or reverence other gods. The Sabbath, New Moon Celebrations, Holy Days, and Jubilee/Sabbath years were named by God and ordained by God – which is why the writers of the Bible use specific terms to refer to each of them. God is one, meaning he does not contradict himself or go against his own words. God gave everything in the Law, including the Holy Days, to show mankind how to serve and worship Him.

Paul uses the word "and" between each word in the phrase "days and months and seasons and years" to show the Galatians the cumulative effect of how far the Galatians have strayed from the true Creator God. They are observing pagan days and months and seasons and years. In other words, observing pagan days has led to observing pagan months which has

lead to observing pagan seasons which has led to observing pagan years. This passage reiterates what Paul says in Galatians 5:9: "A little yeast leavens the whole lump." These practices are causing them to serve the gods that Christ freed them from – which makes Paul fearful that they will be enslaved once again.

END NOTES

1. For historical references to the region of Galatia, the following source was used: McGarvey, J.W. and Philip Y. Pendleton. *Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans*. Cincinnati, OH: The Standard Publishing Company, 1916. pp 274-276.
2. For references to Roman and ancient customs (some of which is general knowledge), the following sources were used: Johnson, Sarah Iles, ed. *Religions of the Ancient World*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004. p 274. Lyttleton, M. and W. Forman. *The Romans*. London: Orbis Publishing Limited, 1984. pp 35-55. Warrior, Valarie M. *The Roman Religion*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

For Scripture references, the New International Version (NIV) was used, with the exception of Galatians 5:9 (KJV) in the last paragraph.

For language references, *Strong's Concordance* was used.

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CHRISTIANS TURN TO GOD OVER STATE OF THE NATION

"Your Kingdom come, Your will be done" was the prayer of hundreds of Christians who gathered at a central London church on Saturday to cry out to God over the moral and spiritual crisis in the UK.

The State of the Nation gathering also focused on repentance over the church's silence in the face of immoral legislation passed over the decades, particularly in the areas of the unborn child and marriage.

All mainstream denominations were represented at Saturday's gathering at the Emmanuel Centre, near the Houses of Parliament. Prayer gatherings were also held in Birmingham, Manchester, and Edinburgh and in countries around the world, including the US, Germany and Australia, in an expression of solidarity with the London meeting.

The day of prayer and repentance was organised following a meeting at the House of Lords last December of some 80 Christians from the church, the Houses of Parliament, and the business and education sectors. The meeting focused on the moral and spiritual implications of the financial crisis and concluded with a call for a season of prayer and fasting for the UK.

(Source: *ChristianToday.com*)

Why Study the History of Sabbath Keepers?



by Richard Nickels

Giving and Sharing Study No. 264

An Indian proverb states, "A people without history are like the blowing wind." Today there is an abysmal lack of knowledge among Sabbath keepers of their own history. This dearth has motivated me to write a couple of books on the fascinating subject of church history.

Why should we study church history? Because we cannot understand what is happening today in the Sabbath-keeping Churches without a background of what has happened in the past. Unless we learn the lessons of the past, we are destined to repeat the mistakes of our ancestors. The history of God's Church is both thrilling and educational. "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6,13, 22).

I have long been interested in the history of Sabbath keepers. Not knowing one's history is like starting to watch a movie in the middle. You don't know what happened before and have difficulty understanding what is happening now. When you look into the history of Sabbath keepers, you see striking examples of the maxim, "history repeats itself." You see the relationship between different groups and appreciate more fully how they arrived at their position today. You find characters such as John James, Dr. Peter Chamberlen, Gilbert Cranmer, and many others with whom you can identify. You can appreciate their work for the Master, their problems, and their trials.

Giving & Sharing (giveshare.org) has recently reprinted a revised, expanded, edition of my book, *Six Papers on the History of the Church of God*, originally published in 1972. This book covers the history of Sabbath keepers from seventeenth century England to America, through the Adventist period and the foundation of the modern Church of God (Seventh Day), as well as the independent movement of G. G. Rupert. John Kiesz, elder

statesman of the Church of God (Seventh Day), wrote paper number six. A companion book is *History of the Seventh Day Church of God, Volume 1*, which gives further details of the formation of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in the mid-1800's down to the present.

Who "Owns" Sabbatarian History?

History has not as much to do with time as with how we live and believe. In updating my book *Six Papers on the History of the Church of God*, part of which covers the history of Sabbatarian Baptists in England and America from the 1500's to the 1880's, I was inspired and encouraged to learn that early Sabbath keepers practiced nearly the same beliefs that we hold today. Through the pages of history I have discovered my spiritual ancestors.

Yet, some would deny my claims of spiritual kinship with early English and American Sabbath keepers. Don Sanford, today's official historian of the Seventh Day Baptist Church, has written a revised Seventh Day Baptist history, *A Choosing*

People: The History of Seventh Day Baptists (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1992). Sanford holds that other Sabbath keepers cannot rightfully appropriate Seventh Day Baptist history as their own (see: *The Sabbath Sentinel*, October, 1992, pages 6, 7).

I believe many Sabbath keepers of today can indeed validly claim early English and American Sabbatarian Baptists as their spiritual predecessors. Actually, many Church of God groups today are doctrinally closer to early English and American Sabbath keepers than are today's Seventh Day Baptists. Early American Sabbatarians rejected the Trinity doctrine as well as the immortal soul teaching, and eschewed Christmas and Easter, all of which are generally contrary to modern Seventh Day Baptist doctrinal teaching.

Continued on page 14

Seventh-day Adventist Becomes Jamaica's New Governor General

By Michael Ireland

Wednesday, January 14, 2009

KINGSTON, JAMAICA (ANS) — For the first time in the 47-year history of Jamaica, a Seventh-day Adventist will hold the nation's highest office.

According to Mark A. Kellner, News Editor, Adventist Review (www.adventistreview.com), Dr. Patrick Allen, president of the church's West Indies Union, is expected to take office as Jamaica's sixth Governor General in late February. Jamaican Prime Minister Bruce Golding announced his appointment in a Parliament session on January 13, 2009.

"It is astounding and I don't think I can wrap my head around it, and I'm not sure what the Lord is doing here, but He has some Joseph and Daniel role for me to perform," Allen told Adventist Review in a telephone interview the same day from Freeport, Bahamas, where he was helping to conduct an audit. "I'm just praying about it and making myself available for God to use me in whatever way He chooses best."

Kellner reports that Allen will resign his present position as West Indies Union President, and a special executive session will be held February 10 to name a successor, said Israel Leito, Inter-American Division president.

"The church serves the community and we can do this from within the church organization or as individuals in other activities," Leito said in a statement.

"The appointment of Dr. Allen as Governor General of Jamaica is something historic in Jamaica and the world field. As far as memory goes, this [appointment of an Adventist pastor as a Governor General] has never happened before. But the Inter-American Division is so pleased that one of our leaders through the high standing of the church, has reached such a distinction that he could be considered for such a position," said Leito.

Leito added: "We wish Dr. Allen all the best, realizing the serious challenges he will have — to be the leader with non-political authority, but still in leadership position for a whole nation. The church will always be praying for him in this position."



Dr. Patrick Allen
[Photo: Nigel Coke/WIU/IAD]

Orville Parchment, assistant to the president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, said the world church leadership was happy at the news.

"On behalf of Pastor Jan Paulsen, President of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and our worldwide church family,

we congratulate Pastor Allen on his new appointment. We pray for God's continued blessing as he carries out his new civic responsibilities," he said.

Allen, who turns 58 on Feb. 7, replaces Sir Kenneth Hall, who was appointed Governor General in February of 2006, and who reportedly resigned for health reasons. Ironically, Sir Kenneth presented Allen with the Order of Distinction on the country's 2006 Heroes Day for his contribution to the church and religion in Jamaica.

Kellner says that according to the Jamaica Information Service (JIS), the Governor General "represents the Queen on ceremonial occasions such as the opening of Parliament, the presentation of honors and military parades."

Jamaica's constitution gives the position additional powers, the JIS reported, including "appointing and disciplining officers of the civil service, in proroguing [dissolving] Parliament and so on, but only in [a] few cases is he empowered to act entirely on his own discretion. The Governor-General also exercises the prerogative of mercy on behalf of the Queen" including "the power to grant [a] pardon to any person who has been sentenced to death."

Kellner reports that Bruce Golding, who has held the Prime Minister's office since November 2007, is married to Lorna, a Seventh-day Adventist. The Goldings are regular attendees at Adventist worship services. Allen said the church's work to improve life in Jamaica brought his name to the leader's attention.

"I suspect [Prime Minister Golding] has grown to appreciate the [Seventh-day Adventist] church and its function in the country over the years," Allen said.

"The church in Jamaica is very significant and playing a role in nation-building. One of our strategic roles is 'the church in the community.' The work we have been doing and the execution of that strategic issue has caught the attention of the government," he said.

Allen recounted that Golding, "said to me that what he needs for the nation is what he thinks I can bring to bear: the integrity, the moral bearing and the leadership."

Kellner explains that as a nation of 2.8 million people, Jamaica is a constitutional parliamentary democracy, which gained its independence from Britain in 1962. It remains a part of the British Commonwealth of Nations, and Queen Elizabeth II is its monarch; the Governor General represents the Queen.

Allen was educated at Moneague Teachers College in Jamaica, and church-owned Andrews University, where he studied for undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate degrees. He holds a Ph.D. in Educational Administration and Supervision, a Masters degree in Systematic Theology, and a Bachelors degree in History and Religion.

He is an ordained minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He was elected to the position of President of West Indies Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in October 2000 and re-elected in 2005.

Prior to that, Allen served in many other posts within and outside of the Adventist Church. He served as President of Central Jamaica Conference, Director of Education and Family Life at West Indies Union Conference, and District Pastor. As a trained teacher he also served as principal of Schools, and Adjunct Professor at West Indies College, which is now Northern Caribbean University. Allen currently chairs NCU's board of trustees.

"I'm extremely proud, on behalf of Andrews University, to have one of our alumni three times over be considered for this important position," said provost Heather Knight. "As a fellow-Jamaican, I have warm

thoughts about the office of Governor General. It's held in very high esteem."

Sir James Carlisle, who served as Governor General of Antigua for more than 14 years and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II for his service, was the first Seventh-day Adventist to hold the head of state position.

"That's wonderful news," he said when a reporter called to inform him of Allen's selection.

"It's a wonderful office of witness as well," Sir James told Adventist Review. "Your very presence there is a witness. Most people know who Adventists are."

Sir James added: "Jamaicans love their institutions. They have tremendous respect for their institutions. I'd be very surprised if he doesn't have a lot of knowledge; [although] there's nothing like doing the job."

Jamaica is not only home to the West Indies Union and church-owned Northern Caribbean University, but also claims about 11-percent of Jamaicans as members.

Allen said he was conscious of his new visibility as Governor General.

"It is a great day for Adventism and also for the church in Jamaica," Allen said, adding: "I think the members are going to be very excited about this, and they will also come into an awareness that they are going to be ... scrutinized and the searchlight will be on. It is an opportunity to witness in areas where we were not able to access easily. I think that is the most exciting part of all of it. We'll be able to introduce our faith and learn more about who we are, especially in the higher echelons in society. It bodes well for the church."

He concluded: "There will be some challenges, but I doubt they will be insurmountable. We have a God who is always looking out for us and He will give the wisdom."

Michael Ireland, Chief Correspondent of ANS, is an international British freelance journalist who was formerly a reporter with a London (United Kingdom) newspaper and has been a frequent contributor to UCB Europe, a British Christian radio station. Michael has traveled to Albania and the former Yugoslavia, Holland, Germany and the former Czechoslovakia, Israel, and Canada. He has reported for ANS from Jordan, China, Russia, Jamaica, Mexico, and Nicaragua. Michael's involvement with ASSIST News Service is a sponsored ministry department -- Michael Ireland Media Missionary (MIMM) -- of A.C.T. International at: Artists in Christian Testimony (A.C.T.) International.

than they now do. Sabbath keepers are probably the most Bible literate Christians that exist, yet I have noticed that many Sabbath keepers are allowing their Bible knowledge to slip away due to neglect. The Word of God is the eternal bread that we eat to give us the spiritual strength to face our circumstances and the disintegrating world around us. If we do not draw on the bread of life, how will we be able to stand on our own, let alone help those around us.

Second, we need to make a renewed commitment to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Some have drifted away from active fellowship with other Christians and allowed themselves to be overcome by the cares of this world. Yet it is we, together with our Christian brethren, that form the army of God that will succeed triumphantly through the darkness that is coming on the world. We should not be a single candle glowing in the darkness. Rather, we should be a whole host of candles shining in unison to light up the world. We are one body, not many scattered pieces. When there is opportunity to get together with other Christians, that's where we should be. Only by fellowshiping together can we strengthen and encourage each other.

Christ is the gate through which all men must pass into God's kingdom. We are the lights along that path that illuminate the way for those seeking God. That is why we should study together, pray together, and eat our meals together when possible. I said earlier that we were called by God for such a time as this. People are more lost than ever before, and we as God's people have been called to go out to seek the lost, the broken, the suffering, and to bring them to Christ for healing and for salvation in His eternal kingdom.

We would like for the Bible Sabbath Association to be one of the oases in the desert where wandering souls can find rest and refreshment on their way to the Kingdom of God. We are truly thankful to those of you who have made the commitment to become BSA members and those who have contributed regularly to this ministry. We hope that you will consider us worthy of your support well into the future.

Our calling is to go out into the field and gather as much grain for our Master as we can possibly haul. As Jesus said, "the harvest is white" and ready for God's harvest. The apostle Peter tells us "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (2 Peter 1:10).

We know we were called for this moment in history. We must recommit ourselves to Christ and His kingdom. Now is our time of salvation.

—Kenneth Ryland

Who "owns" Sabbatarian history? Those who believe and practice what early Sabbath keepers believed and practiced (John 8:39). Sabbatarian history should not become the intellectual property of any particular group.

Recent Historical Developments

A revision and update of my material on church history was necessary due to developments over the past twenty years. There have been at least three significant books published, which have expanded the horizon of knowledge on the history of Sabbath keepers. They are: 1) Sanford's book, mentioned previously; 2) *Andreas Fischer and the Sabbatarian Anabaptists*, by Daniel Liechty (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1988), and 3) *Sabbath and Sectarianism in Seventh-Century England*, by David S. Katz (New York; E. 1. Brill, 1988). Liechty adds interesting data about Sabbath keepers in Slovakia during the early 1500's. Katz, a non-Sabbatarian, makes the astounding conclusion that the Adventist Movement (of which the Seventh Day Church of God is a derivative) is the direct spiritual descendant of the seventeenth-century Sabbatarians who kept the Sabbath and believed in the soon-coming millennial rule of the Messiah.

There is yet another reason why it was necessary to revise and update this history. The past twenty years have seen dramatic doctrinal changes in many Sabbath keeping groups. At this time, some Sabbath keepers are saying that they do not have a need anymore to support their doctrinal position by showing that other believers down through the ages have upheld the Sabbath and related doctrines. While Katz and Liechty have provided additional proofs that we have indeed found our spiritual ancestors, some today are ignoring the lessons of this history.

I do not hold such views. A careful study of the evidence shows that in every age there have been a few who have not "bowed the knee to Baal." I have written about a small portion of these valiant individuals. May we always remember how we have received and heard the Truth of God (Revelation 3:3, 4) and remain faithful, holding fast to the end, no matter what others do!

*Richard Nickels, now deceased, is the former president of the BSA and one of the founders of the Giving and Sharing ministry. The **Six Papers on the History of the Church of God**, and **The History of the Seventh-day Church of God** are available through Giving and Sharing, P.O. Box 100, Neck City, Missouri, USA 64849.*

Westby: Continued from page 5.

I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:18). When God spoke his covenant he was clear about the terms: "Listen to the terms of this covenant...I said, Obey me and do everything I command you, and you will be my people, and I will be your God" (Jer. 11:2, 4).

This universal covenant embodies the two great commandments—love God, love neighbor—which Jesus declared, "All the Law and Prophets hang on these two commandments."³ Accepting God as your God implies you will whole-heartedly love and obey Him (the first and greatest commandment); being one of His people implies you will love others as he loves you (the second great commandment).

What could be clearer? You use your freedom to obey God by altering your behaviors and thoughts to conform to his divine way. You change. This great and necessary change doesn't happen overnight as we well know from personal experience. Nor does it spontaneously occur without cost or difficulty. But it can and does happen over time.

Time and Change

Time is always moving forward providing active tension, making our relationship with God real and precious. We must "redeem the time,"⁴ not in the sense we can get any more of it or buy back squandered time, rather that we can make the absolute most of the time remaining. Your life is time and time is your life. With the business of moving Godward, there is no time to waste.

As time moves along, we move along in our lives. We are changing constantly both physically and spiritually. Our bodies are moving in various directions in the short term (losing weight, gaining, getting into tone, out of shape, eating well, eating poorly, sleeping too little or too much, etc.), and in the long term, the gradual slide toward decay and death.

Spiritually, the movement should be in the opposite direction of decay and death, instead, happily, toward renewal and life. We want to be constantly growing in spiritual understanding, vigor, and increasingly manifesting the spiritual fruits of joy, patience, love, hospitality, humility, kindness, peace, etc. Right? Don't we want God to be working us over spiritually to renew us into his image? Of course we do.

This ever-changing process takes time and in that sense time is our friend. Time and change are dynamic, symbiotic movements toward the future. Yielding to God's will, over time, produces God-like changes in us.

Dynamic growth comes forth from loving God with all of one's mind, heart, and soul.⁵ "Becoming holy because God is holy"⁶ is the logic and reason for our passion for God. It is a hungering and thirsting to have the heart of God. Might these words describe you? Me? We should pause here to find the honest answer.

Ideally, the spiritual development of a Christian should appear on a graph as a line moving upward—Godward. But life, as most of us live it, does not always adhere to the ideal. We go in spits and spurts, take backward steps, stumble, go in circles, and the spiritual growth line graph for our lives might look like an alligator's mouth, a lot of peaks and valleys. Thankfully, God is merciful and patient with us.

However, as long as that jagged line is moving in an overall upward direction—toward the holy character of God—we can still confidently say we are "growing in grace and knowledge"⁷ of God and his way. We are traveling the Way of God, but not always with the speed and focus of which we are capable. Maybe we can change this too.

Mirror Time

Take a moment to evaluate your spiritual growth and your present state of maturity as you move Godward. I know how we work to avoid such introspection. Let me hand you a mirror. I have one too. Let us take a long and piercing look into the mirror.

Some Christians deceive themselves about the true state of their spiritual health. They approach their spiritual condition like pop psychologists handle self-esteem. These feel-good purveyors of false self-worth substitute narcissism, excessive self-love, self-admiration, and self-centeredness for real self-worth achieved by real accomplishments—worthy accomplishments that can honestly contribute to positive self-respect.

Professing Christians can likewise self-righteously preen that they are not unbelievers, not pagans, don't do the bad things sinners do, they lead respectable lives, go to church on Sunday (or Saturday), occasionally read the Bible, and give money to good causes. Plainly, a good person...right? But does this profile offer us a "Christian" generating the spiritual fruits, the character, and the righteous works of Christ? Not necessarily.

Shouldn't we measure a "Christian" against his namesake? What is a better measure of a Christian than Christ himself? But we must be careful to look to the Jesus of Scripture, not to the remade caricature of Jesus that politics, culture, and some religious sectarians palm off.

Being Good, Doing Good

Every culture and religion has its standards and pays service to a version of the “Golden Rule” for human conduct. Confucius put it negatively when he advised, “Whatever you wish not to be done to yourself, do not do that thing to another person.” Surely the world would be a better place if only that maxim were practiced.

Jesus expands it by phrasing the rule positively, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”⁸ Confucius had in view not doing bad things to others, whereas Jesus’ repeat of the Golden Rule encompasses both concepts with the stress upon doing good to your neighbor. In your ever-changing spiritual walk you must ask yourself, “Am I improving in doing good to others—both in quantity and quality?” Answering that question truthfully took me more than a few minutes.

The Golden Rule is simply a restatement of the second great commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”⁹ Love is not passive, not negative; it is a positive action of goodness toward someone that could be called your neighbor. God judges us on what we actually do, not what we say we want to do, or affirm is a good thing to do. Jesus said that his words must be put into practice. He warns that simply hearing and agreeing with his words, but not doing them, makes one a fool doomed to failure.¹⁰ Serious stuff.

Growing in God-directed change is learning to put into actual practice acts of loving kindness toward those around you and especially those people and causes that could use your help. The Lord’s brother, James, defines pure and faultless religion in terms of doing good deeds. His examples include looking after needy orphans and widows and “keeping oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:26-27).

Peter advises that God’s path of living spiritually comes down to our selfless actions of love and service. He said, “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:6-10).

Here is change we can believe in; changing from a person dominated by self-interest, to one that, like God, is truly concerned with the needs, welfare, growth, and happiness of others.

Every Christian is in some way capable of ministering to others. We each have gifts or abilities with which we can serve others. Your list of “graces” should not be difficult to inventory. Start by asking yourself, “What good things have God and others done for me?” Then, to the best of your ability, go and do likewise. It’s The Golden Rule. Spiritual change Godward can start here.

Ask, in what helpful ways have I been served by others? Then find ways to go and do likewise. Ask, how has God and his word improved my life? Then seek ways to share God’s word and goodness with someone. There are lots of someones out there and one is waiting on you. Ask, am I now more connected to people I can serve than I used to be? Or, am I a loner, largely cut off from people? Ask, am I more active in supporting the proclamation of the Gospel to a world in need? Spiritual growth requires positive change—not just in our thinking, but in what we do, our works.

Godly self-esteem, self-worth, or perhaps more accurately expressed, self-respect, is something you earn. You earn it through all of your choices and actions, each and every day you add to your sense of positive self-worth, or subtract from it. God wants us to change into someone new and beautiful and be filled with good works. Paul said, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:17). That is change from the inside out. Christian confidence and boldness come forth from real growth, real change, and godly good works.

Your freedom to change declares that you possess a high degree of God-given agency. God accepts that you have responsibility for your own life. You own your own life, and you must decide what you want to do to move your life in God’s direction, what you can do to strengthen your spiritual character, your inner self. Growing Godward is an internal process fueled by a passion to “be holy, because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16; Lev. 11:44, 45).

Finding True North

In what direction is your moral compass pointing? Is it properly calibrated according to “true north”—the Way of God? That way, as we’ve seen, is simply making God your father and becoming a loving, obedient son or daughter. Jesus said, “I do what pleases him”¹¹ and often his father responded to Jesus and those with him: “This is my son whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him.”¹² Here we see the essence of the bond God wants to establish with us—“I will be your God and you will be my people.” But the process of conforming to God’s Way is not without stress.

Life is good, but it is not always easy. The dynamic of change—economic, emotional, mental, family, political, physical—brings fluctuating levels of stress. Not all stress is negative. In fact, stress exists in the tension between life and death, success and failure, happiness and misery. We stress ourselves to seek life and the best ways to enjoy it. This is positive. A life totally free of stress is probably not much of a life. I would guess it would be more like lying in a casket.

I remember talking to a vineyard owner famous for his Oregon pinot noir wine. After walking about his rocky hillside vineyard, I remarked that his soil looked poor, not what I had expected. He acknowledged it was poor, but nevertheless was good for making quality wine. He explained that the best wine comes from stressed vines that have been heavily pruned and forced to put down deep roots seeking needed nutrients. These are the vines that produce a superior grade grape though not always in great quantity. Because the vines are stressed, they produce a finer, higher quality wine of deeper complexity, richer taste, and consequently of greater value, fetching a higher price.

In his famous “I am the vine, you are the branches, and my Father is the gardener” parable¹³, Jesus said that even the fruitful branches needed pruning to be ever more fruitful. The Father is after quality, precious children, ever-changing into his spiritual image, of which there is no better example than Jesus, his firstborn son.

New Good Habits Destroy Old Bad Habits

Counselors have long recommended to people addicted to negative behaviors that the best way to break bad habits is to replace them with good habits. This too is the essence of spiritual growth. We repent of and replace the selfish habits of sin with new habits of righteous living, selfless giving, and good works. God offers us his spirit to empower us to live in newness of life.

Paul pleads for his fellows in the faith to become living sacrifices offering themselves as holy offerings to God. The highest form of worship before God isn't waving hands, speaking in “tongues,” or making noise and music at a “worship service.” It is to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” to conform to the divine nature (see Romans 12:1-2, 9). Imitation, motivated by love, is the most profound demonstration of our worship of God. It compels us to search for the Way God wants us to think and act; “to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (vs. 2).

Renewing the mind works like one of those old elephant jokes: “How do you make an elephant out of a huge rock?” Answer: “Knock off every piece that doesn't look like an elephant.” Simple in concept, but it requires a skillful hand to sculpt a real-looking elephant out of a chunk of rock. Consider that you want to become like God in all the ways it is humanly possible. This requires major work to be done on you, the raw material, the unsculpted “rock.”

You are the raw “rock” for the analogy, but not an inert piece of stone, rather a living creature similar in image to your Creator, except in the area of character. Using again the rock-carving analogy, you as a free-thinking being must participate in your own carv-

ing—your own reshaping. You are working on yourself. First, the carver must have before him a clear image of what an elephant looks like and keep his eye on that model throughout the work if he expects to do a credible job. In God’s grand scheme of making people into his image, the carver (you) is not left to act alone. The Image (God) itself will assist the carver (you) in the process of becoming like Him. Amazing.

In other words, it is a joint process with you and God working as active partners in the project. God will not force you into his image. You must want to be so shaped and must willingly submit to his skillful shaping process.

The potter and the clay is another analogy used in Scripture. “O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand” (Isa. 64:8). No analogy fits perfectly the process of making you into God’s image, but they do picture the hands-on cooperative effort going on between you and your Maker.

God is using the precious time of our lives to be ever-changing us into His image. Let us be soft clay in our Master’s skilled hands. God’s predestined plan is that we “be conformed to the likeness of his son” who was the perfect “image of the invisible God” (Romans 8:28-29; Col. 1:15).

As long as you are alive, time and change are pushing you in a direction. With God’s guidance that direction will be toward the Eternal Kingdom. Absolutely nothing that may come in your way can stop you from entering into the Father’s Presence and fellowship (see Romans 8:31, 37-39).

“Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”¹⁴

END NOTES:

1. Revelation 2:17, 26
2. Galatians 5:16-26
3. Matthew 22:40
4. Ephesians 5:15; Colossians 4:5 KJV
5. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (the *Shema*)
6. Matthew 5:48; Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:16
7. 2 Peter 3:18
8. Luke 6:31
9. Matthew 22:39
10. Matthew 7:21-27
11. John 8:29
12. Matthew 17:5
13. John 15:1-8
14. Philippians 1:6

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

Littrell: "Good Shepherd," continued from page 7.

Many of us are like that. We never seem to get out and beyond ourselves and the shallow experience in our spiritual life. We know nothing about going out where there is progress. If we follow Christ, we will go on from grace to grace and will have more joy and power. But we all have to choose to follow Him. He will not force us to follow Him. We choose to take His way because we desire to and know it is in our best interest to do so. As His sheep we say: "Shepherd, you make the turnings wherever you want to. I am resigned to your will."

Many years ago, an old Alabama farmer was heard praying: "Lord, you are the needle, I am the cotton. Where you go, I will be right along with you." He could not do otherwise. Their relationship was so close. It is lovely when we resign ourselves, not to a denomination, not to a theory, but to God; when we let self go and let Him take over our spiritual life. In our Christian life, we must follow God only, no one else! How beautiful everything runs when there is singleness of purpose and control!

God has put all things under His supreme control. We must have singleness of purpose. We must get beyond ourselves, from the ups and downs, and get our eyes upon God and His power to help us.

Three thousand sheep were being transported to Australia. They were fed dry hay and were satisfied with it until they got near enough to the shores of Australia to smell the fresh green grass. Then they refused the hay. "How is that?" said the man. "They were hungry for the hay before; now they won't take it." The scent of fresh grass made them discontent with the dry hay, and they went around sniffing and sniffing the air. When they were let off in Australia, they made a dive for the hills of green grass. It is the same with us. We cannot be satisfied with anything of this world. We want God, and He gives us more than enough. He satisfies. Praise His name!

The sheep belong to the shepherd, and the shepherd belongs to the sheep. They are identified one with the other. You cannot separate them. So, we can be identified with Christ in His sacrifices, in His zeal, in His prayer life, in His humility, compassion, and love. The question is, are we identified with Him? We may belong to a certain denomination, but do we belong to Him? Are we identified as a Christian in the community at large? When we identify with Him, we also identified with each other. There already exists unity—one with Him and one with his sheep. Jesus prayed: "That they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you" (John 17:9–11).

The Good Shepherd desired that down the centuries His voice of truth should be heard by the whole flock He purchased by His sacrifice.

Unity is a BIG word in its implications for all of us. We are united, we have a common bond in our faith. It is because of this bond that somehow our lives should be different, and our lives should make a difference. Yes, with all our diversity, with all our differences, we are UNITED. We are all children of God. Our challenge is to continually care for and love one another... whether we be Judaic or Gentile believers, rich or poor, old or young, Asian or African, male or female.

The question for all of us to answer is, "can we take one another's hands despite our differences and unite in living lives that can change the world?" With God's help, I believe we can, as His sheep hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd. Follow him.

Reprinted from Restore magazine, August 2008. Terril Littrell is a retired pastor of over 40 years of experience in teaching and ministry. He and his wife Chloe lived in Cleveland, Tennessee.

Theos/Comres report — Intelligent Design supporters "highest educated"

by Andrew Sibley

The report, *Faith and Darwin* written by Comres not Theos to avoid bias, commented on page 102.

"Despite the decrease of religious practice in the UK and the recent media coverage of issues of science and faith, there is still a core of people who hold to Young Earth Creationism. However, interestingly, the youngest generations and highest educated people show inclinations towards believing in Intelligent Design. Could this be a pointer towards the dominant trend of tomorrow?"

Pages 18–19: "[He is typically] 25, has just completed a master's degree, believes that the complexity of life on earth can only be explained by Intelligent Design. He believes there is a God or higher power of some sort, though is unwilling to be drawn on whether that is the God his grandmother believes in or some other force. Evolution, he says, is still just a theory that is waiting to be proved or disproved by the evidence. It doesn't offer a serious challenge to the question of ultimate purpose in life, and does not contradict his view that humans have unique value and significance. He thinks science challenges religious faith, but is happy to live with this tension and remains open-minded about how evolutionary theory and Christianity relate to each other. Unlike his father, he thinks children should be introduced to Intelligent Design in school, but while his grandmother would like to see it taught in science lessons as an alternative to evolution, he agrees with his mother that it is a more appropriate subject for discussion in subjects such as RE."

(Source: <http://www.uncommondescent.com/intelligent-design/>)



The State and the Church

by Bill Ellis

Tuesday, February 24, 2009

Special to ASSIST News Service (www.assistnews.net)
SCOTT DEPOT, WV (ANS) — Each year I listen intently as the Governor and the President deliver their annual addresses on the State of the State and the State of the Union.

Either before or after they have given their addresses, many pastors have delivered an annual "State of the Church" message. Most never attempt to be profound or complicated. They seek to be understood and practical.

We live in a day of economic turmoil, prosperity and excess taxation. We may have more than enough and we are taxed more than enough. Taxation, spending and credit seem to be out of control. Too many of us expect some branch of government to take care of us. Maybe that is a realistic expectation since it takes so much from us.

I am only slightly amused by the politician who pontificates and promises that if he is elected "to give the government back to the people." What is often meant is, "We'll take your money and spend your money the way we think it should be spent."

Low morals by highly placed leaders have been a blight on our national life. This has been true in government, religion, education, medicine, entertainment, sports, business and every facet of life. Fear, loneliness, despair and hopelessness are not strangers to our collective psyche. Is it possible to replace our failures with confidence, community, concern and control?

Gambling, lotteries, tobacco, alcohol, disregard for the sanctity of life, pornography, ignorance, divorce, immorality, family disintegration, and dozens of other social ills are taking a heavy toll on our state and nation. We cannot live in this manner without suffering its inevitable consequences.

More than 50 years ago my friend, the late D. Elton Trueblood, one of the great thinkers and teachers of the last century, said, "Most grievous of man's ills is the failure of his spiritual growth to parallel his technical progress." Technology, presently, is running far ahead of our spiritual progress. Trueblood was correct then and now.

What's happening in the church? Patterns of worship are changing. More and more is expected from

pastoral leadership. The authority, not only of elected leaders, but also of the Word of God, is often ridiculed and rejected. Was Adolph Hitler correct when he said, "Partisan, religious, humanitarian and all other criteria in general, are completely irrelevant?"

The life of the church, in human terms, is in the strength of its pulpits. As our pulpits go so goes the church and so goes the nation. Too many church members turn a deaf ear to the plain teaching of Scripture. It is not a matter of interpretation; it is a matter of obedience.

There is too little difference in the life and lifestyle of the believer and the unbeliever. The person who has rejected the Word of God lives as he pleases. The person who has accepted that Word lives as it pleases God.

When I hear a preacher preach, whether I agree with him or not, I want him to preach as though he believes everything he is saying. Stephen F. Olford, one of the great preachers of the last 60 years, wrote in his book, *The Christian Message for Contemporary Life* (Kregel Publications, 1999). "Postmodernism has influenced many pastors in our land to preach what people want to hear."

Tell me what I need to hear! What I want to hear may not help. He is no friend who does not speak truth. If your pastor preaches, "Thus saith the Word of the Lord" rather than, "Thus saith my mind", pray for him, accept preached truth in obedience, grow in your faith and clasp his hand and thank him for being your friend.

The prophet Samuel said, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,..." (1 Samuel 15:22). Obedience to God's Word is required to live successfully.

Bill Ellis is a syndicated columnist, and convention and conference speaker on every continent. He is the writer of more than 1600 columns and widely known as a motivator utilizing enjoyment of life and just plain fun and laughter while speaking to high school, university and professional sports teams as well as to business and professional groups of all kinds. His keen understanding of human problems make him a favorite speaker for youth, parent, and senior adult meetings. He is accompanied by Kitty, his wife, favorite singer, editor and

Why Christians Should Know the Torah



by Daniel Botkin

“Why should I study the Old Testament Law?” some Christians ask. “I’d rather read the New Testament. I occasionally read in Psalms or Proverbs, maybe something from the Prophets once in a great while. But the Law? I don’t see any point in studying that. I’ll concentrate on studying the New Testament.”

Studying the New Testament is certainly very important. No question about that. But it is for this very reason that studying the Old Testament Law is also very important, because much of the New Testament cannot be correctly understood without a knowledge of the Torah. One of several passages where this vital truth is revealed is in a parenthetical remark that Paul makes. In his letter to the Romans, Paul is explaining theological doctrine to his readers. In the midst of his explanation Paul makes a parenthetical remark: “(for I speak to them that know the law)” (Rom. 7:1).

When words are enclosed in parentheses, it often means that the words are of minor importance. Not in this case, though. Think of the importance of Paul’s parenthetical remark. If Paul is addressing his teachings to people who know the Law, what does that imply about people who do not know the Law? Paul’s parenthetical remark is an “oh-by-the-way” remark: “Oh, and by the way, let me point out to you that this information I’m sharing is intended for people who are familiar with the Torah. If you don’t know the Torah, I’m not speaking to you, because I speak to them that know the law.”

We can conclude from Paul’s remark that a person who does not know the Law is very likely to misunderstand Paul, because Paul’s teachings, and indeed all of the New Testament writings, presuppose a familiarity with the contents of the Torah. The writers of the New Testament were writing to people who were very familiar with the Old Testament. This can be seen from the way that the New Testament writers quoted extensively from the Torah, the Prophets, and the Psalms. It is quite obvious that they assumed their readers would be people who knew the Torah.

I have had Christian friends admit to me that they know very, very little about the content of the Old Testament Law. And these are not baby Christians; these are people who have been saved and in church for over 25 years. They admit that they do not know the Law, and yet they think they understand the New Testament, even though Paul and the other New Testament writers were addressing their teachings to them that know the Law.

Knowing the Law is a prerequisite to correctly understanding the New Testament Scriptures. Trying to understand the New Testament without a knowledge of the Old Testament Law is like trying to understand complex algebraic formulas without a knowledge of basic math. It is like trying to build a house without a knowledge of basic carpentry skills. It is like trying to farm a few hundred acres without a knowledge of basic agriculture. You do not need to understand the complexities of rabbinic and Talmudic law, but you do need to “know the [written] law.” You must be familiar with the contents of the Torah and have a basic understanding of it if you want to correctly understand the New Testament.

The Bible consists of four parts: the Law, the Prophets, the Writings, and the New Testament. The first three parts make up the Old Testament; the fourth and final part is the New Testament. Suppose you had written a play consisting of four acts. You give a copy of the script to a friend. Your friend reads Act 4, but pretty much ignores Act 1, Act 2, and Act 3. He just flips through some of the pages of Acts 1 through 3 and skims over a few bits and pieces of the text that catch his attention. He gains only a very scant knowledge of that which is written in Act 1, Act 2, and Act 3. And yet your friend assures you that he understands the play you have written, because he has read the final act of the play. What would you think of your friend’s assumption? What do you suppose the Lord thinks of Christians who claim to understand the New Testament even though they have only a very scant knowledge of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings of the Old Testament?

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Jesus, the Investment Banker

by Lenny Cacchio

The economy has a way of commanding our attention, and it should. While it's tempting to ask what Jesus might do in times like these, it's a tough question to answer without asking more questions. Do you mean what would he do as a carpenter from Nazareth? That would elicit an entirely different answer from what he would do as the King of Kings.

Just for the fun of it, let's try to figure out what Jesus the Investment Banker might do. In fact, Jesus spoke a couple of parables that give us a strong indication of how he would approach a few challenges our economy faces.

In Luke 19 Jesus pictures himself as an investor who has a few bucks (or pounds) to put to work. He chooses ten people, gives them each the same amount of capital to invest, and tells them to do business with it while he's out of town.

Some time later, he calls his ten entrepreneurs together to assess how they have done. The interesting thing about this is that he gave capital to ten entrepreneurs, but in the parable he only interviewed three of them. Two of the three made good returns, and the third did nothing more than turn the original investment back over. Is it possible that the remaining seven lost everything? If so, it's interesting to contemplate why those seven weren't condemned for losing it all while the fellow who simply sat on his capital received a condemnation.

In any case, the investment banker makes a decision. He takes the money away from the guy who has just the one pound that he was given and gives it to the guy who has ten. That sounds callous to our ears today. In fact, the servants questioned the fairness of this: "But Lord! He already has ten pounds!" (Luke 19:25)

That is what Jesus the Investment Banker would do. Instead of subsidizing ventures that are destined to fail, he would direct his capital to the ventures that would be the most productive. That's as it should be. The banker began with ten pounds, and after his entrepreneurs went to work, his wealth had grown to sixteen (10+5+1). If he had tried to subsidize the non-productive enterprises via capital injection taken from the successful, he would eventually erode all his capital on the not so successful entrepreneurs, who would have been better served finding another line of work.

I suspect Ronald Reagan might have had this parable in mind when he said, "The government's view of the economy could be summed up in a few short phrases: If it moves, tax it. If it keeps moving, regulate it. And if it stops moving, subsidize it."

Jesus might have had in mind the proverb from Ecclesiastes: "Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well" (11:6).

So Jesus the Investment Banker would not be doing to the financial system what some are doing today. Instead of injecting capital into failing institutions, he would be investing in those that have a proven ability to succeed. What would Jesus do? Something radically different from what is being done. And that should be no surprise to anyone.

Lenny Cacchio lives in Lees Summit, Missouri, and is very active in his local church. The "Sabbath Morning Companion" is now available as a devotional and journal through the Website of the Church of God, Kansas City (www.kccog.org/literature.htm).

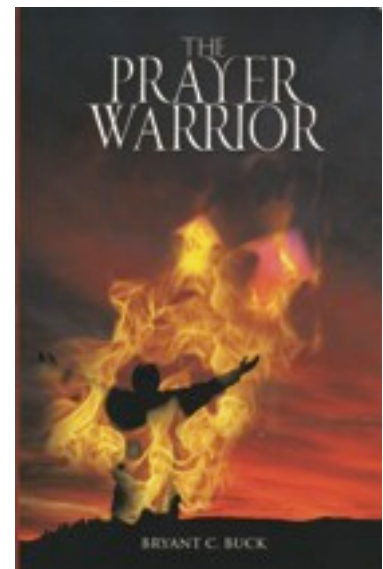
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The Church in the World

NIGERIA: SIX PASTORS KILLED, 40 CHURCHES RAZED IN JOS VIOLENCE

As smoke clears, mayhem ignited by Muslim attacks leaves 25,000 people displaced.

JOS, Nigeria, December 11 (Compass Direct News) — The murderous rioting sparked by Muslim attacks on Christians and their property on Nov. 28-29 left six pastors dead, at least 500 other people killed and 40 churches destroyed, according to church leaders.

More than 25,000 persons have been displaced in the two days of violence, according to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).

What began as outrage over suspected vote fraud in local elections quickly hit the religious fault line that quakes from time to time in this city located between the Islamic north and Christian south, as angry Muslims took aim at Christian sites rather than at political targets. Police and troops reportedly killed about 400 rampaging Muslims in an effort to quell the unrest, and Islamists shot, slashed or stabbed to death most of more than 100 Christians.

Among Christians killed was Joseph Yari of the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA), Angwan Clinic, Tudun-Wada in Jos. On Nov. 28, his wife Mary Yari told Compass, he had returned from his workplace along Ibrahim Taiwo Road saying he was going to a Baptist church that Muslims were setting on fire.

The Rev. Emmanuel Kyari, pastor of Christ Baptist Church, Tudun-Wada, told Compass that Joseph Yari died helping other Christians who repelled Muslim fanatics bent on burning down his church building.

"Yari was standing beside my wife when he was shot by Muslims," Rev. Kyari said. "In addition to Yari who was killed, there were also three other Christians who were shot, and two died instantly."

Pre-Meditated Violence?

Rioting erupted in Jos in the wee hours of Nov. 28 while results of local council elections held the previous day were still being awaited. In the Nov. 27 elections, according to reports, Muslims in Jos North who suspected vote fraud – specifically, the late arrival of election materials to polling sites – raised a lament, and by 1 a.m. on Nov. 28 Muslim youth had begun burning tires, schools and churches.

The killing of non-Muslims followed in the early morning. Muslims began attacking Christians in areas such as Nasarawa Gwong, Congo-Russia, Rikkos, Ali Kazaure, Bauchi Road, Dutse Uku, Ungwar Rimi, and Tudun-Wada. Commands to defy authorities and join the "jihad" blared from a mosque loudspeaker in the Dilimi area, according to advocacy group Christian Solidarity Worldwide, including instructions to ignore a night-time curfew and attack anew.

Authorities' efforts to halt the rampage, including a Muslim assault on a police barracks, accounted for the estimated 400 corpses reportedly deposited in a key mosque, according to CSW, citing security sources.

At the end of two days, hundreds of persons from both sides of the religious divide were killed, with others injured and hospitalized at Jos University Teaching Hospital, ECWA Evangel Hospital, OLA Hospital and Plateau State Specialist Hospital.

"We strongly feel that it was not political but a pre-meditated act under the guise of elections," Kaigama said.



Joseph Yari (Compass Direct)

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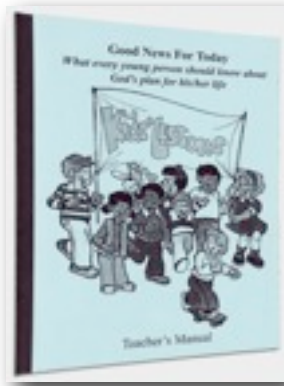
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By Marjorie Gray
Illustrations by Dave Fulwiler

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Prayer Request

Dr. Terril Littrell, a regular contributor to *The Sabbath Sentinel*, is requesting prayer for his cancer. Here are his words from a recent e-mail he sent to us:

"Would you please make an appeal for prayer for me in the Sabbath Sentinel? Besides being a diabetic and my resistance to invasion is low, I am now fighting cancer. I have six months of chemo treatments to receive beginning in March."

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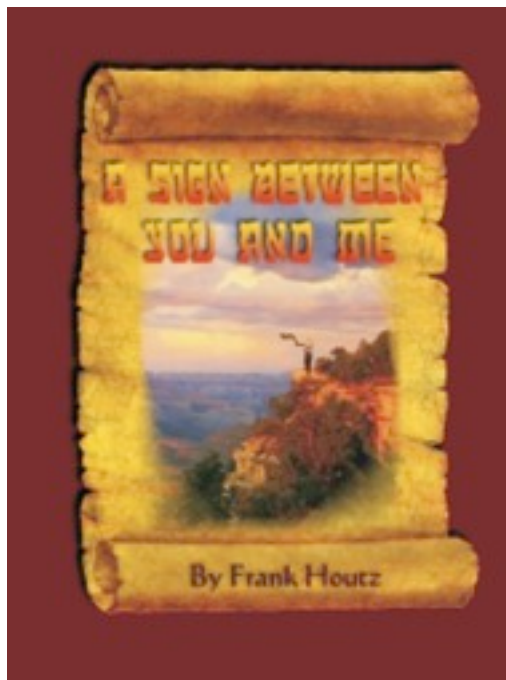
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