

THE Sabbath Sentinel

May–June 2006



Graduation: Are young Christians prepared to face the world?

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

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

The Sabbath Sentinel

May–June 2006 Volume 58, No. 3 Issue 519

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Our Cover: “...always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.... (1 Peter 3:15). Photo by iStockPhoto at www.istockphoto.com.

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Address Service Requested



An Afternoon with Rich and Shirley Nickels

My wife, Patti, and I recently had the opportunity to spend a Sabbath afternoon with Rich and Shirley Nickels at the Southwest Medical Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma, one of the Cancer Treatment Centers of America.

When we left our home near Wichita, Kansas, we really expected to encounter a somber and depressing scene when we met up with Rich and Shirley in their Tulsa hospital room. Such was not the case. In fact, by the end of the day, we were very uplifted by the Nickels' trust in God and their overall up-beat, positive approach to this entire matter. Rich in particular was lively and enthusiastic in spite of all he has been through. After a couple of days of nausea due to radiation treatment, he felt good enough to go out with us to his favorite place to eat, Cracker Barrel.

I don't want in any way to minimize the struggle that faces the Nickels. The diagnosis is very serious, in fact, terminal, but Rich and Shirley's faith is strong, and Rich is being treated in one of the best cancer treatment centers in America. The facility uses natural treatments as well as the latest in modern medical knowledge. And, it is not just the patients and their families that pray at the hospital. The doctors routinely get together for prayer to seek God's intervention for their patients. If one has to go through this, I cannot think of a better place to do it. Let's all keep praying that our Father will show a special kindness to Rich and heal him. "By his stripes, we are healed."

The following notice regarding Rich's health appeared in *The Journal*.

—Ken Ryland

Richard Nickels Diagnosed with Cancer, Giving & Sharing Bookstore Closed

GILLETTE, Wyoming — Richard Nickels, 58, has been diagnosed with cancer and given six to nine months to live. The Victor Kubik Web site reports that the disease specifically is adrenal cancer which has spread to other parts of the body.

Richard founded the popular Giving & Sharing (G & S) bookstore in 1978. Bookstore operations have



been indefinitely stopped to give Rich time to battle and receive treatment for his illness.

In a March 22nd announcement posted on the Bible Sabbath Association Web site, office manager Shirley (Richard's wife) stated:

"My husband Richard Nickels has been diagnosed with cancer. They say he has 6 to 9 months to live, but we are going to Cancer Treatment Centers of America because they have had some wonderful results. We believe that God will heal him if it is his will."

Although the bookstore has been closed, plans are to continue updating the Giving & Sharing Web site and to keep publishing the online newsletter *Church of God News*.

Cards and letters can be sent to:

Richard/Shirley Nickels, 3316 Alberta Drive,
Gillette, WY 82718, USA

Your prayers for Richard's healing would be most appreciated.

Following the Footsteps of our Father Abraham

by Daniel Botkin



"Now Yahweh had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee" (Gen. 12:1).

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb. 11:8).

"Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him" (Isa. 51:2)

Abraham was called to leave his country, his kindred, and his father's house, and go to a place which was foreign to him. Regardless of physical genealogy, all those who believe in Yeshua HaMashiach (Jesus the Christ) are counted as Abraham's seed. "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed" (Gal. 3:29). What Abraham was called to do in a physical, geographical sense, we are called to do in a spiritual sense, because we are children of Abraham and we must follow in his footsteps. If you believe in the Messiah who came from Abraham's seed, you are also called by God to "Get thee out."

The phrase translated "Get thee out" in Genesis 12:1 consists of two Hebrew words which are both spelled with the same two letters, but pronounced differently because of different vowel marks: לך לך, *lech I'cha*. The first לך, *lech*, is the masculine singular second person ("you") imperative (command) form of the verb "go." The second לך, *I'cha*, literally means "to you" (spoken to a male). The I'- prefix (-ל) means "to" and the -cha suffix (-ך) is used for the objective "you" when referring to a male as the object of a preposition.

Bible translators have rendered *lech I'cha* in a variety of ways: "Get thee out" (KJV), "Go forth" (NASB), "Leave... and go" (NIV). The Stone Tanach's "Go for yourself" is the closest I have seen to a literal translation. (The I'- prefix sometimes means "for," but more often means "to.") I am not aware of any English translation that translates it literally as "Go to you" or "Go to yourself." Such a statement does not make sense in English. However, if you consider what happens to "you" when you leave your old life behind in order to follow the Messiah, then "going to yourself" takes on meaning. You leave the old "you," your old self, and go to a new life in the place where the Lord leads you in that place in the Spirit, you



"find yourself," i.e., the new self that God is calling you to become. "Go to yourself" does not sound strange or foreign to a man who has experienced a radical transformation and has indeed "gone to [find] himself." Richard Wurmbrand, in his book *Victorious Faith* (Harper & Row, 1974, page 17f), describes his vision of the final judgment of the wicked, who did not "go to themselves":

God will sit on a white throne, behind Him a curtain, before Him in one line those who have to be judged. God will lift His right hand, and at this sign beings of unspeakable splendour, radiant in all colours, will appear from behind the curtain and will stand before each of those to be judged. Then the wicked will ask God, "Who is this beautiful being before me?" And God will answer, "This is you as you would have become if you had believed in Jesus." Then, in despair over what they have lost, the wicked will flee to hell, unable to endure the picture of what they could have become.

Abraham's journey from Ur to Canaan transformed his life and altered the course of history. The Lord calls us to go from our Ur to our Canaan, and to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to the world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your

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***Wollemia Nobilis*: A Living Fossil and Evolutionary Enigma**

by Andrew A. Snelling, Ph.D.

(Impact #394)

Who would have thought that, at the close of the twentieth century, only 125 miles from the center of a sprawling metropolis of more than four million people, scientists would find a previously unknown tree in a rugged wilderness area?

When discovered in August 1994, the Wollemi pine was hailed as the “botanical find of the century,” like “finding a small dinosaur still alive on earth.” It was found by New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service ranger David Noble during a weekend bushwalk into a remote 500-600 meter deep narrow sandstone canyon in the rugged and densely forested Wollemi National Park, only 200 kilometers (125 miles) northwest of downtown Sydney, Australia (Figure 1). Thus this strange tree from the “ancient,” past a new genus, was formally named *Wollemia nobilis* (Figure 2).

Features of the Trees

In the first grove discovered there were only 40 trees in a 5,000 square meter area—23 adults, 16 juveniles, and the largest, a fallen tree 40 meters long with a girth of three meters. Botanists were at first puzzled by the strange features of this pine, a unique member of the “monkey puzzle tree” family Araucariaceae. Conifers have dark green foliage, but the Wollemi pine has bright lime green fern-like leaves on younger foliage, varying to a yellow-olive green on mature trees. The mature, dense, waxy foliage is arranged in rows of four. The tree trunks have a distinct knobby, spongy, cork-like bark that makes them look like they are coated with bubbly brown chocolate.

Prior to this discovery, all living Araucariaceae belonged to two genera: *Agathis*, the Kauri pines, confined to rainforests in northeast Queensland (Australia) and elsewhere; and *Araucaria*, the Norfolk Island, Bunya and Hoop pines found along Australia’s east coast and elsewhere. The Wollemi pine has some characteristics of both these genera, but it belongs to neither. Mature trees are between 27 and 35 meters high. Their structure is complex, with successive whorls of primary branches emerging from the trunks. The upper branches are tipped with bright green female



cones and brown cylindrical male cones, making the trees bisexual.

Figure 1. Location map.

Since the initial discovery, another grove of 17 trees has been found at an even more secluded location about a kilometer upstream from the first, and a third grove of just three adult trees (the tallest only 15 meters high) around 40 meters up a rock wall in a 150 meter deep slot canyon close to the other two groves, but in a different sub-catchment. Thus, the Wollemi pine seems highly specialized in a particular ecological niche, because these surviving trees are only found in deep gorges with similar soils, light regimes, and creeks running in the same direction.

Genetic Fingerprinting

These surviving trees appear to have been isolated for a very long time, because the oldest has been estimated at more than 1000 years old. A research team from the Australian National University, Canberra, analyzed genetic markers in eight adult trees from the first grove and four from the second. They compared be-

tween 30 and 40 enzyme-coding sites on the genomes of each of these 12 samples and found no variation at all. The team then used a version of DNA fingerprinting which compares thousands of points on the genome, but again absolutely no genetic variation was found. These pines have thus been a small population isolated for thousands of years, and/or the trees in these two groves are clones of one another, having been propagated by coppicing. Indeed, at one of the sites a group of 160 stems appears to be part of a single individual.

The third grove of trees being in a different sub-catchment means that its establishment could not have been the result of a seed being washed downstream. Preliminary DNA fingerprinting indicates that these three trees may have some genetic variation. They therefore are most likely a remnant of a much bigger forest of pines.

A "Living Fossil"

So where did these few, isolated Wollemi pines come from? The fossil record contains no Wollemi pines. The closest match yet found is between Wollemi pollen and the fossilized pollen *Dilwynites*, the last known occurrence of which is in sediment layers "dated" at two million years old. From then on, the record is silent. It was thus assumed the genus to which this pollen belonged had become extinct. However, the discovery of the living, apparently related Wollemi pines makes them a living fossil.



Figure 2. A living Wollemi pine (*Wollemia nobilis*).

The foliage of the Wollemi pine is virtually identical to that of one of its supposed fossil ancestors, the late Jurassic (150 million year old) *Agathis jurassica* (figure 3). This obvious relationship explains the designation of the Wollemi pine as a "tree from the Dinosaur Age," a "living fossil" that has been "missing for 150 million years." To evolutionary botanists the origin of

the Wollemi pine remains an evolutionary enigma. How could this tree go missing for 150 million years when its relative sits fossilized less than 100 kilometers (62 miles) away from the living survivors?

Solving the Puzzle

The fossilized *Agathis jurassica* is found in the Talbragar Fish Bed, which outcrops less than 100 km away from the living Wollemi pines (Figure 1). In this late Jurassic shale lens with these and other plant remains are beautifully preserved fossil fish (Figure 3), testimony to the watery destruction responsible for this fossil graveyard. This shale belongs to the strata of the Great Artesian Basin, a vast sedimentary basin which covers 1.8 million square kilometers or about a quarter of the Australian continent (Figure 1 inset) and which thus was once covered by water.

The canyons in which the Wollemi pines are found were eroded into Triassic sandstones of the Sydney Basin, which was once a southeasterly extension of the Great Artesian Basin. However, the Sydney Basin was cut off from Great Artesian Basin by the Cretaceous, when earth movements began to uplift the Great Dividing Range (the continental divide along the western edge of the Sydney Basin) and the Blue Mountains Plateau (Figure 1). It was not until the late Tertiary that the canyons, now home to the Wollemi pines, were rapidly eroded into the Blue Mountains Plateau. So at least 130 million years separates the burial of *Agathis jurassica* and the erosion of the canyons in which the Wollemi pines became established. No wonder this living fossil's survival is a mystery to evolutionists.

However, the puzzle is easily solved when the millions-of-years interpretation of these strata is jettisoned and the drastically reduced timescale of the recent, global, year-long Genesis Flood is adopted. The Jurassic Talbragar Fish Bed would have been rapidly deposited late in the Flood event, burying parts of *Agathis jurassica* trees that had floated for months on the Flood waters. As the Flood ended, earth movements rapidly uplifted the mountains, trapping some of the retreating Flood waters behind them to the west. Cuttings and/or seeds of *Wollemia nobilis* were still floating on those leftover Flood waters. The Blue Mountains Plateau also acted like a natural dam wall to hold back those waters. However, due to post-Flood rains, this "dam wall" was eventually "overtopped" and breached at knickpoints, the released torrent of water catastrophically gouging out the many canyon systems now deeply incised into the Blue Mountains Plateau. As the waters drained away some of the cuttings and/or seeds of *W. nobilis* were left behind, buried in the sediments deposited as soil in the canyons, where the Wollemi pines then grew and survive today. Indeed, it is already well known that Wollemi pines have the capacity to

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The People of God Must Preserve the Blessings of God

by Kenneth Ryland

“[T]he right to freedom being the gift of God Almighty, it is not in the power of Man to alienate this gift, and voluntarily become a slave.” —John Adams

A friend and I were talking at church about the great blessing for the people of God that is the United States of America. We have the freedom to assemble as we wish with whomever we wish. We can study the Bible without interference. We have the freedom to travel from place to place to preach the gospel, and we have the incredible blessing of wealth to carry the message of Christ beyond our borders to the farthest reaches of this earth. What more could any Christian ask in this world? I truly believe that if the USA did not exist, God would find a nation to bless with freedom and wealth in order to carry his message of salvation to the entire world.

Given that the Great Creator of the universe has laid in our laps all of these blessings, why do we insist on placing the care of these blessings in the hands of godless men? We are loathe to take up the challenge to govern, so we elect leaders who constantly seek to raise our taxes, restrict our movements, and limit our God-given freedoms. Many Christians believe that government is a tool of the devil—a Babylon that Christians should escape from. There is no doubt that the blessings of wealth and freedom in the hands of the ungodly are often used to serve Babylon. So, why are we content to allow such people to hold public office?

Early in the history of our nation public office holders were required to confess fealty to Jesus Christ; otherwise, they were not considered fit to hold office. Were not our ancestors much wiser than we? When the burden of governance overwhelmed Moses, he was advised to seek out upright and godly men to conduct the affairs of civil government. Our founders used the same criteria as Moses in selecting office holders at all levels of government. Why have we as modern Christians abandoned our God-given role as godly civil servants? Is it just “too much bother?”

I think we are much too quick to equate Christian participation in civil government with devil worship. The apostle Paul made it clear that civil authorities are ministers of God. Does it not make sense, especially since we have the freedom to do so, not to vote godly men and women into public office. The responsibilities of civil leaders are the same as they were in the time of Moses: “For the rulers are not a terror to good works,

but to the bad. And do you desire to be not afraid of the authority? Do the good, and you shall have praise from it. For it is a servant of God to you for good. For if you practice evil, be afraid, for it does not bear the sword in vain; for it is a servant of God, a revenger for wrath on him who does evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience’ sake” (Romans 13:3-5).

I can hear many say that there is too much corruption in politics, too much dirt, and that Christians should avoid any kind of association with the corrupt practices of worldly politics. My answer to that kind of thinking is that the Christian is supposed to be salt and light in this world. We can never win souls to Christ by fleeing the arenas of this world in which the light of Christ is most needed. Dark areas need to be filled with light. Never in the history of this world has there ever been such an opportunity to bring the Spirit of Christ to bear on the culture around us as we have in the United States and other Western democratic states. The whole idea of political freedom as we know it was born in the womb of the Protestant Reformation. In other words, it was a religious idea that was extended to all people (religious or not) that governs us. An “unalienable” right is not a right defined by government, but one birthed in the notion that each individual must be free to give an account of his life to his Creator. It is a right that transcends government. It derives from the same idea that governments should impose no taxes on churches. Our founders believed that government at any level should have no such power over the people of God and their churches. We answer to God, not government, and it is in that same vein that we, the people of God, should infuse government with moral and spiritual character.

We are, of course, free to withdraw our influence from the political arena, but we do so to our own peril and to that of the Church. The blessings we enjoy are gifts from our Creator for the purpose of performing His work so long as we have life and breath. We should be careful not to squander such a precious gift on foolish and godless politicians. □

Cause & Effect

by Brian Knowles



Life, as it daily unfolds on this planet, is largely a matter of cause & effect. Things don't just happen – they happen for reasons. We don't always know the reasons, but if we probe deeply enough, we may discover at least some of them. My wife, for example, suffers from migraine headaches (as do some 23 million other Americans). She knows some of the reasons why she gets these devastating headaches – food allergies for example – but she doesn't yet know the main reason. She can reduce the number of headaches she gets by avoiding the offending foods, but she cannot eradicate them entirely, because there is some deeper cause of which she is as yet unaware.

For many years, I have been subject to asthmatic attacks. I know virtually all of the triggers for these attacks, so, for the most part I am able to avoid them. There are some things – like smog and pollen – that I can't realistically avoid, so when those are bad, I experience symptoms. I do what I can to control those symptoms with patent medicines and efforts to eat "clean" and detoxify my body. (Yes, I realize that the use of patent medicines and detoxification are mutually exclusive ideas.) I stay away from certain kinds of dogs, all cats and horses, and, where possible, dust.

These are minor examples of cause & effect. The condition of the whole world is the cumulative result of a myriad of cause & effect factors, many of which we don't fully understand, some of which we do, and others about which we are in denial. Some of the causes of present day problems were set in motion centuries – perhaps millennia – ago. Like ripples in a lake, they spread out until they finally hit the shore.

When we, as Christians, seek to analyze these cause & effect factors, we are sometimes guilty of gross oversimplification. In many cases, causes are multiple and complex.

Everything bad that happens is not simply the result of "sin." Sometimes it's a lack of expertise or knowledge on the part of someone who's causing something. Often it is because we live in a world where things happen for geological or climactic reasons. It can be misguided social policies. Bad things often happen because of the application of bad ideas, bad ideologies, and bad doctrines.

Looking at Africa

Consider the continent of Africa. Of all continents, it is the one that is the repository of the most concentrated human misery of our time. It is a place of drought, famine, genocide, disease epidemics including AIDS, millions of orphaned children, corrupt dictators, civil wars, pagan religions, and sickness of every variety. At the heart of this continental darkness is political corruption. That, coupled with militant religion, explains much of the misery – but by no means all of it.

More than fifty years after European Colonial powers left Africa, the continent is worse off than when they were present. If you want to read all about it, read Martin Meredith's excellent book: *The Fate of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*. The point here is not enumerate the multiple causes of Africa's misery, but to say that it is presumptuous of Christian missionaries to go into this great darkness with simplistic solutions to nightmarish problems. How do you quickly solve a problem of political corruption at virtually all levels of government? How do you address the moral issues that are behind the AIDS epidemic? How do you end religious persecution by another religion whose theology justifies slavery, murder and genocide?

At best, Christians can only offer Christian solutions one person at a time. Even here, within the established Church, we don't always see Christians living consistent with their avowed principles. The divorce rate, for example, among us Christians is higher than it is in the rest of society. In some churches, alcoholism is as big a problem as it is outside of them. The Church has not demonstrated its ability to solve human problems on any significant scale. Like allopathic doctors, we tend to treat symptoms instead of curing diseases. We feed people who are starving, but we don't teach them how to feed themselves, or to solve the problems with their present food supply – *i.e.* political corruption.

Bite-sized Pieces

Furthermore, the problems of the world are simply too big for any given denomination to address com-

prehensively. At best, we can take on the world's problems in bite-sized pieces. The Christian Church cannot solve the problem that is Africa. Nor can any given political ideology. A great number of factors must come into play simultaneously before anything will change: education; political will; morals & ethics; objective scientific analysis of cause & effect; money; outside help; vision; science and technology; philosophical unity; understanding; tolerance for difference; political and religious freedom; democracy, etc., etc. It isn't all about "sin."

Sin is a factor, in fact it's a major one; but it isn't the only one. There are economic factors; geographic constraints; the distribution of national resources; weather patterns; political realities; tribal considerations and many other issues in play here.

The same is true with the rest of the world. The Church cannot effectively address the totality of human problems. It can only address the spiritual ones, and even then with limited success. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "...you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8-10).

All of us participated in, and contributed to, the spiritual darkness that characterizes human society. Now, as Christians, we have moved out of the realm of darkness into the kingdom of light. Despite this, some of the darkness, like tendrils of fog, still clings to us. We are people in transition. We are not fully light, though we have left behind, for the most part, the darkness. We are still finding out what pleases the Lord. We cannot claim to know it all.

There's a great bumper sticker that says it all: "Christians are not perfect, just forgiven." We cannot afford to go stomping out into the world swaddled in noxious clouds of self-righteousness, claiming to know all the answers. The fact that we cannot resolve our own doctrinal problems, our own leadership problems, our own health and marital problems, our problems with teenagers and adult children, our relationship difficulties, and our financial issues, ought to be humbling in the extreme. Who are we to tell the world how to do it right?

If you'll forgive me for using yet another cliché, we ought to be able to look into the darkness we've left behind and say, "There, but for the grace of God, go I." That's really all that stands between us and the world: the grace of God.

We can seek to help those whom God plants in front of our faces – but only to the degree that we have found out how to help ourselves in the areas where they need

help. I can teach people how to paint pictures because I have learned how to do it myself. I can teach them to write because I have written for more than 35 years. I can show them how to overcome what I have overcome, and teach them what I have come to understand. I can pray for them, love them, be kind to them and seek to meet them at their points of genuine need. I can strive to set an example of moral and ethical conduct. Beyond all that, there's not much I can do, or that the Church can do.

Think about this sobering thought: If you are a Christian, then non-believers encounter and experience Christ through you. With what impression are they left? To what extent is Christ able to live in, and manifest himself, through you? When I think about that, I am sobered and humbled – even embarrassed. I need to learn better how to personify the effects of the Holy Spirit's causes.

"Out of the Box" is a regular feature of the Association for Christian Development Web site (www.godward.org). Brian Knowles is an artist and writer.

Attendance at Church in Baghdad Reaches 900 as Iraqis Seek Solace

Attendance is booming at Rev. Andrew White's church in Baghdad as Iraqi Christians seek solace in religion to cope with a life of car bombings, kidnappings and deprivation. White, a 41-year-old British Anglican priest, travels to Baghdad monthly to minister to Protestants from the West and Iraqi Assyrian Christians who must be bused into the protected Green Zone to hear White preach, after al-Qaeda put a price on his head.

During the past three years the number of Iraqis attending his services has grown to about 900. "People turn to religion when they are desperate," he said. White began visiting Iraq regularly in 1998 and has witnessed profound changes since then. Under Saddam Hussein he found a more secular society where tensions between religious groups seemed nonexistent. Later he learned the divisions were there — Iraqis were just afraid to speak frankly. (*Religion Today*)

Capitol Hill Prayer Partners e-mail newsletter, April 25, 2006.

What Do We Need in a Church?

by Dan Burrell

I recently read an article by a local religion reporter who noted that “the most heartfelt e-mails [he] receives come from folks searching for a faith home.” I would note that he writes for a paper located in a city with some seven hundred houses of worship. Several quotes from that article and comments I’ve heard or read over the years triggered some thoughts for me on what people “want” from a church.

As a pastor, I am intrigued by the kinds of questions people ask me when considering joining our church. Let me give you a sample:

“What programs do you have for children?”

“Are you part of a denominational association?”

“What style of music do you use in your services?”

“How long is your typical sermon?”

“What sort of fellowship groups do you provide?”

The local religion reporter’s article had some interesting comments as well:

One lady said: “We do not want a church that is about ‘absolutes’ and being ‘saved,’ nor are we looking for a charismatic or fundamentalist church. We would like a Christian church that offers contemporary services, social gatherings and family programming.”

One e-mailer cited in the article suggested that “Someone put out a church guide listing everything anyone would ever want to know about a congregation, from music to ministries to dress code.” The e-mailer said that if she had had such a guide on a recent Sunday morning, “I wouldn’t have sat in a church parking lot noting that the congregation wasn’t carrying in their Bibles — a wasted Sunday for me and a waste of time for them contacting me....”

Many pastors experience additional feedback relating to the temperature of the auditorium, the convenience of parking, the volume of the music, and the rapidity with which hospital visits are made. But all of it seems to miss the key points. What is most important?

Not one of these individuals asked what I would consider to be a vital question: What does this church

use for its standard of truth? What is the basis for its faith? Does the pastor preach from Scripture or his own opinions? Will I be spiritually fed at this church? Does this church have an area in which I could be a blessing or encouragement?

I pose this question: Do we really go to church for activities and events, convenience and comfort, to have our egos stroked and our desires met? Do we never consider that the church might need us? What part should each of us play in the health, growth, and ministry of the church?

What if people found a church and joined it with an attitude that says, “Not every sermon must be for me, not every song must be ‘my style,’ not every activity has to be one that I would join.” What if instead they asked, “Where can I serve?” “Whom can I assist?” “Where could my spiritual gifts be best put to use?”

Churches ought to be more like families than amusement parks. Everyone should join in for the good of the family, with each member realizing that it can’t always be “about me.” Some churches are struggling, and an infusion of committed, positive people who are more interested in giving than in taking could spark them to a reformation. Some churches have a dearth of teachers or musicians. The addition of someone with a talent in those areas could be a blessing to the church and the pastor. So not everyone is carrying their Bible to church? How about setting the example? How about using your influence to encourage the pastor to deliver messages that challenge the people to not only bring but use their Bibles?

The world has enough self-centered critics. No church is perfect, just like no family is perfect. Maybe it’s time we quit asking, “What’s in it for us?” and start asking, “What can I do to serve?” A church shouldn’t be about attire, convenient service schedules, worship styles, or personal preferences. It should be about being a called-out community of believers who are committed to using their God-given gifts for His glory and our good.

Dan Burrell is the pastor of Northside Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C. This article first appeared in EP News Service. Bible Advocate, Oct-Nov 2005.

Churchgoers Live Longer

According to Robert Roy Britt, managing editor of LiveScience at LiveScience.com, one of the things you can do to increase longevity is to go to church. According to a new study among the several factors that contribute to lengthening one's life expectancy is regular church attendance. Factors that add to the length of one's life are regular physical exercise (3.0 to 5.1 years), proven therapeutic regimens (2.1 to 3.7 years), and regular church attendance (1.8 to 3.1 years).

This new study is actually a review of existing studies in the three categories mentioned. The study did not, however, reveal why regular religious practice increases one's life span.

"Religious attendance is not a mode of medical therapy," said study leader Daniel Hall, a resident in general surgery at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and an Episcopal priest. "While this study was not intended for use in clinical decision making, these findings tell us that there is something to examine further.... The significance of this finding may prove to be controversial, but at the very least, it shows that further research into the associations between religion and health might have implications for medical practice."

Hall later speculated in a telephone interview that the social aspect of religion could play a role in the results: "There is something about being knit into the type of community that religious communities embody that has a way of mediating a positive health effect." He further stated that being involved in religion could "then decrease your level of stress in life or increase your ability to cope with stress." One other possibility is that, "Being in a religious community helps you make meaning out of your life."

The findings are detailed in the March-April issue of the *Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine*.

A Proverb to Live by

***"The LORD detests lying lips,
but he delights in men who are truthful."***

(Proverbs 12:22)

Can't we agree with God on this one? Who likes liars? Don't we all want to hear the truth? Even liars want to be told the truth. So why is lying so common if no one likes it and everyone wants to be told the truth? Recent surveys of employers reveal that the typical employee can be caught in at least one lie a week on the job. Does a week go by that you don't lie about something? Clearly, lying is a serious weakness of the human condition and I think most of us are ashamed that we too frequently yield to it.

How different would be our politics, judicial system, commerce, religion, and media if there were no lies—everything said was straightforwardly true. Why, institutions might crumble! Maybe some should, but there would be a most pleasant reformation. The Jim Carrey movie *Liar, Liar* humorously illustrated that truth works best in personal relationships, but if you are a lawyer, it could ruin your practice.

One of the qualities most important to the character of God is that his word is true. He must be trusted. His promises he will keep. The apostle Paul said, "Let God be true, and every man a liar" (Rom 3:4). Trust is built upon truth and lying destroys trust and causes a world of pain and misery. It isn't easy to tell the truth when a lie might cover a mistake and protect your pride.

As one moves Godward through repentance and character development, lying, like other sins, is replaced with truth and honesty. God is calling us to become like Him and like his Son for in the truthful he delights.

—Ken Westby

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe is a favorite of our family. I have read all of the C.S. Lewis series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, out loud to our children over the years. We have read some of the stories many times. When the movie came out, I was hesitant to see it, as often the character of a book is compromised by the "Silver Screen." However, this movie adaptation is wonderfully true to the story, and I heartily recommend it to everyone.

For those of you unfamiliar with C.S. Lewis, and his *Chronicles of Narnia*, let me share some background.

C.S. Lewis was a Christian writer. His *Chronicles of Narnia*, and especially *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, are allegories of Christianity. The children in the story, are like all of us. The lion, known as Aslan, represents Christ. He is always near, although often unseen. He is the ruler of all, but is engaged in a long, fierce battle with the evil witch, who personifies the devil and the evil in the world. She often appears to be sweet, but is treacherous and sly; she is seemingly kind, offering temptations that are difficult to resist. Once taken, the temptations turn into bondage and grief.

Aslan sends his representatives to rescue those in bondage. Even though there is rescue, there is a price to pay, and Aslan offers his own life as payment, just as our Lord and Christ offered himself for our rescue from sin and death.

The story is an allegory. There are many references to Christ, evil, and the constant battle we all fight each day with Satan. The story is also about the redemption of a child, even when the child has been selfish and hurtful to others. Just like Satan, the witch deals in sweet temptations to lure the selfish away from what is right. Every day each of us has to deal with those same alluring temptations that lead us astray and hurt others. Yet, each day our Lord and Savior patiently and lovingly forgives us when, from the depths of our sorrow, we plead for his forgiveness.

It is difficult to teach our children the truths of Christianity. It is hard to keep them on the path of righteousness because as hard as we work, Satan is working harder and ceaselessly. I have used these stories of the *Chronicles of Narnia* to point out the truths of Christ to our children. The books were an interesting and entertaining way to teach these truths. It was a time we could enjoy reading, enjoy one another, and enjoy learning about the Lord.

The movie can also teach children in the same way. *The The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* is a great story full of wonderful truth about our wonderful Lord. Not often do we see anything worthwhile come out of Hollywood, but this movie is an exception to the rule.

—Patti Ryland

Patti Ryland is a home-schooling mom and a teacher with over 30 years in the classroom.

Where God Dwells

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? Ps. 8:3, 4.

Did you ever look up at the sky on a clear night and wonder how big the universe is and how powerful God must be to govern the stars so that “not one faileth” (Isa. 40:26)? David and Isaiah did. And under inspiration Job declared: “By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent. Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand?” (Job 26:13, 14).

Of the more than 6,000 stellar objects that can be seen with the naked eye, all except one belong to our Milky Way system. Our system, or galaxy, is a huge pinwheel-like aggregation of suns and gas about 100,000 light-years across. This means that light, traveling at the enormous speed of 186,000 miles per second, would take about 100,000 years to cross it. What an awesome distance! But as men have devised better and better instruments for looking out beyond our own galaxy, they have been stunned by the incredible vastness of the universe. Space seems to be filled with as many as 100 billion island universes, all of which appear to be flying outward at fantastic speeds, and the farther out, the greater the speeds. Some of the most distant celestial objects are estimated to be traveling at 91 percent of the speed of light!

The Great Nebula of Andromeda, the only object outside our galaxy visible to the naked eye in the Northern Hemisphere, is a mere 2 million light-years away—relatively near compared with some galaxies. Countless other systems lie at vastly greater distances. Some stellar objects called quasars, imperceptible to the naked eye, shine with the brightness of ten trillion suns and are up to ten billion light-years away!

Is there anything beyond? Nobody knows. Perhaps future discoveries will reveal that there are other universes just as vast as our own. But whatever is discovered, two things are certain: the universe is immensely vast, and our God who rules it is incomprehensibly powerful and wise. But the most astounding fact of all is that this great God is not only mindful of His universe but is personally concerned with erring mortals. Isaiah 57:15 says: “Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

What a thought that He who holds the stars in position holds you individually in His keeping!

Donald Ernest Mansell, New Every Morning, p. 25. Review and Herald Publishing Association, Copyright 1981.

Moral Equivalency?

Tod Robberson of the Dallas Morning News made an interesting leap of logic recently that illustrates in part the moral confusion of our times. Writes Mr. Robberson, “In the past three months, Muslims around the world have rampaged against cartoons in a Danish newspaper deemed to be mocking Islam, and an Afghan (sic) faced the death sentence for converting to Christianity. Meanwhile, two popular Christian preachers in the U.S. stoked the flames by labeling Islam as an evil or violent religion.”

Mr. Robberson goes on to characterize both the Christian and Muslim subjects of his opening paragraph as extremists. Not knowing precisely who the two Christian are, let’s take a look at the interesting comparison he attempts to make, leaving out the potential personalities involved.

If I understand the logic correctly, the reasoning goes something like this:

1. One side is rampaging in the streets, burning and pillaging, and rejoicing at the thought of killing the other.
2. The other side says the actions of those in the street are evil.
3. Therefore, both sides are extreme.

Call me extreme too, if you wish, when I call his logic a head-scratcher. If #1 and #2 seem morally equivalent, then our values are indeed in crisis, and we have no basis for making rational moral judgments. Is there a moral equivalency between Muslim extremists and conservative Christians? Indeed, are all extremists and conservatives brothers in different clothing, as one man proclaimed to me after the 2004 elections? (“I see no difference between the Taliban and the people who won this last election”).

If Americans become convinced that they are on no firmer moral ground than their Muslim antagonists, then there is no moral rationale, and perhaps no moral will, to protect and preserve American interests and indeed even the American way of life.

I find it difficult to believe that the American people in general would accept such assertions. While I can appreciate any attempt at even-handedness, there does come a time when decent people need to call things as they are. A nation that doubts its values and heritage is a greater danger to itself than a confident one, and so it is with any group or movement, including Christianity.

More to the point, Christians have no obligation to accept upon themselves the label of extremist when they call sin for what it is.

— *Lenny Cacchio*

Lenny Cacchio lives in Lees Summit, Missouri, and is very active in the Truckers’ Bible Study in the Kansas City, Missouri, area.

On Being Thankful

by Julia Benson

Author's note: I read the following story to my church group one Sabbath. When I got to the part about what I was thankful for, I stepped away from the podium and handed each church member a slip of paper with a sentence or two about why I was thankful for that person. The act of being thankful for my church family was not only uplifting to me, but it also meant a lot to my friends to receive a personalized note telling them how much they meant to me.

Anybody who has children or grandchildren has probably heard of Veggie Tales. Madame Blueberry is a *Veggie Tales* character who is never satisfied, obsessed with the idea that having more stuff is going to make her happy.

I can't tell you how many pity parties I've had for myself because I simply want more stuff. I want some new furniture. I would really like a new bedroom set. I'd like to get new siding and a roof for my home. My car runs pretty good, but the peeling paint and lack of shiny new hubcaps sort of embarrasses me, plus, it makes a strange knocking sound. I'd like to be able to set my heat above 70° just for the fun of it. Central air would be nice during the summer. A new wardrobe would be helpful.

Oh, oh. I've just about talked myself into another pity party. And that is what Madame Blueberry does, great big blueberry tears and all. I'm sure all of us can identify with her. But Madame Blueberry learns, after she has accumulated a whole lot of stuff from the Stuff-Mart, that "being greedy makes you grumpy, but a thankful heart is a happy heart."

Larry the cucumber and Bob the tomato explain that Proverbs 15:27 says, "A greedy man brings trouble to his family, but he who hates bribes will live." I have to tell you, it's easy to succumb to those bribes of Satan when he says I should have everything I have ever wanted.

So, enough with the pity party. These are the things I am thankful for.

Pastor David and his wife Anita are very welcoming to all who attend church. It really meant a lot to me to spend time in Bible study with Jan and learn from her. Jan's husband Larry is friendly and his smile warms up the entire church. Deb is helpful with my daughter Kiersten and I know that Kiersten loves her dearly. Ray and Inda are both solid and stable and I really look up to them both. Clayton and Carolyn are probably the most positive and caring people I have ever met. Gary and his wife Eteri's always have warm smiles and an abundance of hugs and handshakes when they come to church. Cliff so generously shares his knowledge and ideas with us all. Gene is truly a wonderful person. He helps me so much with Kiersten and I know he loves her as she was his own grandchild. Bob and Lerena are an inspiration by sharing their love of the Lord with us. Julie is a burst of energy full of love for Christ and her husband Mike always has a warm smile for everyone. It is so wonderful that Eric and Holly and their children Stephanie and Jerod have started attending our church.

This wonderful, loving group of people is what I'm thankful for. How about you?

Julia Benson is a freelance writer who lives in a small town in northeast Iowa. A former school teacher, Julia now works part-time at a local newspaper. Julia has a husband and a three-year-old daughter. She attends an Adventist church in Wisconsin.

THE REAL “ARK MYSTERY”

by Doug Ward, Ph. D.



On March 3, 2001, a special called “Biblical Mysteries: The Ark of the Covenant” was broadcast by the NBC television network in the United States. I decided to tune in, partly because we had just been discussing the instructions for the construction of the ark (Exodus 25) in our family Bible study. I was also curious to see how the program would handle the various speculations about the ark’s current whereabouts.

The television special turned out to be rather disappointing. It concentrated largely on the speculations of a man named Michael S. Sanders (see: www.biblemysteries.com). Sanders believes that the ark was taken by the Egyptian Pharaoh Shishak, who attacked the kingdom of Judah during the reign of Solomon’s son Rehoboam and “carried off the treasures of the temple of the Lord and the treasures of the royal palace” (2Ch 12:9). Strangely, the program made no mention of the strong evidence against this theory. In particular, 2Ch 35:3 indicates that the ark was still in the possession of the Jews a few hundred years later, during the reign of King Josiah.¹

People have long been intrigued by the question of where the ark of the covenant might be located. The “Biblical Mysteries” special, Graham Hancock’s book *The Sign and the Seal*, and the movie “Raiders of the Lost Ark” are all indicators of our continuing fascination with the ark. The recovery of the gold-covered ark, which contained the stone tablets of God’s covenant with Israel (Ex 25:21; 40:20; Heb. 9:4), would truly be a sensational discovery. Of infinitely greater value, however, are the spiritual lessons conveyed to us through the symbolism of the ark. In this article, we will turn to the Scriptures to see that the ark has much to teach us about God’s nature, promises and purpose.

The Significance of the Tabernacle and the Ark

The events recorded in the biblical book of Exodus vividly demonstrate God’s love and faithfulness to His people. In fulfillment of His promise to Abraham (Ge 15:13-14), God miraculously delivered

the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and began to guide them toward a new home in Canaan. At Mt. Sinai, six weeks into the journey to the Promised Land, God described the dramatic rescue with this poetic phrase: “...I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself” (Ex 19:4, NIV).

God had a vitally important purpose in liberating Israel, expressed in Exodus 19:6: “...you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” To equip the Israelites for this mission, He gave them the Ten Commandments and other instructions at Mt. Sinai. God’s commandments reveal much about His nature and character; Israel would need to follow them in order to be proper representatives of God and reflect His character.

Among the instructions God gave to Israel were detailed plans for the tabernacle, a portable place of worship. Nearly a third of the book of Exodus (chapters 25-31 and 35-40) is devoted to these plans and their execution, indicating that the tabernacle would play a key role in Israel’s mission. As God explained in Exodus 29:45-46, “Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.”

The tabernacle would provide a special place for God to be present with His people. This purpose of the tabernacle is reflected in its Hebrew word—*mishkan*. The noun *mishkan* comes from the verb *shakan*, which means “to dwell” [1, p. 94]. (*Shekinah*, the Hebrew word for God’s glorious presence, also comes from *shakan*.)

The plans for the tabernacle begin in Exodus 25 with instructions for its most important component—the ark of the covenant (vv. 10-22). The ark was a gold-covered wooden chest designed to house the tablets of the Ten Commandments (vv. 10-16). On its cover, also made of gold, were two golden cherubim, between which God’s presence would appear:

“There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will

meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites" (verse 22).

From His place between the cherubim, God would continue the revelation that He gave to Israel on Mt. Sinai. The tabernacle has often been referred to as a "portable Sinai," and in fact, there are a number of parallels between the appearances of God at Mt. Sinai and at the tabernacle [3, Chapter 9]. For example, after the tabernacle and its furnishings had been built, God's presence came to the tabernacle in a cloud (Ex 40:34), reminiscent of His earlier descents to Mt. Sinai in a cloud (Ex 19:9; 24:15-16). Then God "called to Moses and spoke to him" (Lev 1:1), as He had earlier called to Moses on the mountain (Ex 19:20; 24:16). (Interestingly, the only other time that the book of Exodus speaks of God "calling" to Moses was at the burning bush in Ex 3:4 [2].)

On Mt. Sinai, there was a point beyond which the people could not go in approaching God's presence (Ex 19:12, 21; 24:1-2). Moses, Aaron with his sons Nadab and Abihu, and some elders could go past that point, but only Moses talked with God (24:1-2, 13-18). Similarly, the tabernacle included an area called the Holy Place, access to which was restricted to priests performing their prescribed duties. Within the Holy Place was the Most Holy Place, which contained the ark of the covenant and could only be entered by the high priest, and then only on the annual Day of Atonement (Lev 16:1-2, 29-34; Heb 9:1-7).

Both at Mt. Sinai and in the plans for the tabernacle, we see God's *transcendence* as well as His *immanence* (see [1, Chap. 9]). On one hand, a person who wished to approach God would have to prepare appropriately for the encounter (e.g., Ex 19:10-11; Lev 11-15) and carefully follow God's instructions on how, when, and where He could be contacted. These provisions underlined the great gulf separating an infinite, perfect God from finite, sinful human beings. On the other hand, God in His great love wished to reach across that gulf and dwell among His people, as emphasized by His continuing presence above the ark.

These qualities of God are important for worshipers in all eras to keep in mind. We who worship God today remember His transcendence when we come before Him with reverence, and we are grateful for His immanence when we confidently approach His throne of grace (Heb 4:16).

A further indication that the tabernacle was designed to continue the experience of Mt. Sinai can be seen in the sacrifices offered at the inauguration of the tabernacle service in Lev 9. These sacrifices included a peace offering (NIV, "fellowship offering")

for the nation of Israel as a whole (Lev 9:3, 18). A similar offering accompanied the ratification of the covenant at Sinai (Ex 24:5). Interestingly, a collective peace offering was also part of the annual liturgy for Pentecost (Lev 23:19), a festival that is traditionally associated with covenant renewal and God's revelation of *Torah* at Mt. Sinai.

Symbolism of the Ark

So far we have seen the importance of the ark of the covenant as a location for God to dwell among the Israelites and impart further instruction to them. Now let's take a closer look at the description of the ark in Ex 25:10-22. Through the centuries, Jews and Christians have carefully examined each facet of these instructions in order to discern the lessons God may have been trying to impart through such a detailed plan. Today there is a large body of tradition, rich with spiritual lessons, about the symbolism of the ark.

Notice first that the directions for building the ark can be divided into two sections, corresponding to two parts of the ark: verses 10-16 describe the wooden chest the repository for the tablets of the covenant; while verses 17-22 discuss the cover atop the chest where God's presence would reside between the golden cherubim. We might think of these two parts as representing the two parties involved in the covenant. The chest could stand for Israel, which receives *Torah* and agrees to follow it; and the cover could represent God, who will dwell among a people that gladly accepts His teaching.

Verse 11 instructs the Israelites to "overlay it [*i.e.*, the wooden chest] with pure gold, both inside and out..." In Jewish tradition, this detail is said to signify that the lives of those who strive to obey God's commandments should exhibit a consistency between outward behavior and inner character. Such a consistency is emphasized throughout the Bible (see e.g. Dt 10:16; 1Sa 15:22; Ps 51:6, 16-17; Jer 4:4; Hos 6:6; Mt 23:23-28; Ro 2:28-29).

Like other articles of the tabernacle furnishings, the ark would be transported by means of poles that fit into gold rings at the four corners of its base (Exodus 25:12-14, 26-28; 27:4-7; 30:4-5). The instructions for the ark also specify that its poles never be removed from the rings (Ex 25:15), a stipulation not made for the other furnishings. In Jewish tradition, the command to keep the poles in the rings is listed as one of the 613 commandments of *Torah*, and commentators have pondered its meaning [5].

One main reason, of course, for keeping the poles of the ark in their rings was to ensure that the ark would be carried with the poles and not by some other method. The ark, as the dwelling place

of God's *Shekinah*, was the most holy of the tabernacle furnishings and thus deserved to be treated with special care. This principle was later underscored during the time of King David, when the ark was once transported on a cart, contrary to God's command that it be carried on the shoulders of the Kohathites (Numbers 7:6-9). At one point the oxen pulling the cart stumbled, and Uzzah, who was guiding the cart, was struck dead when he put his hand on the ark to steady it (1Ch 13:6-10). As a result, David made sure that the ark was handled properly when it was later carried the rest of the way to Jerusalem (1Ch 15:11-15).

There may also be spiritual significance in the fact that the ark was to be carried on men's shoulders. Taking the ark upon one's shoulders could symbolize submission to God and acceptance of the responsibility to obey His commandments. In the context of this symbolism, the command to keep the poles in the rings of the ark could represent the fact that one's commitment to walk in obedience to God must never be ignored or abandoned. Jesus Christ later gave instruction on this point when He said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

The command not to take the poles of the ark out of their rings implies that it was *possible* to remove the poles. This fact has led commentators to ask the following question: Why didn't God just design the ark so that the poles were permanently affixed to it? After all, making the poles impossible to separate from the ark would have been a simple way to guarantee that they were never removed. In keeping with the symbolism of the previous paragraph, one answer offered by Jewish tradition is that the removability of the poles represents God's desire that His people accept His instruction voluntarily [5]. God wants us to obey Him, but He will not force us to do so. He allows us to choose (see e.g. Deut. 30:19-20).

Perhaps the most striking feature of the ark was the presence of the golden cherubim on its cover (Ex 25:18-20). Cherubim had previously appeared in the Bible in Ge 3:24, where we read that in the aftermath of the sin of Adam and Eve, God "placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life." Some commentators have suggested that the cherubim were placed on the ark to remind Israel that access to God was limited and required spiritual readiness, as well as to impart the message that the way back to the Garden of Eden lies in faithfulness to God's covenant [4].

A Brief Biography of the Ark

After the tabernacle and its furnishings, including the ark, had been carefully constructed according to the specifications outlined in Ex 25-30, "the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Ex 40:34). Then as He had promised, God accompanied the Israelites on their journey to Canaan. When the children of Israel broke camp at Mt. Sinai and began the next stage of their travels, the bearers of the ark led the way as God directed them (Nu 10:33). At the end of the journey, the waters of the Jordan River parted when the priests carrying the ark reached the water's edge (Joshua 3). God's presence with His people throughout their forty years of wandering in the wilderness is commemorated each fall in the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Later, during a time when the nation had strayed far from God, the Israelites temporarily lost possession of the ark when they foolishly tried to use it as a sort of magic talisman in a battle against the enemy Philistines (1Sa 4). They had lost sight of the fact that the ark had no intrinsic power of its own. What they needed was repentance and a close relationship with God, not a gold-covered good luck charm.

The ark was brought to Jerusalem amid great rejoicing and celebration during the reign of King David (1Ch 15-16). David's dream of building a great temple in which to house the ark was then realized by his son Solomon. At the time of the temple dedication (held, fittingly, in conjunction with the Feast of Tabernacles—see 2Ch 5:3; 7:8-10), the ark was carried to its position of honor in the temple's Most Holy Place (2Ch 5:4-10), and the *Shekinah* subsequently filled the magnificent new edifice (2Ch 5:13-14; 7:1-3). God had demonstrated His love and faithfulness by coming to dwell with His people once again.

After the reign of Solomon, Israel divided into two kingdoms. The northern House of Israel quickly fell into idolatry and was eventually conquered by the powerful Assyrians. The southern kingdom of Judah, where Jerusalem and the temple were located, also drifted away from God, but its decline was more gradual because of occasional religious revivals under righteous kings. In particular, the temple was repaired and true worship briefly restored under King Josiah (2Ch 34-35). Josiah's revival included the return of the ark to its proper place in the temple (2Ch 35:3), from which it had apparently been removed either on account of the repairs or by the order of a previous idolatrous king.

What Happened to the Ark?

Second Chronicles 35:3 is the last passage in the Hebrew scriptures in which the ark of the covenant is mentioned. Nobody knows for sure what happened to the ark; presumably it disappeared around the time of the destruction of the temple (about 586 B.C.). According to one tradition, recorded in the second century B.C. in the book of Second Maccabees, the prophet Jeremiah hid the ark in a cave:

"...the prophet, having received an oracle, ordered that the tent and the ark should follow with him, and that he went out to the mountain where Moses had gone up and had seen the inheritance of God. Jeremiah came and found a cave-dwelling, and he brought there the tent and the ark and the altar of incense; then he sealed up the entrance. Some of those who followed him came up intending to mark the way, but could not find it. When Jeremiah learned of it, he rebuked them and declared: 'The place shall remain unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy. Then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will appear, as they were shown in the case of Moses, and as Solomon asked that the place should be specially consecrated' " (2Macc. 2:4-8, NRSV).

Why did God allow the ark to be lost? The answer indicated by the Scriptures is that the ark came with an "expiration date" attached. As wonderful as the ark was, God planned from the beginning to eventually be present with His people in even more marvelous ways.

The first hint of the temporary nature of the ark appears in the original instructions for the tabernacle in Ex 25:9, where God commands, "Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you" (see also Ex 25:40). These instructions imply, according to both Jewish and Christian tradition, that the ark was a model of some greater heavenly prototype (see e.g. Heb 8:5; Rev 11:19).

A second clue about the greater things to come appears in Jeremiah's prophecy of a new (i.e., renewed) covenant in Jer 31:31-37. This prophecy states that God's *Torah*, formerly engraved on tablets of stone and stored in the ark, would one day be written on the hearts of men (v. 33).

To make possible the close relationship between God and His people described in Jer 31:34, God would send Jesus, the Messiah, to provide a perfect atoning sacrifice for the sins of humanity (Isa 53:4-12). The offerings given by the Israelites at

the altar in front of the Holy Place pointed toward this ultimate offering (see Hebrews 9-10).

The coming of the Messiah was also foreshadowed by the ark. We can think of Jesus' mother Mary, the virgin who fulfilled the prophecy of Isa 7:13-14, as an "ark" which held the Word, the personification of *Torah*. (This symbolism is discussed further in our article on the Virgin Birth in Issue 5 of *Grace and Knowledge*, see at: <http://www.graceandknowledge.beliefnet.com/creed4.html> or by writing to Dr. Ward at: 307 N Elm St, Oxford, OH 45056.) And today, when we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, He comes to dwell in us (John 14:23). God's purpose is to grant us eternal life (Rom. 8:10-11) and to be with us forever (Rev 21:3). He gives each of us the wonderful opportunity to be an ark or a temple (1Co 3:16; 6:19-20).

Conclusion

The possibility of finding the ancient ark of the covenant, lost now for nearly 2,600 years, continues to intrigue erstwhile Indiana Joneses as we enter a new millennium. But the ark, as great as it was, is in itself no more than a beautiful piece of antique furniture. Far more exciting, when we understand and accept them, are the spiritual principles and wonderful promises of which the ark was a symbol and type. As Jeremiah prophesied, one day the whole world will enjoy fellowship with God and the ark will no longer be remembered (Jer 3:14-18). In the meantime, we gratefully accept His presence with us and in us and strive to walk faithfully in His covenant.

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Notes:

1. Sanders asserts that the ark mentioned in 2Ch 35:3 was a copy of the original one, based on the dubious claim that Jer 3:16 suggests the existence of at least one such copy.

mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1f).

Abraham was not transformed by focusing on himself. He was transformed by leaving his old self behind in Ur. Like our Father Abraham, we have to leave behind our country, our kindred, and our father's house, at least in a spiritual sense if not in a physical, geographical sense. In other words, we must let our thinking and our theology be shaped by God rather than by our country, our kindred, and our father's house.

You may still live in America and be a good American citizen. The Lord might even allow you to have a political career if you think you can be a successful politician and still maintain your honesty and integrity. (Believe it or not, it is possible! Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon are examples of godly men who were political leaders.) However, you must remember that your first loyalty is to the Kingdom of God. Anytime there is a conflict between the demands of your earthly country and the demands of your heavenly country, you must "get thee out" by forsaking the demands of your earthly country and obeying the demands of your heavenly country.

The same principle applies to your kindred. You may be Italian-American, Irish-American, African-American, or Native American. It is not a sin to celebrate your ethnicity, but it must be celebrated in ways that are compatible with the Kingdom. You also need to guard against focusing too much on your cultural and ethnic identity. Your primary culture should be the culture of God's Kingdom. Your eternal ethnic identity is wrapped up in your relationship to God through His Son. All other cultural and ethnic identities are of secondary importance.

Abraham was called to leave his father's house. Your earthly father's house may still be the place you call home. Family ties are important, but they must not hinder your call to be transformed into your new self. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37).

Abraham's country and kindred were idolatrous. Even Abraham's father served other gods: "...Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor: and they served other gods" (Josh. 24:2). Abraham did not let these things prevent him from being transformed into the man God wanted him to become. He literally left his country, his kindred, and his father's house. He crossed over from Ur to Canaan and became the first person in the Bible to be called a "Hebrew" -an *'ivri*, literally, one who crosses over. Abraham's crossing over was not only in a physical, geographical sense, though. He also crossed over from polytheism to monotheism and became the friend of God.

Abraham was made righteous because he believed a promise that God made to him. God called Abraham outside one starry night and said, "Look now toward heaven, and tell [count] the stars, if thou be able to

number them... So shall they seed be." The next verse says, "And he believed in Yahweh; and He counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:5f).

Abraham "against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, 'So shall thy seed be.' And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. And being fully persuaded that, what He had promised. He was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness" (Rom. 4:18-22).

In effect God was saying this to Abraham: "Look at the stars. That will give you some indication of how many descendants you will have through the son I'm going to give you. We both know that it's humanly impossible, but I'm going to give you a son. Will you believe in this son whom you cannot yet see?"

Abraham said, "Yes," and became righteous in the eyes of God. God says something similar to us. Instead of telling us to look at the stars, He tells us to look at His Son. "Look at My Son, Yeshua of Nazareth. That will give you some indication of what a son of God should be like. We both know that it's humanly impossible for you to be like Him, but I'm going to transform you into a son like Him. Will you believe this, even though you can't yet see how it can happen?"

When we say, "Yes," we become righteous in the eyes of God.

Abraham did not see the actual appearance of his son for several years, yet he knew that the promised son would one day appear. We may not see ourselves totally transformed into sons like Yeshua for many years, yet we know it will one day happen when He appears. This is what John was talking about when he wrote:

"Beloved, now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3:2f).

Abraham looked at the stars in anticipation of his promised son. That starry night was a turning point in Abraham's life. After that night, Abraham probably never looked at the stars again without thinking of the son who was on his way.

As children of Abraham, we look to the heavens in anticipation of the appearance of the Son of God. If we are as eager for the arrival of this Son as Abraham was for the arrival of his son, then we should never look at the heavens again without thinking of this Son who is on His way. *Maranatha!*

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Snelling: "Living Fossil" continued from Page 6.

re-sprout after a catastrophe. New trunks can grow from old roots that may be thousands of years old.



Figure 3. The fossil conifer *Agathis jurassica*, with an adjacent fish fossil (arrow).

Conclusion

Who would have thought that, at the close of the twentieth century, only 125 miles from the center of a sprawling metropolis of more than four million people, scientists would find a previously unknown tree in a rugged wilderness area? It's hard to imagine how this tree, which has now been propagated and will soon be growing in gardens around the globe, could have supposedly been missing for 150 million years. But there's no mystery when this tree's history is understood within God's framework and timescale of Earth's history recorded in His Word. Rather than being a living fossil, it is a survivor of the Flood only 4,500 years ago, destined to grow in the new world while its relatives (not ancestors) were buried with the remains of the old world.

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"The churches of America do not exist by the grace of the state; the churches of America are not mere citizens of the state. The churches of America exist apart; they have their own vantage point, their own authority. Religion is its own realm; it makes its own claims. We establish no religion in this country, nor will we ever. We command no worship. We mandate no belief. But we poison our society when we remove its theological underpinnings. We court corruption when we leave it bereft of belief."

—Former U.S. President, Ronald Reagan

Christ, the Mediator

The Greek word (pronounced) *dee-ath-ay-kay* means a *disposition*, the act or means of disposing of something, as in a *will*. It is variously translated as either "covenant" or "testament," which is interesting because they differ in meaning in English usage i.e. *covenant* means "a written agreement between two or more parties to perform some action" while *testament* means "a legal document declaring a person's wishes regarding the disposal of their property when they die." While the Greek word is closer in meaning to the English word "testament," the Biblical usage of it blends "covenant" and "testament" in a way that the full Scriptural meaning is only made clear by the use of both.

"He is the mediator of the New Testament"

The original Greek word is variously rendered according to a translator's preference, whether within a single version of the Bible, or in comparing versions such as the example below where the original Greek word in Mark 14:24 is translated as "covenant" in the Revised Standard Version (which was based upon the American Standard Version, which was based upon the King James Version) and "new testament" in the King James:

"And He said to them, "This is my blood of **the covenant**, which is poured out for many" (RSV)

"And He said unto them, This is my blood of **the new testament**, which is shed for many." (KJV)

Examples of the original Greek word *dee-ath-ay-kay* translated as "covenant" in the King James Version:

"But now hath He obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, He saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people" (Hebrews 8:6-10 KJV).

Examples of the *same* original Greek word *dee-ath-ay-kay* translated as "testament" or "new testament" in the King James Version:

"And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is My blood of



the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:27-28 KJV).

"Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Corinthians 3:6 KJV).

While the New Testament is about a New Covenant, the word testament is appropriate because, according to the literal meaning of testament, a death, not of calves and goats, but of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is a key event of the new covenant. Again, the very same original Greek word variously translated as either covenant or testament, is here very appropriately translated as testament:

"And for this cause He is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you" (Hebrews 9:15-20 KJV).

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The prison was my home, and a small cell was my room

My name is [name deleted to protect identity], and I am 41 years old. I am not very old yet but life experiences have made me advanced in years, and I suppose, in wisdom as well. You see, I have been imprisoned nine times for my faith. They say that I am a strong leader in the church. This led to a series of arrests. And so, for a time, the prison was my home, and a small cell was my room.

I remember that there were nine of us who were arrested that day. We were all terrified of what might become of us. If we don't die of torture, we'll surely die of the conditions inside. We were prohibited from even seeing a Bible and were punished for praying.

The situation in that dark, dreaded place was very difficult. My little room behind bars was not entirely mine, for I had to share it with many others. In that crowded space we ate, slept, and answered the call of nature. It was terrible. I lived like this for two years . . .

But through it all, it was God's Word tucked in my heart that gave me hope and strength. My favorite passage while I was incarcerated was Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. I recalled it as much as I could as often as I could. Jesus' words gave me strength:

Do not worry—God is in control. If they hate Me, remember they will also hate you.

After seven months, six of my companions denied their faith. They could not withstand the harsh treatment of the guards and the inhumane conditions in prison. But three of us stood firm. We were mocked for our decision. The six were set free.

Then, the police put us in different cells so we could not talk to each other. In 2001, we were all released though we did not denounce our faith. However, my time in prison took its toll on my legs, which have lost their strength due to prolonged sitting. But God is gracious. I may not be able to stand physically, but I know I am standing strong in His promises to me.

Christians from my district are severely persecuted. Their land is taken away from them, and their children are denied education. They could not ask for medical help from hospitals. Because of this, I was forced to move my family to another district where the religious intolerance is not so severe. Please pray with me that God would grant me and my family at least a place to stay and land to farm. I know nothing now but to engage in agriculture because it seems my mind has lost



most of its faculties due to my long stay in jail. Any prayer said on our behalf is a cherished treasure.

What You Can Do to Help

This Christian is asking you to pray. Please intercede for him and others like him. We must do everything we can to help them!

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Christians in India Attacked, Charged with Illegal Conversion

In Madhya Pradesh state, Hindu extremists brutally beat Christians; police take no action.

by Vishal Arora

NEW DELHI, April 13 (Compass Direct) – Extremists attacked two Christian schools and a private Christian gathering last week in Madhya Pradesh state and accused several Christians of carrying out “illegal conversions.”

The Christian community called for the arrest of several *Dharam Jagran Sena* (DJS or Army for Religious Revival) members who launched three attacks in Jabalpur city on April 5, 6 and 7. Christians denied the charge of illegal conversions.

In the final attack, which took place at around 9 p.m. on April 7, “police stormed a prayer meeting in the home of an Assemblies of God church member, Nitin Bergman,” lawyer Ralph Ambereesh Robertson told Compass. “Then they took the seven Christians who were present to the police station.”

Schools Attacked

In other attacks last week, DJS members stormed the Christ Church Boys School at Thaiyavali Chowk on April 6, reprimanding them for not closing the school to mark *Ram Navmi*, a Hindu festival held that day.

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The Editor

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