


THE Sabbath Sentinel

July–August 2006



"Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, even they who pierced him...."

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

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

The Sabbath Sentinel

July–August 2006 Volume 58, No. 4 Issue 520

FEATURES

- 3 **Tribute to Richard Nickels, 1947 to 2006**
- 5 **A Sermon to the Wind**
by Kenneth Westby
- 7 **Seven Preposterous Claims of Evolution**
by Kenneth Ryland
- 9 **Emperor Worship, Words, New Testament Christianity**
by David L. Antion
- 12 **Rivers of Living Water**
by Doug Ward
- 14 **Psalms 13**
by Julia Benson
- 15 **Angels Quell an Angry Mob**
by Donald Mansell.

DEPARTMENTS

- 11 **President's Radio Address: The Marriage Amendment**
- 16 **Sabbath Morning Companion: Brother Nelson**
by Lenny Cacchio
- 17 **"Secret Believers are Everywhere" in Iran**
- 22 **The Church in the World**
- 23 **Notices and Advertisements**

Our Cover: Revelation 1:7

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Richard Nickels

1947 to 2006

On June 4, at about 7:00 p.m., BSA president Richard Nickels passed away at Campbell County Hospital in his hometown, Gillette, Wyoming. Richard was peaceful and in no pain when he died. His wife, Shirley, who was at Richard's side when he died, would like to thank everyone for their prayers, cards, and phone calls.

A memorial service was held in Gillette on Wednesday, June 7. The Gillette service was officiated by Pastor Charles Small of Grace Bible Church.

Four days later on Sunday, June 11, a funeral service was performed for Richard in Vancouver, Washington. Richard was buried in Vancouver near his deceased father-in-law. Steven Kieler, a close friend from Iowa, performed the funeral service. BSA board member Bryan Burrell delivered a eulogy at the funeral.

Richard was born June 10, 1947, in Portland, Oregon, to Henry and Rosemary (Schmidt) Nickels, where he was raised and educated. Upon his graduation he attended Linfield College at McMinnville, Oregon, graduating Summa Cum Laude with majors in math and history.

On Jan. 23, 1972, he married Shirley Lorraine Whitaker in Junction City, Oregon. He started his career with Pacific Power and Light in 1974, quickly moving on to work for Nerco Coal Corp. In 1981, he and his family moved to Sheridan, Wyoming, where he continued to work for Nerco Coal Corp. when it relocated. In 1993, he came to Gillette, where he worked in accounting, most recently as revenue accounting supervisor for Rio Tinto Energy America, one of the world's largest mining companies.

At the time of his passing, Richard was president of the Bible Sabbath Association and director of a ministry called "Giving and Sharing," a non-profit organization designed to help people obtain religious books and other material at cost. Richard enjoyed writing and for 30 years produced a newsletter about different aspects of good health and articles on the Bible and Bible history. In addition to his regular work and the ministries he was involved in, Richard also found time to write numerous articles and books after starting Giving & Sharing in 1978. These included *History of the Seventh Day Church of God*, six papers on the "History of the Church of God," *Biblical Holy Days*, *Biblical Law*, *Biblical Health and Healing*, *Biblical Marriage and Family*, *Herbert W. Armstrong, 1892-1986*, and more. He served as President of the Bible Sabbath Association from 1996-1999 and 2004-2006.

Richard is survived by his wife Shirley; three daughters, Barbara Nickels Parada of Houston, Rachel Lyn Nickels of Edmonds, Washington, and Amanda Byrd of Eugene, Oregon; two sisters, Henrietta Shirk of Butte, Montana, and Linda Whitesell of Everett, Washington; and one grandchild.

Many readers will be interested in how the Lord brought Richard to repentance and a personal commitment to follow Christ. In Richard's own words: "I was raised in Portland, Oregon, and spent the greater part of my early life in that area. In 1960 my parents and I moved to the Oregon coast where I began listening to the radio broadcast of "The World Tomorrow" with Herbert W. Armstrong and his son Garner Ted Armstrong. Careful study of biblical doctrines they pre-



sented, plus divine intervention in my life through a traumatic experience, led to my repentance and baptism in March 1969 at the age of 21. I began attending the Worldwide Church of God Sabbath services and annual Holy Day Festivals.”

All of us who knew Richard can attest to the fact that he was a tireless worker for the gospel of Christ and for the truth of the seventh-day Sabbath. Richard, we miss you and look forward to the day when we will meet you in the clouds.

“Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep; but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus.

To the right: Richard standing next to a 10 Commandments monument in Wyoming.



The following eulogy written by Calvin Burrell was delivered by Bryan Burrell at Richard’s funeral.

(Both Calvin and Bryan Burrell are BSA board members.)

Richard Nickels was one of those rare souls who knew the direction of his calling and always worked in that direction. Straight as an arrow, he flew to the target.

For Richard, the target was to know, to obey, and to spread the word and will of God as it is revealed in the Bible generally, and in gospel of Christ and the Ten Commandments specifically.

Many Christians have had that goal, or one like it; not many have pursued it with the single-minded devotion and zealous manner that Richard did. Not primarily a preacher, he devoted himself to writing the truth more than speaking it. Few sermons resonate so well as to echo more than a few moments, but Richard’s writings—his books, booklets, tracts, and countless articles—will continue to be read and absorbed by unknown readers around the corner and around the world, long after he has gone.

In addition to writing the truth as he understood it, Richard Nickels also made extensive efforts to distribute not only his own writings but the writings and tapes of many others whose views he appreciated. He loved nothing more than to freely distribute good books and literature that promoted God’s Kingdom of grace and truth. He chose the name “Giving and Sharing” for his own ministry in this regard. Most of his materials were mailed without charge; only a minimal charge to cover printing and mailing costs was made for others.

Although “Giving and Sharing” is the way he lived, it would be a mistake to think that Richard Nickels was a weak or easy man—a pushover. Few men have stronger convictions than Richard had, and even fewer promote them with the strength, intensity, tenacity, and follow-through that he exercised. It is these characteristics that made him effective not only in his personal ministry, “Giving and Sharing,” but also in his leadership as President of the Bible Sabbath Association for nearly seven years. Richard’s vision and effectiveness in that position will be sorely missed, and not easily replaced. On behalf of the members and board of the Association, we extend our sincere sympathies to Shirley and the family, as well as our thanks for her years of service to the BSA with Richard!

A Sermon to the Wind

Preachers and religious writers often wonder if their messages are simply sermons to the wind. Without a doubt many are. What makes an article or sermon have a constructive impact upon an audience? Is it the quality of the message or the attitude of the individual receiving it . . . or both?



By Kenneth Westby

"I might as well be talking to a brick wall," is a common comment from exasperated parents after an encounter with their teenage kid. I've heard many preachers, teachers, and writers express similar frustrations believing their spiritual messages go in one ear, and without slowing down to visit the grey matter, exit the other ear. They wonder, is the audience dull, deaf, or just dumb?

Of course, the blame for fly-over sermons may need to be equally shared with the preacher whose poor content and delivery make his messages easily forgettable. Simply being able to talk louder than people can snore isn't the top talent required of a preacher. More on a minister's responsibility later.

I borrowed my article title from Thomas Jefferson's words in his letter of June, 26, 1822, to his close friend, Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse. Jefferson wrote:

I have received and read with thankfulness and pleasure your denunciation of the abuses of tobacco and wine. Yet, however sound in its principles, I expect it will be but a sermon to the wind.

Jefferson went on to wish his friend success in his efforts, but warned that people don't always heed advice given in their best interests. You might as well be speaking into the wind as to attempt to change a mind already set. I know that has often been the case with good advice I've ignored. How about you?

The Made-Up Mind

Nothing is easier than self-deceit. For what each man wishes, that he also believes to be true.—Demonsthenes, Greek statesman, 384-322 B.C.

"Believing what we wish to be true" is a human flaw as common as rain in Seattle and we see examples every day: politicians, commentators, scientists, preachers all spinning facts or cherry-picking facts to "prove" what they want to be true. It should be evident to all—but isn't—that there is a slant to the news both in how it is reported and in what is se-

lected or omitted for reporting. We all operate—including enlightened believers—with assumptions and preconceptions that govern our world view and how we process information.

The truthfulness of our preconceptions, however, will govern our ability to learn and apply truth to our lives. If we have erroneous assumptions in biblical and spiritual matters, our ability to grow in grace and knowledge will be compromised. Our ability to be objective with the Scriptures will suffer. Faulty assumptions can skew beliefs, doctrines, mix truth with error and detour our Christian walk. One need only look to the seven churches described in the book of Revelation to see how commonly Christians can be detoured into dangerous error. Only one out of seven wasn't singled out for rebuke by Christ.

The audiences of Jesus all heard the same words, but processed them differently. He used the parable of the sower to illustrate just how differently people receive the Gospel, the Word. To some, Jesus was giving a sermon to the wind. Can you think back to a time when you heard profound truth but paid no attention, or didn't perceive its value, or didn't even recognize it as truth? I can. Do we continue to make that mistake?

Jesus said God's Word is ultimate truth. When he told Pilate, "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me," Pilate asked rhetorically, "What is truth?" Pilate didn't really want to know the answer to his own question. Those of us on the side of truth need to listen to Jesus and heed the Word of God. But we should ask Pilate's question of ourselves: What is truth?

When we read an article like this or listen to a sermon in church or on tape or on TV, are we equipped to spot and receive the truth of it? Or are they simply sermons to the wind? What is that critical ability to discern truth from error, diamonds from cut glass? Wisdom is certainly a requirement

and a brief description of wisdom is the ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting; insight, common sense; good judgment. Ultimate wisdom is the mind of God, and for man, the beginning of wisdom is the fear or reverential awe of God. Wisdom is not subjective, narrow, prejudiced, but combines understanding, knowledge, experience and righteous judgment into an integrated savvy of people and things. Wisdom is such a valuable gift; we are invited by God to ask him for it and then passionately pursue after it.

It isn't wise to maintain a closed mind. We are told to guard the door to our mind, but not nail it shut. Unfortunately, a lot of Christian folk sit on their favorite pew each week already knowing everything and having their trusty, well-marked Bible locked shut with preconceptions and doctrines set in cement. Anything that is different from the "faith once delivered" is suspect or given a deaf ear. The only expectation from the preacher's sermon is to interestingly repack what the pew-sitter already believes, entertain a little, titillate with some "new" slant, serve up a portion of spiritual meat, and for desert, make it easy to stay awake.

Why don't we question this "faith once delivered" concept. Does it mean the doctrinal teaching we grew up with, or what we have traditionally believed, or what our church teaches? Not necessarily. The Apostle Jude (the Lord's brother) exhorted Christians that they "should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). He went on to immediately warn that false teachers and doctrines were already a threat to what was the very first generation of Christians.

Did you and I receive our doctrine directly from the Apostles of Christ? I think not. Jude's audience received the unalloyed truth of God first hand. They were soberly warned to hold it fast against all attempts to corrupt it.

The problem for us, in many respects, is the opposite of that of Jude's audience. We have come up in a world of doctrine alloyed with myriad errors—some so long-taught and believed that they can be easily assumed to have come straight from the apostles. They didn't. Yes, we have the Bible, but unless it is properly interpreted, it can be "spun" into a host of disagreeing doctrines as the presence of hundreds of denominations attest.

Our job is to contend for the truth of Scripture which requires us to ask serious questions of our beliefs, regardless of how long we have held them. We need to ask basic questions of Scripture: What does it really say (not what I assume it says or wish it says or my favorite teacher says it says)? It is amazing how much can be learned simply by asking good questions.

Good Preaching

The purposes of a sermon (or article in a publication like TSS) will vary. Some will be to simply inform; to impart helpful and important information a Christian can use to better understanding Scripture. Others are appeals to change behaviors in directions the speaker deems more righteous and harmonious to God's will. Some are inspirational in purpose. Yet others may attack perceived heresy, sinful practices, or cultural trends. Some are specific to particular areas of spiritual growth and understanding. There are other types of sermons, but probably the most common is simple expository preaching—taking a particular biblical text, explaining its context and meaning, and drawing from it a current or practical application.

Jesus, the prophets and the apostles preached with an inductive accent to involve their listeners and engage their minds. They challenged people to think, question, and analyze. The inductive reasoning process differs from the deductive in that it involves the listener in the process.

Deductive preaching starts with a declaration of intent and proceeds to prove the validity of what the preacher says is already determined to be true. Perhaps most sermons are of this genre. Inductive preaching, on the other hand, lays out the evidence, the examples, the illustrations, and postpones the declarations and assertions until the listeners have had a chance to weigh the evidence, think through the implications and then come to the conclusion *with* the preacher at the end of the sermon.

Among the greatest teachers to use the inductive style were Socrates and Aristotle. Characteristically, inductive teachers ask many questions in the course of their presentation and reason from practical particulars familiar to the audience to more general conclusions or principles.

Jesus is regarded as a master of the inductive teaching approach—which is sometimes called "the reversible *why*"—which gives listeners a part in the sermon process. Inductive learning is more easily internalized since one has stepped through the reasoning process for one's self as opposed to passive acceptance of the preacher's predetermined conclusions. Does this make sense?

Some sermons (and articles) are duds—poorly prepared and poorly given. Some are partial duds—shallow on content, but entertaining. The sermons we all want to hear are those rich in important information (preferably new) and expertly delivered, entertaining, and not too long. As members of the audience, we don't want to work too hard to get something out of the message. We want the preacher to make it easy to listen and learn.

Continued on Page 20

Seven Preposterous Claims of Evolution

by Kenneth Ryland



1. *Acquired characteristics can become inherited characteristics.*

One of the things that has always fascinated me about the theory of evolution is the insistence of its proponents that animal and plant species “learned” to adapt in order to survive. Of course, this assumes that a particular species was dying off due to lack of adaptation and continued to die off over a period of thousands, or perhaps millions, of years until the animal finally mutated a gene that changed its behavior allowing it to survive. But wait a minute! If it took the animal thousands or millions of years to develop the “survival gene,” then it was obviously able to survive during that time without the genetic mutation that evolution says it needed for survival. So, in reality, it did not need to evolve because it was already surviving for that length of time without the need for genetic change. The logic of evolutionists on this point is truly baffling. Most would fail a college course in basic classical logic.

Add to the above the assumption that plants and animals somehow “learn” through the process of evolution. In the evolutionary explanation there is an almost mystical implication that there is a conscious process going on that has allowed species to become other species or to evolve new processes or appendages for the sake of survival. The assumptions involved in this kind of thinking are staggering.

One of the things that scientists should have learned from their study of the peppered moth in England (touted as “proof” of evolution) is that even though adaptations can take place within species, a peppered moth is still a peppered moth.⁽¹⁾ This remains true whether the dark or light variety predominates due to its ability to camouflage itself from predators. To date, none has ever been observed evolving into an Emperor Gum Moth or a Gypsy Moth (see the Sept-Oct 2005 edition of *The Sabbath Sentinel* for a thorough discussion of the peppered moth).

2. *Matter came into existence from nothing.*

Taken at face value, this is exactly what the book of Genesis says that God did. In our case however, we have evolutionists making the same statement with no causal agent. I have done quite a bit of research on

this point, and it is evident that most evolutionists agree that matter is not eternal, that it came into existence at some point in the past. On the other hand, if matter were eternal, then it would be completely inert and disorganized because all energy tends to render itself less usable over time as it changes form; that is, it follows the second law of thermodynamics. Nothing in the universe would be radioactive because all radioactive matter would have exhausted its half-lives in aeons past. Of course, the whole idea of radioactivity and half-lives is not even workable in a universe in which matter is eternal. Half-lives assume a beginning, and if matter is eternal, radioactivity can have no beginning. Again, it’s a matter that most evolutionists do not understand the logic of their own premises or are not willing to take those premises all the way out to their logical conclusions.

Most evolutionary scientists believe that the universe came into being 12.7 billion years ago, and that it started from a “Big Bang,” which is evolutionary lingo for an enormous explosion somewhere in the nothingness of space. The “Big Bang” theory assumes that there was once a super-concentrated glob (not to be confused with the physics term “mass”) of subatomic particles (all the mass and energy in the universe) that exploded, hurling mass and energy outward from that explosion point. The story (sometimes called Cosmology^[2]) goes that as the matter raced outward, it began to cool and coagulate into the celestial balls we see at night called stars and planets. This is, of course, a very simplistic explanation of the Big Bang theory, but I think you get the gist of it.

If I were in a classroom, I would have to ask a few questions at this point. Where did the subatomic particles come from? What physical laws in a nonexistent universe caused the Big Bang to occur? Why 12.7 billion years ago? Why not 107.7 billion years ago? What was the causal agent of the Big Bang? Where did the physical laws originate that govern the cooling and coagulating of the matter into stars and planets that was hurled outward by the Big Bang.

One of the problems with the Big Bang theory is the concept of time. Time is important to us on earth, but in the rest of the universe there is only mass, mo-

tion, and energy. So, when we say 12.7 billion years, can we say for certainty that time has always been a constant factor in determining the age of the universe?

Probably the biggest problem with the Big Bang theory is that it starts with a preexistent "something" instead of "nothing." No matter how far back you push the beginning of the universe, you still have to answer the question of how the first matter and energy came into being.

3. *Evolution is statistically possible.*

To avoid allowing this discussion to become too complicated, let me quote a number of well-known scientists.

"The occurrence of any event where the chances are beyond one in ten followed by 50 zeros is an event which we can state with certainty will never happen, no matter how much time is allotted and no matter how many conceivable opportunities could exist for the event to take place" (Dr. Emile Borel, who discovered the laws of probability).

"The probability for the chance of formation of the smallest, simplest form of living organism known is 1 to $10^{-340,000,000}$. This number is 1 to 10 to the 340 millionth power! The size of this figure is truly staggering since there is only supposed to be approximately 10^{80} (10 to the 80^{th} power) electrons in the whole universe!" (Professor Harold Morowitz, Biophysicist of George Mason University)

"I could prove God statistically; take the human body alone; the chance that all the functions of the individual would just happen, is a statistical monstrosity" (George Gallup, famous statistician).

"The idea of spontaneous generation of life in its present form is therefore highly improbable even to the scale of the billions of years during which prebiotic evolution occurred" (Dr. Ilya Prigogine, Nobel Prize winner).

"The probability of life originating from accident is comparable to the probability of the unabridged dictionary resulting from an explosion in a printing shop" (Dr. Edwin Conklin, evolutionist and professor of biology at Princeton University).

"All of us who study the origin of life find that the more we look into it, the more we feel it is too complex to have evolved anywhere. We all believe as an article of faith that life evolved from dead matter on this planet. It is just that life's complexity is so great, it is hard for us to imagine that it did" (Dr. Harold Urey, Nobel Prize winner).

"One may well find oneself beginning to doubt whether all this could conceivably be the product of an enormous lottery presided over by natural selection, blindly picking the rare winners from among numbers drawn at utter random... nevertheless although the miracle of life stands 'explained,' it does not strike us as

any less miraculous...." (French biochemist and Nobel Prize winner, Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity*).

"A further aspect I should like to discuss is what I call the practice of infinite escape clauses. I believe we developed this practice to avoid facing the conclusion that the probability of self-reproducing state is zero. This is what we must conclude from classical quantum mechanical principles as Wigner demonstrated" (Sidney W. Fox, *The Origins of Pre-Biological Systems*).

"Evolutionary biologists have been able to pretend to know how complex biological systems originated only because they treated them as black boxes. Now that biochemists have opened the black boxes and seen what is inside, they know the Darwinian theory is just a story, not a scientific explanation" (Professor Phillip E. Johnson).

"An honest man, armed with all the knowledge available to us now, could only state that in some sense, the origin of life appears at the moment to be almost a miracle, so many are the conditions which would have had to have been satisfied to get it going" (Dr. Francis Crick, biochemist, Nobel Prize winner, *Life Itself: Its Origin and Nature*, pg. 88).

I have about two more pages of quotes from famous scientists, some Nobel laureates, putting into doubt the notion that evolution is at all possible. However, even from the sample of quotes given above, the reader should be able to see that even evolutionists often embrace their theory as a matter of faith (like a religion), and not because there is any evidence to support it.

4. *Evolution produces improvements in species and a more highly-organized universe.*

Evolution assumes the increase in order in the universe and the increase in the usability of energy, in addition higher complexity in supposed "evolved" organic species of plants and animals.

However, the second law of thermodynamics (called "entropy"—the universal law of decay) states that matter tends toward chaos and that energy becomes less usable over time. This universally known and recognized law directly contradicts the brazen postulation of the theory of evolution that matter has become more organized over time and that the evolution of living organisms has somehow produced greater order and provided us with more usable energy.

What evolutionists seem not to recognize is that candles burn out, flowers wilt, and people get old and die. Fight as we might against the forces of nature, given enough time, our sun will one day burn up all its fuel, and this planet will grow cold and incapable of sustaining life. What happens then with this thing called evolution? We only continue to exist by taking in energy from outside this planet. Once that outside energy source is gone, so is biology. Life ceases.

Continued on Page 18

Emperor Worship, Words, New Testament Christianity

by David L. Antion



Excavations all over the middle eastern world have discovered various materials from stone, metal, papyrus, wax, and pottery on which were written in the Greek language called "*koine*" or common Greek. This is the Greek that was forced on the world by Alexander the Great when he ruled the world.

Before Alexander, the Greek language was an assortment of various dialects each one localized to a small area. Alexander wanted a Greek language common to all peoples. It was called "*koine*" which means "common." This is the language of the New Testament as well as volumes of other writings that have been discovered. Among them were old discarded office records, books, legal documents, bills of divorce, personal letters, tax papers, family letters, notes, diaries, etc.

Those contemporary with the New Testament show how people thought, their values, customs, and ideas as well as how they wrote and used words. One of the great sources of *koine* writings came from writings on broken pottery which are called the "*ostraca*." These were less expensive and were the main writing materials of the poorer classes.

Koine Greek was more popular in Rome than was Latin. Rome capitalized on this common (*koine*) language known around the civilized world. Rome became the center for, and accepted, all the cult religions. Rome's policy was to allow its subjects to have their own religion as long as they accepted Emperor worship.

One of the titles of the Emperor was the *koine* Greek word, "*kurios*," which means "Lord." It was a divine title of the emperor! But, it was also the main word used to translate the Hebrew word "YHVH" by the Septuagint (*LXX*) translation of the Old Testament.

Paul said there were many "lords" but for Christians there is only one Lord – Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 8:5-6). Festus referred to Caesar as "lord" when planning to send Paul to Rome (Acts 25:26). Polycarp, John's disciple, was asked, "What is the harm in saying, 'Lord Caesar.'" He still refused and was put to death by Rome.

But we are told that Jesus has been exalted and given a name above every name and that every knee will bow and "every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (*kurios*), to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11 *NAS*).

The early Christians came into conflict with the cult of Caesar through other words used by the New Testament and by Rome. In the *koine* Greek the word "king" was applied to Roman emperors. The emperor often took the title "king of kings" as ruler over all other rulers in the known world. To claim to be a king put one in conflict with Caesar! "...*whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar!*", cried the Jews before Pilate (John 19:12). Later they said, "*We have no king but Caesar*" (v. 14-15). Pilate, looking at the scourged, bleeding, and weakened Jesus did not take the claim of king seriously. Pilate found no real threat in this man and wanted to release Him, but the Jews cried out, "*if you release this man you are no friend to Caesar.*" Later Paul wrote, "...to the only King..." (1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15).

Emperors were often referred to as "saviors" and at least eight of them took the title, "savior of the world." It was no wonder. Rome brought peace, restored order to lawless areas of the empire and brought in a system of justice so the Roman citizens had the rights of due process of law. "*Pax Romana*" was the phrase hailed around the world as Rome brought world peace and kept order. Roman roads brought prosperity through commerce. Rome saved people from disorder, injustice, poverty and war.

But another "savior of the world" (John 4:42; Titus 1:3-4; Jude 24) came to save people from their sins. Most preferred the savior from Rome to the Savior from Galilee, for men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil!

The emperor held the title, "*Pontifex Maximus*" – Latin translation of "*archiereus*" which is "high priest." In the cult of Rome the emperor was the high priest on the throne of Caesar! But we have a great high priest who passed into the heavens and is on the throne of God (Heb. 4:14-16).

In the cult of Caesar there was the title "friend of the emperor." It was the Greek word, "*philos*." On the night of His betrayal Jesus called his disciples "friends" (John 15:14-15). The Jews knew what this meant when they told Pilate that if you release this man "you are no friend to Caesar" (19:12).

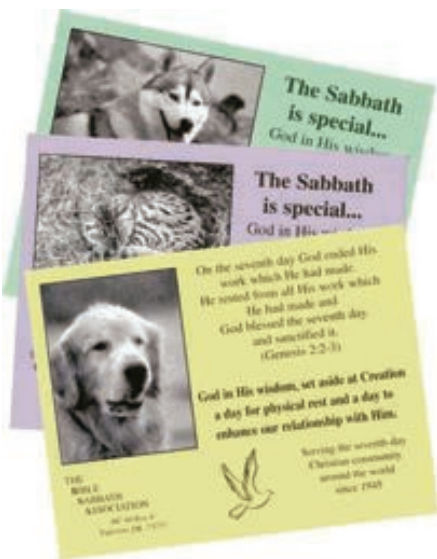
Written documents from the emperor were called "*hiera grammata*" in *Koine* Greek. This meant "the sa-

cred writings." Imagine Paul referring to the old testament as "*hiera grammata*"(2Tim. 3:15). He did this while in prison for the second and last time as he died there in Rome.

Any news about Caesars was called "*euaggelion*" (pronounced u-an-gel-e-on) or "good news", or glad tidings or the old English word, "gospel." Paul wrote to the people in Rome, "I am eager to preach the "*euaggelion*" to you in Rome"(Romans 1:15). He then stated, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel (*euaggelion*). Rome had good news about the emperor, the apostles had the good news about our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Imagine Paul (a little Jewish man according to tradition) walking into Rome on the Appian Way in front of all the great buildings, the coliseum, Roman senate buildings, etc. Even coming to the capitol city of the world, Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the good news!" Are you?

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New Every Morning

Angels Quell a Murderous Mob

My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me. Dan. 6:22.

In 1928 my father held a series of evangelistic meetings in Mossoró in northeastern Brazil. The first Sunday night the hall was packed, but the next day Dad received a letter, signed by the local priest, ordering him to leave town at once or face the consequences. Dad took the letter to the local police chief, who lamely told him that he could not guarantee order at the meetings. Dad immediately sent a telegram to the governor of the state, who was his friend, requesting that he order the meetings protected. No reply came that week. The next Sunday night an angry mob, led by the priest, gathered outside the meeting place.

Only a handful of courageous women and children, and one solitary man, entered the hall that night. As soon as Dad stood up to speak the mob began hurling stones through the windows and doors. These were quickly closed, and then the mob went wild. They tried to break down the door, but were unable to do so. After a while the man decided to go out a back entrance and investigate the situation. When he returned a few minutes later he urged Dad to escape out the back way with him immediately, because the mob was advancing toward the door with a telegraph pole, which they intended to use as a battering ram. As he pressed Dad to leave he patted a revolver concealed under his shirt and said, "If they get you, they will have to get me first. Let us go."

Rather than escape and leave the women and children to the mercy of the mob, Dad invited those present to kneel and pray. When they finished, the uproar outside seemed to be subsiding, and the man again went out to investigate. When he returned he said they were safe. Five armed policemen had stationed themselves in front of the meeting hall and the mob was beginning to disperse. By midnight everything had quieted down, and a grateful group of people went to their homes.

Next morning Dad, assuming that the local police chief had at last received an order from the governor, went down to thank him for the protection he gave. What he found was a puzzled police chief who told him that not only were the five policemen not his men but he had received no telegram from the governor.

Later that day the telegram did arrive. I have it in my possession. Who were the five policemen who stood outside the meeting hall that night? My father always believed that they were angels. Yes, "the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Ps. 34:7).

Donald Ernest Mansell, *New Every Morning*, p. 241. Review and Herald Publishing Association, Copyright 1981.

The White House, President George W. Bush
June 3, 2006
President's Radio Address



Editor's Comment: Just days after the president's address, Congress failed in its vote to preserve the traditional view of marriage as being between one man and one woman. Proponents of the Marriage Amendment vow to continue to work toward its passage until the amendment becomes the law of the land.

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. Next week, the United States Senate will begin debate on a constitutional amendment that defines marriage in the United States as the union of a man and woman. On Monday, I will meet with a coalition of community leaders, constitutional scholars, family and civic organizations, and religious leaders. They're Republicans, Democrats, and Independents who've come together to support this amendment. Today, I want to explain why I support the Marriage Protection Amendment, and why I'm urging Congress to pass it and send it to the states for ratification.

Marriage is the most enduring and important human institution, honored and encouraged in all cultures and by every religious faith. Ages of experience have taught us that the commitment of a husband and a wife to love and to serve one another promotes the welfare of children and the stability of society. Marriage cannot be cut off from its cultural, religious, and natural roots without weakening this good influence on society. Government, by recognizing and protecting marriage, serves the interests of all.

In our free society, people have the right to choose how they live their lives. And in a free society, decisions about such a fundamental social institution as marriage should be made by the people — not by the courts. The American people have spoken clearly on this issue, both through their representatives and at the ballot box. In 1996, Congress approved the Defense of Marriage Act by overwhelming bipartisan majorities in both the House and Senate, and President Clinton signed it into law. And since then, voters in 19 states have approved amendments to their state constitutions that protect the traditional definition of marriage. And today, 45 of the 50 states have either a state constitutional amendment or statute defining marriage as the union of a man and a woman. These amendments and laws express a broad consensus in our country for protecting the institution of marriage.

Unfortunately, activist judges and some local officials have made an aggressive attempt to redefine marriage in recent years. Since 2004, state courts in Washington, California, Maryland, and New York have overturned laws protecting marriage in those states. And in Nebraska, a federal judge overturned a state constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage.

These court decisions could have an impact on our whole nation. The Defense of Marriage Act declares that no state is required to accept another state's definition of marriage. If that act is overturned by activist courts, then marriages recognized in one city or state might have to be recognized as marriages everywhere else. That would mean that every state would have to recognize marriages redefined by judges in Massachusetts or local officials in San Francisco, no matter what their own laws or state constitutions say. This national question requires a national solution, and on an issue of such profound importance, that solution should come from the people, not the courts.

An amendment to the Constitution is necessary because activist courts have left our nation with no other choice. The constitutional amendment that the Senate will consider next week would fully protect marriage from being redefined, while leaving state legislatures free to make their own choices in defining legal arrangements other than marriage. A constitutional amendment is the most democratic solution to this issue, because it must be approved by two-thirds of the House and Senate and then ratified by three-fourths of the 50 state legislatures.

As this debate goes forward, we must remember that every American deserves to be treated with tolerance, respect, and dignity. All of us have a duty to conduct this discussion with civility and decency toward one another, and all people deserve to have their voices heard. A constitutional amendment will put a decision that is critical to American families and American society in the hands of the American people, which is exactly where it belongs. Democracy, not court orders, should decide the future of marriage in America.

Thank you for listening.

Rivers of Living Water

by Doug Ward



Many of the events recorded in the gospel of John occurred during the annual Hebrew festival seasons. John's accounts of these events have much to teach us about the ways in which the festivals direct us to Jesus Christ.

For example, John 7-9 chronicles the last Feast of Tabernacles of Jesus' earthly ministry (see John 7:2). During that festival, Jesus made the following pronouncement:

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, "if any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." (John 7:37-38, KJV)

John goes on to explain in v. 39 that the "water" referred to in v. 37-38 is the Holy Spirit. Jesus was saying that those who believed on him could come to him to receive the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' statements caused great amazement and controversy among his audience (v. 40-53). Some asserted that he must be the Messiah, that great Prophet spoken of by Moses in Deut. 18:15, 18. Officers who had been ordered by religious authorities to arrest Jesus (v. 32) returned to their superiors empty-handed. When asked why they had not seized him, they answered, "No one ever spoke the way this man does." (v. 46, NIV)

Why did Jesus' proclamation in John 7:37-38 elicit such a strong response? To understand the full impact of this famous passage on its original hearers—and its significance for us today—let's take an in-depth look at these verses and their historical and cultural background.

The Water Libation Ceremony

John specifically mentions that Jesus spoke the words of John 7:37-38 on "the last day, that great day of the feast." This was probably the seventh day of the Feast, a day known in Jewish tradition as Hoshana Rabbah (literally the "great Hosanna"). It is also possible that this was the eighth day (see [3]). In any case, commentators agree that Jesus made his statement in the context of the water libation ceremony, a major part of first-century celebrations of the Feast in Jerusalem before the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. This ritual was carried out on

each of the first seven days of the festival (see references[1-6]).

The water libation ceremony began with a priest drawing water from the pool of Siloam in a golden flagon that held about one and a half pints of water. A procession of men and women then accompanied the priest through the south gate of the Temple (which was called the Water Gate) and up the altar ramp. In the procession, people waved the lulab, a bouquet of palm, willow, and myrtle branches, and sang Psalms 113-118. The singing was accompanied by trumpet blasts and the music of reed flutes. The procession circled the altar seven times, and the priest then poured the water from the flagon into the western half of an open-drained, twin-tubbed silver bowl on the south side of the altar. He also poured wine from a silver flagon into the eastern half of that bowl.

One scripture associated with these festivities was Isa. 12:3 ("With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."), and this was indeed a joyous time. It would later be written in the Babylonian Talmud (Sukkah 51 a-b) that "he who has not seen the rejoicing at the place of the Water-Drawing has not seen rejoicing in his life." [2]

The water-drawing celebration was well-known throughout the Jewish world. Some archaeological evidence of this has been found in Cyprus in the form of a six-sided glass bottle, now housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, whose side panels contain pictures of the golden flagon, reed flutes, and other festival symbols. Since fragments of an identical bottle have been found in Jerusalem, and many Jews from the Diaspora traveled to Jerusalem for the festivals (e.g., Acts 2:5, 9-11), it has been speculated that this bottle may have been purchased in Jerusalem by a pilgrim from Cyprus as a first-century Feast of Tabernacles souvenir. Further evidence that the bottle dates from the first century is the fact that one of its panels contains the name of Ennion, a prominent Sidonian glassmaker of the first century [2, p. 117].

The waters of the ceremony held several levels of meaning for first-century feast goers. First of all, the water poured out on the south side of the altar represented rain that the people hoped God would provide for the following year's harvests during the coming rainy season. Prayers for rain were an essential part of

the ceremony. An important scripture in this regard was Psalm 118:25: "Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity." In Hebrew, "save, I beseech" is Hoshana. This verse was the source of the name Hoshana Rabbah as a title for the seventh day of the Feast.

Interestingly, there is apparently another symbol of the festival prayers for rain on one of the six panels of the ancient glass bottle mentioned above: two keys. In Jewish tradition, rain is thought of as a key in the sole possession of God, based on Deut. 28:12: "The Lord shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season...." The keys pictured on the bottle may represent the early and latter rains, for which prayer was made at the Feast of Tabernacles and Passover [2, p. 118]. The presence of these keys on the bottle gives further indication of the importance of prayers for rain at the Feast during the time of Jesus.

Second, the ceremonial water of the Feast symbolized the Holy Spirit. A link between water and the Holy Spirit is implied in the parallel structure of Isaiah 44:3: "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring." When the people prayed for rain at the Feast, they may also have prayed for the rain of the Holy Spirit to fall as was prophesied in Joel 2:28-29.

Third, the waters of the libation ceremony were associated with the waters prophesied to go forth from Jerusalem in the Messianic kingdom. This connection is founded in part upon the fourteenth chapter of Zechariah, which relates the Feast of Tabernacles to the Messianic kingdom (see v. 16-19) and is a traditional part of Jewish festival liturgy. In Zech. 14:8, we read, "And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem...." A second and more detailed source for this symbolism is Ezekiel 47:1-12, which describes a healing river that will flow out from beneath the prophesied future temple.

These second and third aspects of the symbolism of the water libation ceremony—the Holy Spirit and the cleansing waters of Messiah's kingdom—are of course related in the scriptures, for example in Ezekiel 36:25-27, 33:

"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.... Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded."

Further insight into the way these different symbols—rain, the Holy Spirit, and future living waters—fit together in the theology of the water-drawing celebration is available in the third chapter of the tractate Sukkah of the Tosefta (see [3]). The Tosefta (Tosefta literally means "addition") is a collection of rabbinic teachings that expand upon the instruction in the Mishnah. These teachings were probably compiled in written form some two centuries after the time of Jesus, but they are often based on oral traditions that could well have been known to those who heard Jesus' words.

The Tosefta (Sukkah 3:3-9) explains that the name "water gate" for the south gate of the temple and the pouring of the water from the golden flagon on the south side of the altar are derived from Ezekiel 47:1, which says, "The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar." (NIV) In other words, the water poured out in the temple ceremony was meant to symbolize the prophetic waters of Ezekiel 47. The Tosefta also identifies the healing waters of Ezekiel 47 with the living water of Zech. 14:8, and it emphasizes the cleansing function of those waters, citing Zech. 13:1. (In the NIV, Zech. 13:1 says, "On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.")

The Tosefta (Sukkah 3:11-12) also brings out yet another aspect of the symbolism of the water ceremony: its recalling of the miracle of Exodus 17:1-7, in which water came out of the rock at Horeb when Moses struck that rock. The Tosefta refers to those waters as a "river," citing Ps. 78:20 and Ps. 105:41. Grigsby [3, p. 107] adds the interesting fact that one Aramaic paraphrase of Ps. 78:16 (which recounts the miracle at Horeb) refers to the waters that came out of the rock as "rivers of living water."

As feast goers looked back to the miracle of Exodus 17, they simultaneously looked ahead to the Messiah, who they believed would duplicate such miracles. Grigsby [3, p. 107] points out that a rabbinic commentary on Eccl 1:9 ("there is nothing new under the sun") gives the belief in a future water miracle as one example of history repeating itself: "As the first redeemer [i.e., Moses] caused the spring to arise, so the last redeemer [the Messiah] will cause water to rise up."

Two Questions about John 7:38

A knowledge of first-century festival customs can lend insights into two questions about John 7:38 that have often been posed by scholars. First, to what Scripture was Jesus referring in John 7:38? In our discussion of the water libation ceremony, we have looked at several candidates, including Zech. 14:8, Ezek. 47:1-12, Isa. 44:3, and Ps. 78:16. Given that Jewish teach-

Continued on Page 15

Psalm 13

by *Julia Benson*

Psalm 13 is my favorite psalm. I don't know why. It just is. It both raises and answers questions that are in my heart.

Questions:

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? Sometimes I wonder when Christ will finally come. Can I hold out that long? Sometimes I feel discouraged because I just don't think so.

How long will you hide your face from me? It sometimes seems like I am always just out of reach of my Lord. Can't I for once, just for a second, see him clearly?

How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and everyday have sorrow in my heart? Will I ever have freedom from sin? Will my misdeeds always haunt me?

How long will my enemy triumph over me? Will Satan ever leave me alone? I just need a break from his constant attacks.

Look on me and answer, O Lord my God. Please, Father, please answer my prayers. Please deliver me from this world of sin.

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; Why can't I have the strength of Christ to ward off Satan? Why can't I have the strength of Christ to keep me out of trouble?

But I trust in your unfailing love;

My heart rejoices in your salvation.

I will sing to the Lord,

For he has been good to me.

Answers:

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? There is hope. Christ will come again. There is no doubt about that. Until then, he is sustaining me. I can rely on prayer, praise, love, fellowship, and the Bible.

How long will you hide your face from me? Until he comes to redeem the earth, I can see him anytime I want. I just have to look for him. His word helps me to see him. I see him when I feel the tug at my heart when my daughter hugs me. I see him when I witness the compassion shown from one human being to another. I see him when I drink in the splendor of his creation.

How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and everyday have sorrow in my heart? I can have freedom from sin. By following God's law, I am free from the shackles of oppression bound to me by sin. By my human nature, I will slip, but I have Christ's promise of forgiveness. All I have to do is ask and it is in the past and forgotten.

How long will my enemy triumph over me? As long as I let him. But, if I have Christ in my heart, I am protected.

Look on me and answer, O Lord my God. There is always an answer. I just need to train myself to hear it.

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; If I just keep my eyes on the light of Christ I will be fine. I will have everlasting life. What a concept! What a gift. What a joy.

But I trust in your unfailing love;

My heart rejoices in your salvation.

I will sing to the Lord,

For he has been good to me.

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.

ers typically brought together several related scriptures to explain a point or principle, it is likely that Jesus had a number of passages in mind, including these four.

Second, from whose belly would the living waters flow—the believer's or Jesus'? The explanation given most often is that the waters flow from the believer in a new, spirit-led life. This is the reading that is implied in the KJV and given explicitly in the NIV. It is supported by John 4:14, in which Jesus says to the Samaritan woman at the well, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (KJV)

It is worth noting that the Greek word for "springing" in John 4:14 is the same as the one used to describe the lame man "leaping" in Acts 3:8 when he was healed by Peter and John [6]. The words of John 7:38 and John 4:14 picture the Holy Spirit as a Producer of dynamic, life-giving results in the lives of Jesus' disciples.

The view that Jesus is saying that the living waters would flow from the believer is also supported by the punctuation given in the oldest known punctuated manuscripts [4, p. 160].

On the other hand, there is another reading (used in the NEB and Jerusalem Bible and mentioned in a footnote in the NIV) that is based on a different punctuation of the text. In this version, Jesus' invitation is rendered, "If any man thirsts, let him come to me; and let him drink, who believes in me. As the scripture said, from his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

Here "his" could be interpreted as a reference to Jesus himself.

Those who support this second reading point out that it is consistent with the thrust of John 7:37-39, which pictures Jesus as the giver and the believer as the recipient of the Spirit. It has also been suggested that v. 38 might look ahead to John's account of the Crucifixion, where John mentions that "one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water." (John 19:34, KJV)

Such a connection fits well with the customs of the water libation ceremony, where water and wine were poured before the altar, and with the typology of the miracle of Exodus 17. Just as "living water" came from the rock at Horeb when this rock was struck, so water mixed with the cleansing, purifying blood of Jesus' sacrifice came out from his pierced "belly" at the crucifixion. In addition, a link between John 7:38 and John 19:34 might help explain the statement in John 7:39 that "the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified."

Each interpretation has its merits. We note that in either case, Jesus Christ is the ultimate Source of the Spirit, the One to whom we must come to receive this life-giving "water."

The Implications of John 7:37-38

Having investigated the rich symbolism of the water libation ceremony of the Feast of Tabernacles, we are now in a position to grasp the great impact that Jesus' invitation of John 7:37-38 would have had on its original audience. Consider the following implications of John 7:37-38:

Jesus is the Messiah. In the first century, the Feast was a time of great messianic hope and fervor. The water celebration brought to mind prophecies of the Messianic kingdom like Zechariah 14 and Ezekiel 47. Another messianic reference that would have been on the minds of Jesus' listeners was Psalm 118:26 ("blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord"), which was sung during the festivities [1]. By proclaiming Himself as the Bringer of the prophesied "living waters," Jesus was implying that He was the Messiah, the one who would follow in Moses' footsteps and perform a new water miracle.

Jesus is God. In Jeremiah 2:13, God referred to himself as "the fountain of living waters." By calling himself the source of living waters, Jesus was indirectly asserting his divinity.

Jesus is the Incarnation of the future eschatological hope in the present. The healing, life-giving waters of Zech. 14 and Ezek. 47 were prophesied to come in a glorious future time. By announcing the availability of those waters, Jesus was saying that the first stages of the kingdom had arrived with Him.

Jesus is the new Temple. Jesus had previously referred to his body as a temple (John 2:19-22), and He made this connection again in John 7:37-38. The living waters of Ezekiel 47 were to emanate from the prophesied temple, and Jesus identified Himself with the temple by saying that He was the Source of living waters. (For further development of this symbolism, see Rev.21:22; 22:1.)

Jesus is the foundation stone and cornerstone. In Jewish tradition, Israel was the center of the world, Jerusalem was the center of Israel, the temple was the center of Jerusalem, the Holy Place was the center of the temple, the Holy of Holies was the center of the Holy Place, and the foundation stone under the ark of the covenant was the center of the Holy of Holies. The creation of the world was said to have begun at the site of that stone, and it was believed that the prophesied living waters would spring from it [4,5]. Just as Jesus identified Himself with the temple in John 7:37-38, He also identified Himself with its foundation stone. He was the pierced rock from which living waters would flow (Ps. 78:20; John 19:34), the stone that would be

rejected and become the chief cornerstone (Ps. 118:22-23; Matt. 21:42, 1 Peter 2:7).

Jesus' words on that last day of the Feast were remarkable. So, too, was the way in which he delivered those words. It was typical for Jewish teachers in those days to instruct their disciples from a seated position. By standing up and speaking in a loud voice (John 7:37), Jesus indicated that he was making an important announcement [6].

It is no wonder that Jesus' listeners marveled at what he said! In the brief statement recorded in John 7:37-38, Jesus revealed himself as the embodiment of all the prayers, hopes and longings that were part of the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in first-century Jerusalem.

As we celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles today, awaiting the glorious return of our Messiah, we can think each year about this wonderful symbolism and give thanks for what it means in our lives. As we strive daily to advance His Kingdom, we can be renewed and

empowered by the living waters of the Spirit which he offers to us freely.

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Sabbath Morning Companion

Brother Nelson

Let me tell you about Brother Nelson. When I first met him, my family and I were "between churches". We had wrangled an invitation to a church's potluck, and were enjoying the good food and kind people when I noticed Brother Nelson. He was a beehive of activity, first making sure the trash barrels had fresh bags in them, hauling out the trash if they were full, then making sure everyone had enough to eat, or seeing if anyone needed another drink, or sweeping up a spill on the floor. He managed to stop long enough to say a few words with everyone, including me, never once losing the smile from his face.

Finally, after everyone had gone through the line, Brother Nelson picked up a plate and flatware and took his helpings from whatever remained in the serving line.

My family and I had not been to services that day, but as we enjoyed the company around us, out of curiosity and courtesy I asked who the pastor was. They pointed to him, and it was Brother Nelson.

Many reading this article come from a church tradition where a minister serving his congregation is the norm, and therefore Brother Nelson's activities are no surprise to you. But some of us come from a background where such things were simply not done.

I love the King James Version of the Bible, but it surely has its weaknesses. One such weakness is illustrated by this passage, as it reads in the King James:

"Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority

upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister." (Matt 20:25-26 KJV)

If we read this as translated, it implies that the greatest among us should be our ministers, and that concept has led some people to look upon certain types of service as being beneath the ministry. After all, aren't the ministers supposed to be greatest among us?

But Brother Nelson, who as far as I know uses only the King James Version, understands the intent of the aforementioned passage. Here is what it says in the New King James Version:

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant."

Put differently, Jesus' intent is the exact opposite of how some ministers I know treat their congregations. As Jesus himself said, "For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves" (Luke 22:27 NKJV). In the intervening years I have come to know Brother Nelson as both a brother and a friend, and he would be the first to tell you that if Jesus could live a life as one who came to serve, then so can he. No greater love has a man than this, to lay down his life for a friend. And that even means emptying a trashcan so the other guy can enjoy the potluck.

—Lenny Cacchio

“Secret believers are everywhere” in Iran

Thousands of Iranian Muslims have come to Christ through Christian TV satellite broadcasts. Most of these new believers are young and passionate about their faith, but out of fear of persecution, they remain “secret believers” who are not connected to a church or cell group.

Nevertheless, as believers boldly share the Gospel with those they meet, they often discover the “secret believers” all around them. Following are testimonies from such surprise encounters.

In a Beauty Salon

“Recently I . . . started sharing the Gospel with my hairdresser, and when she found out that I am a Christian, she said she had come to Christ several months earlier through Christian TV programs. With tears in her eyes, she shared that her life was transformed. After her conversion, she abandoned prostitution to work in that beauty salon. I invited her to our house church, which she gladly accepted. Now she is a regular and vibrant member of our house church.”

On the Train

“[On the train], I started telling [the family in front of me] about Jesus. . . . Their eyes lit up with joy. They shared with me how they have come to faith in Jesus through Christian TV programs. They said that they were hungry to learn more about the Bible, so they invited me to go to their home and teach them the principles of the Christian faith.

Within a week, I was in their home ready to teach. However, they had invited some of their Muslim relatives to hear my teaching. That night I shared the Gospel and four of them came to know Christ. We are now starting a house church in their home.”

In a Taxi

“Secret believers are everywhere. I take a taxi to work daily. In the period of just one month, . . . two taxi drivers . . . shared how they have come to Christ through TV. One of them had been miraculously healed from cancer . . . [and] had a cross hanging in his taxi. When I asked him, ‘Aren’t you afraid to be persecuted?’ he answered, ‘I just share with my passengers how Jesus has healed my cancer. Nobody can argue with that!’”

At School

“Last week, I was sharing Christ with one of my friends on the university campus. Her friend . . . stopped to listen. Knowing she would be late for her class, I told her, ‘Go to class and I will talk to you later.’ But she was spiritually so hungry that she said, ‘I would rather miss my class and listen to you.’ I shared the Gospel with her and then she prayed to receive Jesus.”

(Source: Open Doors, 6-20-2006)

5. *The geological strata prove organic evolution.*

Actually, nothing could be further from the truth. If the strata prove anything, it is that evolution has never taken place. What we observe in the strata are fully-formed animal and plant species. We do not see half-lizard-half-bird species, but we do see lizards and birds embedded in the rock layers as fully-formed lizards and birds.

I use the example of lizards and birds because evolutionary biologists contend that birds evolved from reptiles. However, nowhere in the geological strata do we find any evidence of this. Science required evidence, and there is none.

When fossils are found in rock layers, it is most often the result of alluvial sedimentation. What occurs in every flood event that causes these deposits is a natural sifting of sediment. Small particles settle to the bottom and larger particles are on top. The same is true of the animal and plant species that are caught in the watery catastrophe. Because of this natural phenomenon, we cannot assume that "older and less complicated" species are found in the lower layers of rock. It is very possible that small and large animals were deposited together in the same flood, and that the smaller plants and animals sifted to the bottom of the layers. Where a fossil is found in the strata proves nothing about the age of the fossil—only that the layering of sediment is exactly the same as can be observed on any river shore or beach in the world.

6. *We can date the age of fossils by looking at the surrounding strata.*

One of the assumptions of evolutionists is that geological strata in places like the Grand Canyon or Williston Basin in North Dakota can be used as a measuring stick for the evolution of plant and animal species. What is generally not revealed in geology or biology text books is that any animal or plant species is likely to be found resting conformably (i.e., without upheaval or disruption) in any set of rock layers anywhere in the world. In other words, trilobites might be found at the bottom of a geological column in the Grand Canyon. In another part of the world, or even in the state of Arizona for that matter, trilobites might be found resting conformably in what are considered to be the "newer" layers in the column.⁽³⁾ There is no such thing as a geological column that can be used as a standard by which to measure the likelihood of "old" or "recently evolved" species of plants or animals. The truth is, the geological column has been pieced together from exposed layers and core drilling from around the world. It is a patchwork.

In actual fact, the strata are "dated" by the fossils contained in them. You read that correctly; the strata are dated by the fossils, and the fossils are dated by the

strata. This kind of circular reasoning is very tricky, but biologists and geologists have been using it for years to "prove" their case for evolution. It has been a winning strategy for a long time, but many biologists and geologists are beginning to question its validity (of course, the average Joe on the street could spot such faulty reasoning in less than the 100 plus years that it has taken scientists). As one paleontologist states:

"It is a problem not easily solved by the classic methods of stratigraphical paleontology, as obviously we will land ourselves immediately in an impossible circular argument if we say, firstly that a particular lithology [theory of rock strata] is synchronous on the evidence of its fossils, and secondly that the fossils are synchronous on the evidence of the lithology" (Derek V. Ager, *The Nature of the Stratigraphic Record*, 1973, p. 62).

"The procession of life was never witnessed, it is inferred. The vertical sequence of fossils is thought to represent a process because the enclosing rocks are interpreted as a process. The rocks do date the fossils, but the fossils date the rocks more accurately. Stratigraphy cannot avoid this kind of reasoning, if it insists on using only temporal concepts, because circularity is inherent in the derivation of time scales" (O'Rourke, J.E., "Pragmatism Versus Materialism in Stratigraphy," *American Journal of Science*, vol. 276, 1976, p. 53).

"Paleontologists cannot operate this way. There is no way simply to look at a fossil and say how old it is unless you know the age of the rocks it comes from....And this poses something of a problem: If we date the rocks by the fossils, how can we then turn around and talk about the pattern of evolutionary change through time in the fossil record?" (Eldridge, Niles, *Time Frames*, 1985, p. 52).

In addition to the problem of circular reasoning, there is the dilemma of rapid fossilization. Specifically, what do paleontologists do with fossilized trees that protrude through layers of rock that are supposedly millions of years apart in age? It has always been assumed that fossilization required long periods of time, but that myth was shattered with the eruption of Mt. St. Helens in May of 1980. Since that catastrophe, scientists have discovered that many fossils formed within months or a few years as a direct result of the eruption. In addition to trees poking through "millions of years" of strata, other interesting modern fossils have been found, such as a cowboy boot and a modern human finger.

7. *Evolution is "scientific."*

Evolution is not observable, it is not measurable, and it is not repeatable—three absolutely necessary ingredients for any theory to be deemed scientific. To be scientific, evolution must be based on theories that are falsifiable, which means that such theories can be repeated and disproved (if false) by others. The assump-

tions for any experiment cannot be rigged to lead only to the conclusion that the theory is true (which evolutionists have done). It has to allow the scientist the option of concluding that the theory is false.

The scientific method has four steps:

1. Observation and description of a phenomenon or group of phenomena.
2. Formulation of a hypothesis to explain the phenomenon.
3. Use of the hypothesis to predict the existence of other phenomena, or to predict quantitatively the results of new observations.
4. Performance of experimental tests of the predictions by several independent experimenters and properly performed experiments.

If the experiments bear out the hypothesis, it may come to be regarded as a theory or law of nature. It is often said in science that theories can never be proved, only disproved.

What makes evolution unscientific is that it cannot be tested. Some may object to this statement by saying that we can observe evolution by looking at the rocks and fossils in the Grand Canyon and many other places. The problem with that objection is that evolution, as it is defined, is not rocks and fossils, it is a process of the mutation of one species into another that supposedly continues to this day.

Since any hypothesis has to be based on observation, where can we observe the process of evolutionary mutations taking place? We can't, because they are not taking place. In actual fact, if evolution were true, we should see many more transitional (intermediate) species of plants and animals than we see fully-formed species, yet we see none. We do not see them in the fossil layers; we do not see them around us in living "half-species." They do not exist.

However, evolutionists are not even looking at the process of evolution. They are looking at what they assume are the results of some hitherto unobserved process that they call organic evolution. They assume the results of that process are recorded in the fossil record. Their theory is based on two mutually supportive (and faulty) assumptions: that the fossils date the rocks, and the rocks, in turn, date the fossils. It cannot be both. You have to pick one or the other and test it.

Conclusion

It was not possible to cover all the baseless claims that evolutionists adduce to try to convince the public that God is not the Creator of all things, and that man is really not the final answer to all moral and spiritual questions. One of the problems with evolution that I did not even address in this article is how our world, once full of nothing but dead matter (at least according to evolutionary thought) came to produce all the rich variety of life that we see all around us. Nowhere do we see this

taking place, yet evolutionists tell us that it happened not just once, but an almost infinite number of times. Nonetheless, like macro evolution, we cannot go to any spot on earth to observe it for ourselves.

I realize that many Christians are intimidated by scientists and the mass of data they display in favor of evolution. What is seldom publicized is that in all fields of science, there is very little agreement on how evolution supposedly took place. We are constantly told that we are more than foolish if we do not believe their story of our origins. Who are the real fools? Those who see that there is no evidence for evolution or those who have wasted their lives pursuing the fool's gold of a world full of dreams, myths, and vapors that has no originator and no source of life?

There is only one principle that evolutionists live by—that evolution is true. It is to them an article of faith that colors all of their conclusions. It is indeed a religion, not science.

End Notes

1. The use of the peppered moth as an example of natural selection that supports the theory of evolution has come under fire in recent years. *Sunday Telegraph* journalist Robert Matthews wrote:

"Evolution experts are quietly admitting that one of their most cherished examples of Darwin's theory, the rise and fall of the peppered moth, is based on a series of scientific blunders. Experiments using the moth in the Fifties and long believed to prove the truth of natural selection are now thought to be worthless, having been designed to come up with the 'right' answer." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creationism_and_the_peppered_moth)

2. Cosmology: The Study of the Universe
"Cosmology is the scientific study of the large scale properties of the Universe as a whole. It endeavors to use the scientific method to understand the origin, evolution and ultimate fate of the entire Universe. Like any field of science, cosmology involves the formation of theories or hypotheses about the Universe which make specific predictions for phenomena that can be tested with observations. Depending on the outcome of the observations, the theories will need to be abandoned, revised or extended to accommodate the data. The prevailing theory about the origin and evolution of our Universe is the so-called Big Bang theory...." (http://map.gsfc.nasa.gov/m_uni.html)
3. "conformable"

Successive beds or strata are conformable when they lie one upon another in unbroken and parallel order and no disturbance or denudation took place at the locality while they were being deposited. If one set of beds rests upon the eroded or the upturned edges of another, showing a change of conditions or a break between the formations of the two sets of rocks, they are unconformable. (*Dictionary of Mining, Mineral, and Related Terms*, <http://www.maden.hacettepe.edu.tr/dmmrt/index.html>)

There are some preachers and writers who have that special communication gift that makes their messages easy to receive. Some even have something worthwhile to say. Every speaker has a responsibility to aid the audience by making his message easy to receive. He can do that by mastering the skills of his profession. He owes it to his audience—and to God before whom he has willingly committed himself to be a servant of God's people.

But most importantly the preacher must have something truthful and important to say. We can get style and entertainment from a host of fine novelists and movie stars, but what the world needs is the Wisdom of God revealed by Jesus. The Gospel of the Kingdom of God summarizes Yahweh's grand plan for mankind and makes clear the way to participate in it. In an ideal church/world we would have preachers expert in the Word of God and possessing gifts of communication to make every listener attentive and responsive to the message.

Alas, we have no ideal churches, no perfect preachers preaching perfect doctrine with perfect style and delivery. Nor do we have perfect consumers of sermons and articles. My purpose in this article has been to assist us imperfect consumers of sermons and articles to get more value from them; to develop an objective mindset to sift wheat from chaff; to be sufficiently open-minded to be challenged to change behaviors, beliefs, opinions, and correct erroneous understanding. That's a big bite to take for an article, but I'll try not to choke.

Dull Ears

Preachers and writers have a responsibility to have something worthwhile to say and the ability to say it effectively. But our emphasis here is on why some good sermons and articles end up given to the wind, why they have no effect upon those of us reading or listening to them. Thomas Jefferson said to his friend Dr. Waterhouse that the big abusers of tobacco and booze would just tune out his message and leave him talking, as it were, to the wind. Why is that so?

God gave Isaiah the difficult task of preaching to people who would not listen.

Go and tell this people: Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving. Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes... (6:9-10).

Jesus quoted this passage in his parable of the sower. Spiritual deafness and blindness are chronic problems not just for ancient Israel or the unconverted world, but even among those of us who warm the pews and subscribe to religious publications.

I've been in the pulpit for thousands of messages and in the pews for even more. I know the syndrome

from both ends. For almost 50 years I've conducted counseling sessions beyond count. At times I've come close to concluding that they were all a waste of time. Folks just ignored advice that they agreed was right and biblical, walked out and continued in the troublesome behaviors and attitudes that brought them in to begin with. Then, thank God, from time to time I would be shocked and encouraged beyond measure with heartening results of a marriage salvaged from the rocks, a bitter dispute between brethren healed, or a plaguing sin faced and overcome. Not all my efforts were to the wind.

I also looked in the mirror and saw my own reluctance to change and realized that the battle for righteousness and biblical truth was difficult and long. One cannot quit or give up on oneself or on others. The human condition is common to us all and moving Godward in life is a continual struggle against sin, apathy, error, and the entanglements of life.

But there isn't going to be much growth into the image of God if our ears are dull and our eyes dim. Our spiritual growth will be sluggish or even worse, stagnant. What can we do to become keen of hearing and sharp of eye?

The Objective and Open Mind

Plugged ears and patched eyes will cut us off from the Word and Light God continually provides. All too frequently my wife JoAn and I will drop a glass on the kitchen floor. Immediately out comes the broom and dust pan to sweep up our mess. Being from Arkansas, JoAn likes to be in her bare feet all the time, so it is very important to sweep up all the glass. Clear glass is a special problem because, look as hard as you like, all the scattered slivers don't reveal themselves until later, and I'm not talking about those we step on. An hour or day later I come into the same room from another direction with light coming from another angle, and low and behold, I see a shining speck of glass I couldn't previously spot.

Bible study is like that. A fresh approach, new light, coming from a different angle will reveal new truth previously passed over. That same objectivity can be brought to the reading of an article or listening to a sermon. Too often we blind ourselves to the possibility of receiving new spiritual insight, wisdom, truth...light. We judge the facts by what we want them to mean. We lazily trudge down the set paths of "what we've always believed."

One of the reasons for the success of detective programs like Monk, CSI, Agatha Christie's Poirot mystery series, etc., is that these detectives don't come at the evidence with predetermined, traditional, conventional approaches. They ask questions of the evidence and let it speak and tell the story of what happened. Asking questions of Scripture is the best way to learn what it has to tell us. Look at all the facts before coming to a

conclusion and by all means don't come to the facts, the text, with a predetermined conclusion.

A major reason for wrong doctrine or erroneously understood doctrine is how respectfully the whole body of facts is considered. One church teaches homosexuality is a sin and condemned by Scripture; another says Scripture teaches no such thing—that passages which seem to condemn it are really misunderstood or irrelevant. Two different approaches to the same body of facts can yield two different conclusions.

The Six Blind Men of Indostan

Speaking of different conclusions from the same body of facts, consider the story of six blind men's encounter with an elephant as told by the American poet John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887).

*It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind
The first approached the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! But the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"
The Second, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, "Ho! What have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"
The Third approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk with his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"
The Fourth reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee.
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he;
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"
The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"
The Sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Than, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,*

*"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"
And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!
Moral:
So oft in theologic wars,
The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean,
And prate about an Elephant
Not one of them has seen!*

The world is full of spiritually blind men from Indostan arguing over what they only partly see. We have no excuse to grope in blindness trying to discover the will of God. There is no excuse for us to be so dull of truth that it becomes but a sermon to the wind.

Through the grace of God we can have our eyes opened to see God's truth in all its shining clarity and moral purity. God wants to give us what we seek, but it takes effort on our part. Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). We dare not let his words become to us a sermon to the wind.

End Notes

1. Taken from the book *The Evolution of Christianity—Twelve Crises* that Shaped the Church, Marshall D. Johnson, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005, p 155. Jefferson was probably the most religiously engaged of all American presidents writing extensively on doctrinal matters and involving himself in the hot Christological debates of the time. He wrote two books on Jesus: *The Philosophy of Jesus* in 1804, but it has been lost, and *The Life and Morals of Jesus*, sometimes called the Jefferson Bible. Jefferson was also enraptured by the beauty of the Psalms. The rest of the letter I quoted from above continued with an attack on the doctrine of the Trinity, Athanasius (the driving force behind the adoption of the doctrine in the fourth century), and John Calvin who perpetuated it into the Protestant world. He accused them of "teaching a counter-religion." Jefferson was a unitarian stating in the same letter that "there is one only God, and He all perfect."
2. John 17:17
3. John 18:37-38
4. See *Inductive Preaching—Helping People Listen*, Ralph L. Lewis, Crossway Books, 1983.
5. Isaiah 6:9-10.
6. Mt 13:14-15; Mk 4:12; Lk 8:10; see also Rom 11:7-10, 25.

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

Pakistan - Tuesday June 27, 2006

“Blasphemy” Prisoner Wins Persecution Prize

‘Forgotten’ Christian serves eighth year waiting for appeal hearing.



June 27 (Compass Direct) – A Pakistani Christian has won a religious persecution award after spending eight years in prison on contested charges that he damaged a sign containing verses from the Quran. The International Society for Human Rights (IGFM) honored Ranjha Masih, still serving his life sentence, with the newly established Stephen Endowment award in recognition of Masih’s “steadfastness in maintaining his Christian beliefs.” Masih was unable to accept the award in person at the IGFM annual conference in Frankfurt, Hesse state, Germany on May 6. The prizewinner remained behind bars thousands of miles away in Faisalabad Central Jail, seemingly forgotten by Pakistan’s legal system. Three years after filing an appeal before the provincial High Court, the Christian has not been given a hearing.

Pakistan - Friday June 23, 2006

Woman Raped for Leaving Islam

Christian family forced into hiding to protect young mother’s convert identity.



June 23 (Compass Direct) – Attacked by her own family, one Muslim’s decision to convert to Christianity highlights the precarious situation of Muslims in Pakistan who leave their faith. Sehar Muhammad Shafi, 24, has fled her home city of Karachi with her husband and two young daughters after being attacked and raped for changing her faith. Shafi told Compass that her family lives with the fear of being discovered. “My husband is keen to get a marketing job,” Shafi said. “But I don’t want him to do something that open, where he will be known.” Though returning to Islam would seemingly solve many of Shafi’s problems, the Christian woman said that is not an option. “It is not a joke to change religions,” she said. “We’ve fallen in love with Jesus, so how could we betray him?”

Nigeria - Tuesday June 20, 2006

Church in Jos Faces Constant Threats, Damage

Christian outpost remains in Muslim area five years after violence erupted.



June 20 (Compass Direct) – For the Gangare area congregation of the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) in this central Nigerian city, the first Saturday in June brought yet another difficult day of fending off Muslim opposition. Church members were trying to erect a protective fence around the church when a large number of Muslims on June 3 stormed the facility and forcibly halted the work. Previously Muslims had built a house on part of the land belonging to the church. The Christians took them to court, which ruled in favor of the church. “To avoid a situation that will ignite a conflict between us and the Muslims, we had to stop the work,” church elder Dauda Mshelia told Compass. “Even now, there are plans by the Muslims to attack us anytime we are in the church and to burn the sanctuary – that is why you see the police keeping watch over the church.” Church members are well acquainted with fierce opposition; Muslims destroyed the church’s original building after conflict erupted into widespread violence in 2001.

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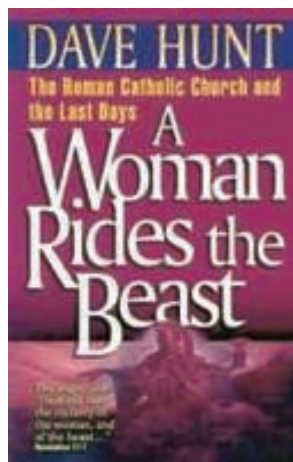


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