


The Sabbath Sentinel

July–August 2007



**"The eyes are the window
to the soul."**

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

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

The Sabbath Sentinel

July-August 2007 Volume 58, No. 4 Issue 526

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The 16th century proverb, “The eyes are the window of the soul,” is undoubtedly an adaptation of Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:22-23, “The light of the body is the eye. Therefore if your eye is sound, your whole body shall be full of light. But if your eye is evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” (MKJV)

See our article on page 16, “The Miracle of the Eye.”

NOTICE: Our new BSA e-mail address is biblesabbath@comcast.net

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The “Right” Kind of Worship



What kind of worship service is the “right” kind of worship service? Ah, the age-old question!

I recently ran into a friend whom I had not seen for several years. We passed some time reminiscing and bringing each other up-to-date on mutual friends and our families. Then we got into the subject that he couldn’t wait to talk about — his new church. He and I had attended the same small church for several years until we moved to a different church that had a lot more activities for our children. My friend continued to attend the small church, but eventually realized that he was having to fight with himself each week to attend the services. He believed that he needed to be with other Christians on the Sabbath, but found no joy whatsoever in attending his church.

Then he came across a church that was started by a former Baptist minister, who through prayer and study had come to realize that the Sabbath and God’s laws were still valid. Now, each Sabbath is like a renewal for my friend. Instead of forcing himself to attend Sabbath services, he can’t wait to go and join his friends, some of whom were part of his old church. The sense of fellowship he now has with the members of his congregation is like a breath of fresh air.

Is this not how we all should feel about the churches we attend on Sabbath? There are weeks when my wife and I are exhausted from our work, and all we want is to rest on the Sabbath, but we always look forward to seeing others at church who share our faith. We talk to them, we share each other’s burdens, and we pray for them.

So, what is the “right” kind of worship service? For sure, it is one that brings a sense of “refreshing” to the members of the congregation. But, what that means to one person is not at all the same as what it means to another. I can’t count the number of times I have heard, “I like the old hymns” while someone else will say, “Why can’t we get some contemporary music in this church? The old stuff is just stale.”

I guess the most important thing to remember is why we are come together to worship in the first place. We come into the presence of our Father to be taught at the feet of his Son, Jesus Christ. Being taught doesn’t always mean reading from the Bible and becoming experts in biblical doctrine. It can mean learning how to praise God with joy even in the

midst of trials. It often means giving comfort to the sick and wounded. It means being at one with our Father, his Son, and with our brothers and sisters in Christ. As King David put it in Psalm 133, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

I have come to the conclusion over the years that at least for now, God is allowing us Christians a wide variety of options in our worship. I remember when a pastor friend came from Kenya to the U.S. and attended services with us (the same church my previously mentioned friend and I attended together). We were excited to have him stay with us, but after he spoke to our church, he wasn’t sure whether the people in the congregation were dead or alive because there was almost no response, positive or negative, to his sermon or his ministry that covers several countries in East Africa. He was busy traveling through jungles, planting new churches, confronting witch doctors, and, in general, doing the work of Matthew 28:19-20, but most of the congregation didn’t see anything noteworthy about this work of the gospel. I tell you the truth; this is a church that is dying, not growing. For worship to be true and meaningful, there has to be rejoicing among the brethren at hearing that men and women in Africa or next door are being turned from darkness to the light of the kingdom of God’s dear Son.

I marvel that Christians become hostile with each other over the type of music used for congregational worship. I certainly have my own preferences, but when someone sings or plays an instrument in praise to our Creator, how can I say that his type of music is “wrong” for worship?

I have no “quick fix” for those wrestling with the subject of how to present the “right” type of worship service to the congregation. I only have this to offer: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:29-32).

—Kenneth Ryland

The Perfect Prayer

by *Kenneth Westby*



One could rightly say that any prayer that God listens to, likes, and most importantly, answers, is a “perfect prayer.” How does one go about praying such prayers?

A little girl told her mother that her brother had set traps to catch poor, harmless birds. The mother asked if she had done anything about it.

“Oh, yes,” the girl replied, “I prayed that his traps might not catch the birds.”

“Anything else?”

“Yes, then I prayed that God would keep the birds from getting into the traps.”

“Was that all?”

“Then I went and kicked the traps all to pieces.”

The little girl answered her own two prayers with one simple action. She eventually acted on the proven principle: don’t expect God to do what you are perfectly capable of doing for yourself. Even when we need God’s blessing on our efforts (“give us our daily bread”) he expects us to go out and work for it. But prayer is much more than making requests of God.

Prayer is where heaven and earth overlap; prayer is where the creature calls upon his Creator. Prayer is mutual; God and we meet to address what is most important to us. Often our requests are beyond the scope of any specific action on our part (“deliver us from the evil one” or “please heal my sick child” or “please protect my husband on his trip”) and depend on divine attention and action. Yet prayer is more about God than it is about us.

The disciples of Jesus often saw him go off to pray and on a few occasions heard his prayers. Quite obviously he was in close contact with God as his wise words and spectacular miracles continually demonstrated. The disciples knew Jesus’ prayers were real and effective, unlike the shallow or empty show-prayers common among the religiously pious.

Teach Us to Pray

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1).

Clearly, the disciples had been discussing this among themselves, and here was the perfect occasion to ask for help. Don’t we all need guidance on

how to pray? I do. It is not a natural activity to talk to an unseen heavenly Being. How do we address God? What do we say? How do we say it? Then what? Apparently John the Baptist had done basic schooling with his disciples on how to pray and now Jesus’ disciples were ready for instruction. They wanted, and needed, a form of words from which they could learn and use.

Jesus promptly answered their request by giving them a model prayer, the so-called “Lord’s Prayer.” It is not so much Jesus’ own prayer (John 17 is just that) but an example to all who want to talk with God. I call it the “perfect prayer” as it is given by a God’s perfect Son and perfectly outlines how imperfect sons and daughters of God should converse with their heavenly Father. We must look at it line by line and then apply what we learn to make our prayers “perfect prayers.”

Here is the “perfect prayer” in its composite form uniting the versions found in Matthew 6:9-15 and Luke 11:2-4. It should be noted that the doxology at the conclusion, “For thine is the kingdom...” (using the form from the commonly recited and sung Lord’s Prayer) is not found in the two gospel examples, but does reflect an ancient tradition and follows doxologies frequently used elsewhere in the New Testament.

Our Father in heaven

Hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come,

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts, as we too have forgiven our debtors.

Do not bring us to the time of trial,

But rescue us from the evil one.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,

Now and forever. Amen.

(A composite translation by New Testament scholar, N. T. Wright)

Continued on page 19

The Bible Sabbath Association's

Essay Scholarship Contest Winners for 2007

First Place Winner

Megan O'Rourke

Megan is the oldest child of Brian and Carrie O'Rourke. There is not a time in her life when Megan cannot recall keeping the Sabbath. In recent years, the Sabbath has become positively her favorite day of the week. Megan plans to attend Bryan College in Dayton, Tennessee, this fall. She is thrilled about her future at this Christian institution, and plans to pursue a major in Biology and a minor in Counseling Psychology.



A Time for Rest, a Time for God

by Megan O'Rourke

As a young child, the Sabbath meant one vitally important thing to me: pancake day. It was our family tradition that my father would make pancakes for breakfast on Saturday mornings. For that reason, I looked forward to Sabbath mornings with great anticipation. Much has changed since I was a young child, however. My reasons for looking forward to and enjoying the Sabbath are very different from what they once were. My relationship with God has matured, as well as my understanding of the Sabbath. Mark 2:27 ("The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath,") has played a key role in helping me to understand God's purposes for the Sabbath. Now that I finally understand the meaning of Christ's words in Mark 2:27, the Sabbath has taken on a whole new meaning for me. Here are the three main things that Mark 2:27 has taught me: number one, the Sabbath was meant to be a gift, not a burden; number two, the Sabbath was made with a specific purpose in mind; and, number three, God is much smarter than I am.

Keeping the Sabbath is not rocket science. Yet, as a child, that might as well have been my philosophy. The Sabbath seemed to represent only a list of activities that I could or could not participate in (e.g., going to church was mandatory and television was off limits). For me, the Sabbath was synonymous with "rules" and "restrictions." That may be the way that many Sunday-keepers view the Sabbath. Yet Mark 2:27 sheds some clarifying and freedom-giving light on the subject. Once you realize that the Sabbath was created by God for man, the Sabbath takes on an entirely different meaning. Mark 2:27 emphasizes the fact that man was created before the Sabbath, and that the Sabbath was created specifically for man. The truth is, the Sabbath is one of God's greatest, and most often overlooked, gifts to mankind. What kind of gift is it? As Mark Buchanan observes in his book, *Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom In The Rhythms Of Rest*, "The gift of the Sabbath is the gift of abundant time." For many Sabbath-keepers, myself included, Saturday is the only day of the week when we are free to be more concerned with being than doing. The Sabbath gives us an opportunity to spend time in God's presence, to be still enough to hear His voice, to take the time necessary to truly fellowship with other believers, and to rest. When we view God's Sabbath as a gift, as His invitation to take a much-needed pause from our hectic lives, the Sabbath takes on a very appealing aspect. Yes, it is important to honor God by observing the Sabbath in the spirit "of the way in which He has commanded us" (Deuteronomy 5:14, Jeremiah 17:22); but that becomes easier when we stop thinking of the Sabbath as a set of rules and accept it as a gift from our Creator. Like the biblical command to pray, we are commanded to keep the Sabbath not for God's benefit, but for our own.

Some people seem to believe that God created the Sabbath arbitrarily, that the Sabbath is just a rule that God made up for the sake of it. That view simply does not hold water when you consider God's character. You do not have to know much about God to understand that He does not do anything without a purpose. It should strike us as important then, that the first thing God did after creating man was to create the Sabbath (Genesis 2:1-3). The Bible tells us that it was created for man (Mark 2:27), and that it was created on the most basic level—as a rest for man (Lev. 23:3). It almost seems strange that, as important as the Sabbath is to God, He never gives specific instructions as to what is to be done on the Sabbath. He gives only these two guidelines: cease from working, and rest. That is it: that is the only assignment for the day. Some people cannot accept the simplicity of that statement, but sometimes the answer is just that obvious. God never meant that we should be confused about the things that are important to Him, and He has made it clear that the Sabbath is important to Him in both the New and Old Testaments.

God is smarter than we are, and His invention of the Sabbath is an example of His excellent wisdom. As men and women created in the image of God, we have a natural inclination to work. Not only is it our inclination to work, but we are expected by God to work (Exodus 20:9 "Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work"). Work, therefore, is obviously a good thing. And without six days of work, we could never fully appreciate the gift that God offers us in the Sabbath. God knows our needs before we do ourselves: He knew from the beginning that we would need to rest and recharge on a weekly basis. That is the way that He designed us to be. He also knows that, without the Sabbath, our relationship with Him would likely suffer. He knows how easy it is for us to get caught up in our earthly lives, and forget that we have a heavenly citizenship as well as an earthly one. So he sets aside one specific day each week for His people to attend to their spiritual lives. He says to His people, "desist from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure" on my Sabbath (Isaiah 58:13). Instead, He desires that we choose to delight in Him on His Sabbath (Isaiah 58:13,14). He makes wonderful promises for those who do so (Isaiah 58:14). It is almost as if God is saying, "Word to the wise: the Sabbath can be an incredible blessing if you take care to use it the right way."

The Sabbath is one of God's greatest gifts to man, a testament of His grace and wisdom. It is His gift to us of abundant time. This gift should be precious in our sight when we realize that: one, it has a purpose (i.e., rest and the opportunity to focus on our spiritual lives: and, two, God was thinking of us when He created it. The Sabbath is, after all, not for God's benefit, but our own.

Second Place Winner

Jim Hodson

My name is Jim Hodson. I am from New Jersey, but live in Massachusetts. I'm 18 years old and have just graduated from South Lancaster Academy in Lancaster, Massachusetts, where I live with my parents and younger brother. I plan to attend Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee, in the fall. I plan to pursue a double major in History and Nursing. After graduation I would like to work as a full-time nurse in the mission field.



The Sabbath Was Made for Man

by Jim Hodson

In Mark 2:27, the Bible says, "And he said to them, the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." In this essay, I will explain the reasoning behind this saying, and I will elaborate on what this scripture means. Jesus in this passage was saying that God created this special day for His created beings, and not the other way around. Not only is the Sabbath a day of rest and fellowship with God, but it is also a time of spiritual refreshment when we enjoy God's

creation, and it is also a time when we “subordinate” our “interests and pursuits” and set ourselves apart from the rest of the world.

First of all, the Sabbath is the last day of the week, Saturday. Exodus 20, verses 8 through 11 state, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God ... For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.” God created man on the sixth day, and He created the Sabbath on the seventh day. Man came first. The Sabbath became a day of rest, not because God needed a rest, but because He wanted us to rest with Him. Hebrews Chapter 4, verses 9 and 10, says, “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works. as God did from his.” On the Sabbath day, I like to worship with my family of believers. I don't work at my regular job, but I help out at church. I also like to enjoy God through nature.

God also made the Sabbath for us to refresh ourselves spiritually. One way to do this is to turn away from our jobs and schoolwork, and to turn towards nature. Sabbath is like reenergizing your spiritual batteries with God as your power source. “The Sabbath bids us behold in His created works the glory of the Creator ... On the holy rest day, above all other days, we should study the messages that God has written for us in nature ... as we come close to the heart of nature, Christ makes His presence real to us, and speaks to our hearts of His peace and love” (Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 25-26). This would mean that taking a walk, or scuba diving, or kayaking, or going for a drive, are all activities that we can enjoy on the Sabbath, because we are enjoying the fact that God created nature. On the Sabbath, we are showing God the respect for a Creator. We do this by not doing the things that we do on the other six days.

Our sanctification of the Sabbath sets us apart from the world in the fact that not only are we spending time with God, but we also set aside the pursuits of work and daily toil that we endure the other six days of the week. Exodus 31:16 says, “Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant.” A “perpetual covenant” means that our observance of the Sabbath is meant to continue forever. As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I believe in the Ten Commandments. This makes us different from other people, because we keep all of God's Ten Commandments. After all, we are meant to be “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a Holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9). And just as we tithe ten percent of our income and give it back to God, the Sabbath is almost like giving a tithe of our time and thoughts back to God. When we don't spend our special time with God each week, we don't receive God's blessing.

In conclusion, the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. God wants to spend time with each of us; that is why He especially made the Sabbath. It was the last thing that He made, and during the Creation Week. He saved the best for last. By spending time with God, to worship Him, to speak to Him, to listen to His Word, and to share this with others, we are honoring Him. By refreshing ourselves on this day of reflection, we appreciate our Lord and all that He has done for us, and created for us. By keeping the Commandments, especially the Fourth Commandment, and giving ourselves to Him. we receive His blessing in our lives on a weekly if not daily basis. He also died for us, so we must be pretty important to Him.

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Third Place Winner

Rene Octavio Valenzuela

Rene lives in Chinle, Arizona, and attends the Church of God 7th Day

Photo
not
available

Remember

by Rene Octavio Valenzuela

“Remember the seventh day and keep it holy ...”

Why does God asks us to remember the seventh day? Of all the commandments the fourth has been the first to be forgotten and ignored. Instituted as a memorial of the Creation, the Sabbath remains with us to remind us of the pact between God and man. From the lowly bacteria to the powerful Catholic Church, all give evidence that the biblical Sabbath is still with us and must be kept.

The Sabbath has been known since the beginning. It was instituted as part of the creation. "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made:" (Genesis 2:2-3 KJV) It is the memorial of creation and a monument to the relationship between God and man.

For hundreds of years it was believed that the seven day week was simply a cultural/religious invention. Attempts were made to change it, most famously during the French Revolution in the late 1700s. But recently science has made a surprising discovery: "These circaseptan, or about weekly, rhythms are one of the major surprises turned up by modern chronobiology. Fifteen years ago, few scientists would have expected that seven-day biological cycles would prove to be so widespread and so long established in the living world. They are of very ancient origin, appearing in primitive one-celled organisms, and are thought to be present even in bacteria, the simplest form of life now existing." (Jeremy Campbell, *The Importance of Time*, p. 75) All types of creatures from bacteria to humans (rejection of organ transplants, common cold, etc.) have shown that they contain 7 day, weekly cycles. They are a living testimony to God's seven day week and the Sabbath, for "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork." (Psalms 19:1 KJV) The seven-day week and the day of rest are not a cultural/religious invention; they are firmly grounded in biological facts.

Daniel, in Chapter 7:25 (KJV) states that the beast will strive "... to change times and laws" The Catholic Church has stated that it was responsible for changing the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. "Perhaps the boldest thing, the most revolutionary change the Church ever did, happened in the first century. The holy day, the Sabbath, was changed from Saturday to Sunday. 'The day of the Lord' was chosen, not from any direction noted in the Scriptures, but from the Church's sense of its own power." (*St. Catherine Church Sentinel*, Algonac, Michigan, May 21, 1995). Sunday worship was instituted by the Catholic Church; it fulfills the prophesy of Daniel that the beast would change times and laws. The 4th commandment is the only one that has been recorded as changed. In doing so, the Catholic Church affirms its sanctity, "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18).

Instituted at the Creation, proven by nature, and never changed by God, the 4th commandment must be remembered "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one [point], he is guilty of all" (James 2:10 KJV). "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this [is] the whole [duty] of man" (Ecclesiastes 12: 13).

The Miracle of the Eye

Charles Darwin described the eye as one of the greatest challenges to his theory. How could he explain it? The eye, after all, is simply incompatible with evolution. "To suppose," he admitted, "that the eye with all its inimitable contrivances ... could have been formed by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree" (*Origin of Species*, p. 146).

Jesus said that "the lamp of the body is the eye" (Matthew 6:22). Jacob Bronowski wrote that, "if you compare a human being with even the most sharp-eyed of the great apes, say with a chimpanzee, our vision is incredibly more delicate.... Their ability to discriminate fine detail (which can be tested in a very simple way) is not comparable with that of human beings" (*The Origins of Knowledge and Imagination*, 1978, pp. 12-13).

The human eye possesses 130 million light-sensitive rods and cones that convert light into chemical impulses. These signals travel at a rate of a billion per second to the brain.

The essential problem for Darwinists is how so many intricate components could have independently evolved to work together perfectly when, if a single component didn't function perfectly, nothing would work at all.

Think about it. Partial transitional structures are no aid to a creature's survival and may even be a hindrance. If they are a hindrance, no further gradual development would occur because the creature would, according to advocates of natural selection, be less apt to survive than the other creatures around him. What good is half a wing or an eye without a retina? Consequently, either such structures as feathered wings must have appeared all at once, either by absurdly implausible massive mutations ("hopeful monsters," as scientists refer to such hypothetical creatures) or by creation.

"Now it is quite evident," says Francis Hitching, "that if the slightest thing goes wrong en route—if the cornea is fuzzy, or the pupil fails to dilate, or the lens becomes opaque, or the focusing goes wrong—then a recognizable image is not formed. The eye either functions as a whole, or not at all.

"So how did it come to evolve by slow, steady, infinitesimally small Darwinian improvements? Is it really possible that thousands upon thousands of lucky chance mutations happened coincidentally so

that the lens and the retina, which cannot work without each other, evolved in synchrony? What survival value can there be in an eye that doesn't see?

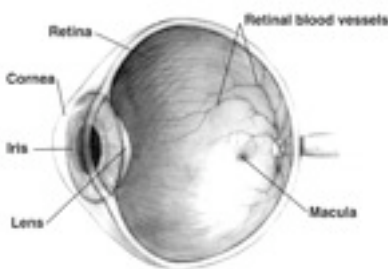
"Small wonder that it troubled Darwin. 'To this day the eye makes me shudder,' [Darwin] wrote to his botanist friend Asa Gray in February, 1860" (*The Neck of the Giraffe*, 1982, p. 86).

Incredible as the eye is, consider that we have not one but two of them. This matched pair, coupled with an interpretive center in the brain, allows us to determine distances to the objects we see. Our eyes also have the ability to focus automatically by elongating or compressing themselves. They are also inset beneath a bony brow that, along with automatic shutters in the form of eyelids, provide protection for these intricate and delicate organs.

Darwin should have considered two passages in the Bible. "The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the LORD has made them both," wrote King Solomon (Proverbs 20:12). Psalm 94:9 asks: "He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see?"

The same can be said of the brain, nose, palate and dozens of other complex and highly developed organs in any human or animal. It would take a quantum leap of faith to think all this just evolved. Yet that is commonly taught and accepted.

After reviewing the improbability of such organs arising in nature from an evolutionary process, Professor H.S. Lipson, a member of the British Institute of Physics, wrote in 1980: "... We must go further than this and admit that the only acceptable explanation is creation. I know that this is anathema to physicists, as indeed it is to me, but we must not reject a theory that we do not like if the experimental evidence supports it" (*Physics Bulletin*, Vol. 30, p. 140).



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Hope in the Face of Loss

by Brian Knowles



Recently a couple we knew many years ago lost their daughter to illness. She was only 47. The loss was devastating to the parents. The father's health was affected. Stress of such an enormous magnitude can directly affect the immune system, making one susceptible to illness.

Another friend has already lost two brothers and a parent to cancer. Others have lost children to disease, accidents and even warfare. Thousands of American and Iraqi parents are living with the loss of sons and daughters due to warfare in the region. Countless millions have been slaughtered by their own governments in the last century and the beginning of this one. In much of the world, life is cheap indeed. They call it "democide" – death by government.

Governments kill. Armies kill. Disease, accidents and old age kill. None of us gets through this life alive. As the writer of Hebrews says, "It is appointed unto men once to die..." (Hebrews 9:27). How we will die is known only to God.

Sam Harris, a man who vigorously opposes religion of any kind, writes poignantly about the reality of loss: "We live in a world where all things, good and bad, are finally destroyed by change. The world sustains us; it would seem, only to devour us at its leisure. Parents lose their children and children lose their parents. Husbands and wives are separated in an instant, never to meet again. Friends part company in haste, without knowing it will be for the last time. This life, when surveyed with a broad glance, presents little more than a vast spectacle of loss," (*The End of Faith* by Sam Harris, p. 6).

Life is indeed a chronicle of losses: we lose our jobs, our good looks, our figures, our eyesight and our hair. Sooner or later an assortment of marketers and the government find a way to confiscate any money we may have blessed enough to accumulate in our lifetimes. Some have called the "death (estate) tax" the "final insult" in which the government finds one last way to tax money that has already been taxed many times before.

So life is about losses. We are all subject to the laws of entropy. The universe exists in a state of

ongoing degradation. Things, including us, are running down. It's a sobering reality. All that is material or corporeal is temporary, transient, destined to disappear. While we live, we experience loss. Every fall we watch the leaves on trees turn brown, wrinkle and fall off. During winter, the tree languishes in the cold. Yet, in the spring new life bursts forth. Is it any wonder the first month of the Jewish sacred calendar is "Nisan" which means "budding?" Spring is that wonderful time when the world comes alive again after a period of dormancy.

The Sadducee's Error

In Jesus' day, there was a Jewish sect known as the Sadducees. Unlike Jesus, the Pharisees and the Scribes, the Sadducees did not believe there would be a resurrection. They believed that this life is all there is (Mark 12:18). Many people today, for different reasons, also believe that this life is all there is. They do not believe in an afterlife or a resurrection. Materialists are convinced that we are nothing more than a temporary assemblage of matter and energy. At death, we simply disassemble and become part of the material world. All that we were, all that we learned, and all the character that we developed, is forever lost.

Within religious circles, views of the afterlife vary. Many of them may be anthropomorphisms – that is, people creating for themselves the kind of afterlife that best suits them. We've all heard of "Cowboy Heaven," and of golf-loving saints playing golf forever on eternal greens. Animal lovers envision being surrounded by all of the pets they accumulated during their lifetimes. Our world view tends to create the kind of ideal afterlife we envision for ourselves.

Jesus Sets us Straight

Jesus spoke of a resurrection that can have one of two possible outcomes: "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned," (John 5:28-29). Note Jesus' use of the word "all."

Unlike the Sadducees, Jesus knew there would be a resurrection from the dead. In fact, he said of himself, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die..." (John 11:25).

Our present bodies are material, transient, temporary. At some point, they will cease to function and we will die. Yet, if we die "in Christ" we can be assured that we will live again. If we are judged worthy, we will live forever.

The Error of the Egyptians

The Sadducees thought this life was all there is. The Egyptians believed the next life was vastly more important than this one. This life was mere preparation for the next life. When an Egyptian Pharaoh died, his servants were often killed too so they could accompany and serve him in his afterlife journey. Massive amounts of food and drink were placed in the tomb to provide sustenance during the journey. Vast treasures of silver, gold and other wealth were placed in the tombs to ensure prosperity in the afterlife.

Jesus also corrects the Egyptian misapprehension: "Watch out!" he warned, "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions," (Luke 12:15).

The apostle Paul wrote Timothy: "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it," (1 Timothy 6:6). All that the Egyptians placed in their tombs did not accompany the pharaohs in their afterlife journey. It lay there and decomposed, eroded, or just sat there until some archaeologist opened up the tomb millennia after it had been sealed. Through the process of mummification, the bodies of some pharaohs were somewhat preserved, encased in elaborate costumes. All these pharaohs, and their slaughtered entourages, will continue to sleep the sleep of death until the resurrection of which Jesus spoke in John 5:29. From the time they died to the present, nothing – absolutely nothing – has happened to them except decay.

The time will come when all of us will join them in death. The apostle Paul called it a "sleep" from which we awake in resurrection. Notice his words to the Corinthians: "...Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive," (1 Corinthians 15:20-22).

Adam, by sinning, introduced death into the world. Jesus, by not sinning, reintroduced eternal life to the

world. The process by which it is achieved is "in Christ." As he said, he is the resurrection and the life. He told his disciples, "I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Jesus is the life giver. It is in him that every Christian has hope for an afterlife. Because he was raised from the dead, we will be raised (1 Corinthians 15:14).

The World to Come

Years ago, I knew an itinerant preacher who made his living giving a sermon in which he assigned Christians "jobs" and roles in the next life based on what they did in this one. In his scheme of things, he had created a pecking order based on rank in the ministry, and the extent of responsibility one had in the Church. Even the so-called "Place of Safety" was a precursor of this envisioned world. When my wife contemplated going to such a place during "the Tribulation," she thought, "I'd rather take my chances in the Tribulation." It was a statement something like, "Give me liberty or give me death!"

Frankly, I think it best to allow the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, to dispense all rewards and blessings in the world to come! I'd rather accept what he gives me than anything a man can devise for me. He is the one who is preparing for us a place in his Father's house (John 14:2). My hope and trust are in God and Jesus Christ, not in any man (Jeremiah 17:5, 7). I am excited about the "place" he is preparing for me. I don't want any other place but that one.

As Paul said we take nothing out of this world when we leave—not our wealth, our pets, our clothes or our money—not even our bodies. Whatever we had, whatever we accumulated in this life, we leave it all behind.

When we are resurrected to life, we will be given a new imperishable body (1 Corinthians 15:42). It will be a glorious body (verse 43). Rather than a mortal body full of weakness and entropy, it will be a body full of power (verse 43). Instead of a physical body, it will be a body composed of spirit (verse 44). Though we have been clothed with mortality, we will then don the cloak of immortality (verse 53). We will have glorious, imperishable, powerful, healthy, immortal bodies! Death will become a thing of the past. As Paul wrote, "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory' " (1 Corinthians 15:54).

Death, from the time of Adam to the present, has been the enemy of mankind. Now, in Christ, that enemy has been vanquished. As Paul wrote, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death," (1 Corinthians 15:26).

In our world of sickness, disease, terrorists, thugs, gangs, and crazy people, death can be a heartbeat away. Every day the news is filled with stories of the sad and untimely deaths of innocent people just going about their business. When Jesus sent his apostles out into a dangerous world, as sheep among wolves, he admonished them, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell," (Matthew 10:28).

God told Israel that he would never leave or forsake her (Deuteronomy 13:6). The writer of Hebrews applied that promise to the Church (Hebrews 13:5). As a result, "...we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:6).

We live in dangerous times. As Christians, our lives are wrapped up with Christ's life. We are his property, bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20). So long as we are in Christ, and in possession of the Holy Spirit, we have the "down payment" of the immortality with which we shall eventually be clothed (Ephesians 1:13-14). Nothing that life, disease, men or even Satan, can do to us can change that if we remain faithful to our calling in Christ (Romans 8:37-39).

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

June 26, 2007

"Creationism and intelligent design have no place in the UK science curriculum" says UK Government.

The U.K. government defined Intelligent Design along with creationism as religion and ruled that neither has a place within the country's school science curriculum.

This is a reaction to an electronic petition launched by James Rocks of the Science, Just Science campaign, a group opposed to the teaching of evolution in schools.

A spokesperson for the Prime Minister's office wrote: "The [UK] Government is aware that a number of concerns have been raised in the media and elsewhere as to whether creationism and intelligent design have a place in science lessons. The [UK] Government is clear that creationism and intelligent design are not part of the science National Curriculum programmes of study and should not be taught as science."

The government will also be "publishing guidance for schools, on the way creationism and intelligent design relate to science teaching."

(Source: WikiNews)

Sabbath Morning Companion

God's Challenge

No, I don't accept it all on faith. The God of the Bible does not expect you to chuck your reasoning powers at the sanctuary door. Rather, we read of Paul's admonition to the Thessalonians to "test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21 NKJV), or as the old King James has it, "Prove all things."

"Prove" can mean lots of different things. Writers such as Lee Strobel offer proof of God through rules of evidence which he presents admirably in his "Case For" books—*The Case of Christ, The Case for Faith, and The Case for a Creator*.

Geniuses such as Isaac Newton saw the laws of physics as proof of an ordered universe and thus the need for a supreme lawgiver.

Apologists such as Josh McDowell brilliantly answer questions skeptics often raise regarding the authenticity of Scripture and, as he says, evidence that demands a verdict.

Those thinkers deserve every accolade they receive, but there is another type of proof that the Bible heartily endorses and indeed enjoins upon us. It revolves around what that word "test" means as used in 1 Thessalonians. We find exactly the same word translated the same way in Luke 14:19, where a man refuses an invitation because he just bought a team of oxen and he wants to "test" (NKJV) or "prove" (KJV) them.

How would a farmer prove his team of oxen? Would he research his dictionaries and biology texts to see if they are really oxen? Rather, the farmer would "prove" or "test" his oxen by taking them into the field and putting them to the test.

In the book of Malachi we see a gauntlet thrown down before the people of God. "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that their may be food in my house. Try me now in this, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such a blessing that there will no be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10).

The idea is to try it out and see if it works, and there can be no better way to prove what God says than to do what he says. Try living the lifestyle that we find in the teachings of Jesus, such little things as going the extra mile, forgiving others for wrongs done to us, and avoiding the greed and lust for stuff so endemic in today's world. Do these things and all the rest and watch the magic they can display in transforming both you and the world around you.

—Lenny Cacchio

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

Road to Redemption

An interview with Francine Rivers by Sherri Langton

*Can anyone absolve another's sin? No. Redemption is through Jesus Christ alone. But a few 1800s immigrants to America brought with them a strange custom: a sin eater — one of their own who symbolically “ate” others' sins after their deaths. Bestselling author Francine Rivers' book on this theme, *The Last Sin Eater*, was turned to film and released in theaters in February; the DVD version is due in mid-May. Just before the theatrical release, I talked with Francine by phone about this unusual story and her own road to redemption.*

How do you feel about the movie coming out? Are you pretty excited?

I am very excited. I was very pleased when I saw it, that they kept the heart of the story, which is the gospel. So that pleased me very much. And I think that they [Michael Landon, Jr. and Brian Bird, co-producers] had a limited budget, but they really made it look like a much more expensively made film for what they were given. Initially, when I was approached, I was a little bit leery because Hollywood, of course, has a reputation. And they came up — Michael Landon, Jr. and Brian Bird — and I met them and we talked. I thought there was no question in my mind that these are two very on-fire Christians who want to glorify the Lord. And then I was also able to read the script and give a script approval and then see the movie just to make sure that it was what I was hoping it would be. I was just very pleased with what they did.

Is this the first book you've had made into a movie?

Yes, it is.... It's very different to see it because it's really their project. You know, a movie is so much different than the novel, and the focus in the movie has to stay on Cadi all the way through, but in the book there's a lot more information on the sin eater and why he agreed to take that role in the community. But I really found it very interesting. We were able to go on the set for four days in Utah, and it was just fascinating to watch the actors and the grips and the gaffers, you know, all the people that work to put that thing together. It takes *a lot* of people to put a movie together. And then the way Michael worked with the children. Liana Liberato [Cadi Forbes], of course, is a *very* talented young girl. I think we'll see a lot of her. And also Soren Fulton, who plays the part of Fagen, was just excellent. They had wonderful actors.... They did a very good job of casting.

With its gothic-mystery feel, *The Last Sin Eater* is a complete departure from your other books. Why did you feel the need to change the genre?

I wrote *The Atonement Child* that I wrote before *The Last Sin Eater*, which had to do with an abortion I had ... way back in college days. It was an illegal abortion, and I had dealt with guilt for years. So when I wrote *The Atonement Child*, I was exploring how abortion affects *everybody* — not just the woman in the death of a child but the husband she eventually marries, because she carries that guilt with her and how it impacts her life. And then the main story character was a rape victim, because I'd heard



a lot of Christians say, “Well, if it's a rape or if it's incest ...” and I thought, *No, it's just another violent act done upon the woman.* But when I finished that, it turned out to be centered on forgiveness, but God was showing me at the end that it had to do with sanctification — coming out of the world's thinking and thinking the way God thinks.

I was thinking about the difference between guilt and conviction and how guilt keeps you trapped and conviction sends you running to the Lord, and I had heard about a sin eater. I'd seen a little piece of it in a movie about a . . . mountain doctor, and it intrigued me why would anybody agree to do such a thing. You know, what would the background be? So it was just sort of one of these ideas that I filed away and I thought, *That would be something to explore about — the guilt and the conviction, and what are the secrets that hold all these people prisoner, and how does God reach them with the truth?*

So that's where you came across the Welsh custom of the sin eater?

It actually came from England, Scotland, Wales, and then it was brought over into pockets of Appalachia. I received a letter from somebody that said that it's not that far removed. I thought it was years and years past. We all carry guilt. We're all sinners, and people who are not saved are looking for a way to find salvation, a way to be released from their guilt. So that's what the story is about — the man-made attempt to remove sin, which does not work, and how Christ does remove our sin and makes us new creations and sets us on a whole new path and gives us a new life.

So was it the idea of the sin eater that lent itself to a gothic-type story?

Yes, because I kept thinking about the connection between the sin eater and the scapegoat — the idea from the Old Testament of how the sins were laid upon the scapegoat, and it was sent out into the wilderness to die. The sin eater is like that, but he can't remove sin. Also the lottery system that was used in Old Testament — I used that in the story for the way he's selected. So there were just a lot of elements.

There was not a lot of information about sin eaters, other than they said many of them were tricked into taking that role in the community. Somebody would invite somebody in for a meal — a poor person — and then tell them after they'd eaten, "Well, you just ate all the sins from our deceased relative in the next room." They would be locked into that kind of a position, and they'd become a pariah. Then the only way they could receive food or any kind of support was to take that role. But rather than use that method, I wanted to use it as imagery of Old Testament Scripture and the scapegoat and the lottery and that kind of thing, and how guilt imprisons people.

It took me twenty-five years to deal with [the guilt from having an abortion]. It was about eight years after I was a Christian before I finally knew God had forgiven me. Jesus had taken that sin. But I just couldn't let it go. It just kept coming up and coming up, and I remember feeling like God was telling me, "Write this story about abortion. I want you to write this story about abortion." I kept saying, "I don't want to go back there. I don't want to go back through that. I know You've forgiven me. Why do you keep bringing this up?"

What I learned in the process of writing [*The Atonement Child*] is God had forgiven me and He forgets our sins, but I hadn't and I needed to put it down at the cross and let it go. It was a process to do that. By the time I finished the book, I was living the forgiveness. My husband went through a class at the pregnancy counseling center for men who are living with women who have aborted and what that means in their relationship. It also brought the two of us so much closer in our marriage. So he had nothing to do with [the abortion]. He wasn't involved in my life at that time. But I would get pregnant and lose a child and then have a child, a lost child, and I kept thinking, *That's God punishing me*. [My husband] would say, "Why would God kill my children for something you did? It doesn't make any sense."

That's a good point.

But it took a lot of years, and then going into the pregnancy counseling center and going through the post-abortion classes and all that to really experience what God was trying to tell me: "I've forgiven you. Leave it at the cross. Don't keep picking it up again."

The project that I'd like to work on is, what's been kind of bothering me over the last few years is how difficult it is to be a Christian in such a free culture where there's so much license and we're surrounded by so much worldly stuff. I talked to a missionary from China, and she said it's more difficult to be a Christian in America than it is in China. And I thought, "Wow! Why?" And she said, "Because even the lines are muddled here." The church begins to absorb the worldly ways of doing things, and there's no question. The line is very clear [in China], but here it gets a little murky. So I want to focus on the parable of the soils and the seeds and what do those lives look like, played out, lived out.

Did guilt prompted you to write *The Last Sin Eater*?

Yes. What prompted me was actually how guilt had held me captive for so many years, and to show the difference between guilt and conviction. Guilt imprisons you; conviction sends you to the Lord to confess and receive forgiveness and experience that freedom that God offers through Christ. That's what I was trying to show in story form in *The Last Sin Eater* — the difference between the darkness and the light, being held captive by Satan and being freed by Christ.

Would you say, then, that the struggle you had is reflected in the little girl Cadi's battle with secret sin?

Yes. But I think everybody in the valley, everybody has a secret. When they're in that graveyard scene at the very end, all of those secrets are coming out and how it entrapped every single person in that valley with carrying the guilt of what their grandparents and parents had done and things that they'd kept secret. Of course, in the book there are other secrets that can't be in the movie because there's just too much information. But every person has guilt. You know, we're all sinners saved by grace, and until we acknowledge Christ and make Him the center of our life, we don't experience that redemption, that freedom.

What lesson did you learn in writing *The Last Sin Eater*?

To confess your sin, to allow to be open to that. We're supposed to examine our lives every day, examine yourself and align yourself with Christ and confess your sins and ask Him to remove that and to change you, continue to transform you so that you can be more like Jesus.

You said on the Web site that the movie is about guilt and the workings of the Holy Spirit. What represented the Holy Spirit in the movie?

Well, the little girl, Lilybet. People ask me, "What was she? Was she an angel? Was she the Holy Spirit?" And I really don't know how to answer that because for me in the story, it started out that she was an imaginary child, you know, imaginary friend. A lot of children that are troubled and lonely, they'll have imaginary friends. But she said things that were so profound that I thought, *Well, no. She's more than that*. So I felt that God can use anything, even an imaginary friend to

reach somebody who's seeking Him. You know, "Seek and you will find," and God used that child. And it could have been in [Cadi's] imagination, because in the end of the movie, the mother is saying, you know, "My little bit of heaven," which was sort of a nickname that she'd used for Cadi. And then Cadi is saying to the audience, "Yes, there's a similarity between Lilybet," who looks so much like her sister and sounds so much like the nickname her mother had used for her, and she was only there that summer, and then she never saw her again because she didn't need her because of the Lord. She had the Lord. So it's sort of left up to the audience to decide "What is she?" Whatever she was, the Lord used her to reach the child.

There are some things that I just don't know what's going on in the story. And that was one of those things that I thought, *Well, it's there for a reason, and God can use anything.* I mean, He uses fiction to reach people and to make them hunger and thirst for Him. I mean, He can use anything. He can use something you hear somebody say or something you see. God is wooing us to Him.

How would you describe Christ's work as the Sin Eater in your own life?

He took all my sins upon Him. My work is just to believe that the work is accomplished in Him and to let go of things. I had a tendency to torture myself over things that I had done, sins that I committed in my past. Mainly the abortion was one, and just looking at my life and the choices that I had made and that deep regret and the sorrow I knew I had caused God when I became a Christian, just thinking, *How could He even love me, considering the things that I'd done?* So to accept the gift. I think that's where God has been at work in me to just telling me, "I love you. Let Me love you. Trust Me. Let go of these things; they're already gone. I've forgotten them. They are as far as the east is from the west. Just let them go and let Me live in you" so that others will see Him, not me, and be drawn to Him. That's true in your life as well as your work. In the writing, that's what I want people to see — less of me and more of Him, that as they read the story, they forget about who wrote the story but they will see Him in the midst of it and want to be with Him.

This movie was a direct hit about Christ as the way to salvation.

The *only* way to salvation. You hear all this stuff about there are many paths to God. No, there's one. The whole heart of that story is John 14:6 — He is the truth. That's it. There is no other way.

In the movie, the sin eater says, "I've been doing this all these years for nothing?"

Of course, in the story, in the book, he actually reads the Bible and goes up on to the mountain, and he has his confrontation with God and he's struggling with all that. Of all he's done, he's done for the sake of his people, thinking that he was redeeming them and saving them, believing he was the living sacrifice. When he realizes, "I've been standing in the way of truth for twenty years, and the people that have died are lost," how grieved he is over that. But he has his own secrets that held him prisoner.

What do you hope the film/DVD will accomplish?

I hope it will be used as a tool, that it will open discussion and that people will be able to present the gospel to unsaved family members and friends. Fiction is supposed to bridge people back into Scripture and to hopefully have people make a choice and want a relationship with Christ, never just be strictly entertainment or just a story. It's for people, hopefully, that they'll want to ask questions and say, "Well, what does this mean to my life?" And that the churches and people will be able to use this as a tool to [get] back into Scripture. Move away from the fiction and get to the real thing, folks. That's the main point.

Are you trying to equip Christians to reach other people who don't know the Lord?

Yes.

But the movie is being released to a general audience through theaters.

People will be in there to see it, and then they'll say, "This is true!"

We're praying for the release of the movie.

I'm hoping that Christians will go and the unsaved will go. We didn't even think we were going to have it in our area, and then I was told two days ago it was going to be at one of the main theaters in our hometown [near] Santa Rosa in California in Sonoma County. We're hoping that there'll be a lot of people that will go in and they'll watch and they'll wonder, "What does this mean? Is this true?" And that they'll investigate and there'll be Christians there and hopefully they'll investigate.

God can reach many people through this.

You know, Fox Faith is putting out eight movies this year, and to me it's just, God is really on the move in the arts. There are a lot of people that have been in Hollywood for years and then trying so hard to find ways to express their faith, and they haven't had the opportunity. And all of the sudden, God has opened those doors and they're pushing through. You know, like Michael [Landon, Jr.] and Brian [Bird].



They're taking that extra step and they're going for it, and it's going to be up to the Christians to go to these things and see them so that Fox Faith, so that Twentieth Century Fox will continue to do these movies and change some of the stuff that's out there. I mean, we've just been assaulted with a lot of stuff that we see in the theaters. There's our chance to really see some ... films, films that are going to have messages that are for salvation and that will make a difference in people's lives for good.

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Prerequisites for Being a Disciple

by Daniel Botkin



A disciple is a student, a pupil, a learner, one who is studying the teachings of a teacher. The word *disciple* is related to the word *discipline*. In an academic context, the word *discipline* refers to a field of study. Students (disciples) study the discipline of mathematics, or the discipline of biology, or the discipline of music, etc. If someone goes to a college to study one of the disciplines, the potential student consults the school's catalog of courses. This catalog gives a description of all the courses that the university offers. Included in each course description is information about *prerequisites*. A prerequisite is something that is required before the course can be taken by the student. For example, before a student can enroll in a course for third-semester advanced chemistry, he usually has to have taken and passed the first and second semesters of beginning chemistry. A prerequisite for a course in painting might be two semesters of drawing. When I took a course to study Aramaic, the prerequisite was proficiency in Hebrew.

Prerequisites are not mere recommendations; they are required before the student can enroll in the class.

Our Teacher is Yeshua. If a person wants to be His student, there are prerequisites. There are certain conditions which must be met *before a person is even qualified to study His teachings*. These prerequisites are not optional; they are required. Our Teacher declared certain prerequisites for those who would be His students:

"If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple ... So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26f, 33).

These are prerequisites to being a disciple of Yeshua. Some people think to themselves, "I'll study His teachings, and that will make me into His disciple." If you think that way, you've got it backwards. Before you are even qualified to study His teachings, you've got to first take care of the prerequisites. Otherwise, you cannot be His disciple. Please notice that He did not say that these prerequisites are just for apostles or super-disciples. He did not say that these prerequisites are only required if you want to be a first-class disciple, but you can ignore them and be a second- or third-class disciple. If you do not meet the prerequisites, He said, you cannot be His disciple. You can try to be His student or pretend to be His student, but as far as He is concerned, you cannot be His student without the prerequisites. It is impossi-

ble. The prerequisites are necessary before you even start out on the road to discipleship.

If a student at a university somehow manages to enroll in a class without having met the prerequisites for that class, do you know what happens? The student feels lost and confused and frustrated because he cannot understand the teacher or the textbook. He feels stressed and afraid because he realizes he is in way over his head. And he's almost certainly going to fail the course. There are great multitudes today who are trying to follow the Teacher without first having met the prerequisites for being His student. As a result, they feel lost and confused and frustrated because they cannot understand the Teacher or His Textbook. They feel stressed and afraid because they realize they are in way over their heads. And they're probably going to fail at being His disciple, because they have ignored the prerequisites.

Before Yeshua stated these prerequisites, the Scripture says this: "And there went great multitudes with Him: and He turned and said unto them ... " Notice to whom the prerequisites were stated: not just to an inner circle of twelve or seventy, but to the "great multitudes" who went with Him. Today once again, there go great multitudes with Him. Today once again, these great multitudes need to hear Him state the prerequisites for being His disciple. Let's consider the prerequisites.

PREREQUISITE # 1 :

"HATING" YOUR FAMILY

We are supposed to love our family members, so the requirement to "hate" them is obviously meant to be understood in a comparative sense. It does not mean that we should have feelings of animosity toward them and wish they were dead. It simply means that our love and commitment to our Master should be so very great that our love and commitment to our family looks like "hatred" *by comparison*.

Here's a story I often share to illustrate this concept. Several years ago I was driving on the interstate at 55 MPH in the right-hand lane. A big truck started passing us on the left.

As our 4-year-old daughter Betsy watched the speeding truck come alongside us and fill up the entire view of her side window, she said, "We goin' back'erds." Even though I was going forward at 55 MPH, the high speed of the big truck made her feel like we were moving backwards. Because she was so focused on the fast-moving truck, she felt like we were moving in the oppo-

site direction. In a similar way, even though we love our family members very much, they might sometimes feel "hated" because we are so focused on the Lord and so deeply devoted to Him.

Family members are to be loved, but if you have to choose between pleasing them and pleasing the Lord, that's when you must "hate" them. Pleasing the Master must be your first priority. If your obedience to the Lord causes your family members to feel offended, or insulted, or hurt, or even hated, that is the cost you must pay to be His disciple. If you do not love the Lord deeply enough to "hate" your family, then you cannot be His disciple.

PREREQUISITE #2:

"HATING" YOUR OWN LIFE ALSO

The same things about "hating" one's family members likewise apply to "hating" one's own life also. The Lord does not want us to be so sad and miserable and lonely that we wish we were dead. On the contrary, He wants us to be happy and to "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1:8). But we are required to "hate" our own life when our own life (*psuche*, literally "soul") interferes with our doing the will of God.

Each soul has its own unique, individual traits. We each have our own personal likes and dislikes, our own inclinations toward or away from certain things. We each have our own personal preferences in nearly every area of life when different choices are available - choices in regard to career, lifestyle, friends, music styles, where to live, where to fellowship, styles of praise and worship, etc.

Having personal preferences for certain things is not inherently wrong or evil (provided that the things we desire are not forbidden by Scripture, of course). But our personal preferences must be totally yielded to the Lordship of our Teacher, because sometimes our personal preferences interfere with His plans for us. For example, you may want to be a school teacher in Tennessee, but He might want you to be a Messianic missionary in Mexico. Or you might want to be a pastor in Poland, but He might want you to be a Messianic mechanic in Michigan.

If we are walking close to the Teacher, our inclinations will usually match His calling for us. If they do not, then He will gradually transform our inclinations if we are totally yielded to His will. If we realize that our natural inclinations, our own personal preferences, are contrary to His plan for us, then we must "hate" our own life. In these situations, you must deny your own personal preference. If you do not "hate" your own soul enough to do this, then you cannot be His disciple.

PREREQUISITE #3:

BEARING YOUR CROSS

Bearing your cross does not mean wearing a cross around your neck as a piece of jewelry. Nor does it mean dragging a big wooden cross in public to attract attention. Some brothers have done this and found it to

be a fruitful tool for evangelizing, but it is not this sort of literal cross-bearing which is a prerequisite for being a disciple. The cross-bearing which is a prerequisite for being a disciple is an internal death to one's own selfish desires. It is a conscious, voluntary choice to die to your own will in order to do the will of God.

Luke 9:23 adds the word "daily": "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." The Apostle Paul said, "I die daily" (1 Cor. 15:31). Bearing the cross is a daily, life-long requirement for those who wish to be disciples. Sometimes the cross gets very heavy and very difficult to bear.

Other times it is lighter, when the Lord sends a Simon of Cyrene to help us bear it, when we cannot bear it alone.

Those who are willing to bear the weight of the cross also experience the power of resurrection and are able to walk in newness of life. They are "crucified with Christ," nevertheless they live, because the resurrected Lord lives in them (Gal. 2:20). This blessing comes only to those who have laid hold of the cross and made a conscious decision to voluntarily bear it every day for the rest of their lives. If you have not yet done this, then you cannot be His disciple.

PREREQUISITE #4:

COMING AFTER HIM

To "come after" somebody means to actively pursue him. If the police are "coming after" a criminal, they are actively pursuing him. They are on the move, headed toward the criminal. They are not just going to go part of the way, then stop and give up because they are tired or bored or scared. They are determined to continue their pursuit until they apprehend the man whom they are coming after.

Before we can be Yeshua's disciple, we must come after Him. We must actively pursue Him with a determination to continue our pursuit until we have apprehended Him and owned Him as our Lord and Savior. Even then, our pursuit of Him continues as we seek a closer walk with Him through prayer. King David, who had a very close walk with the Lord, spoke often in the Psalms about seeking the Lord. Even though David had in one sense "found" the Lord in his youth, yet he still continued to "seek" the Lord throughout his whole life.

If you want to be Yeshua's disciple, you must actively seek Him. I cannot monitor your personal prayer life or legislate how many hours per week you should spend seeking the Lord in prayer. But I can tell you that if you are not coming after Yeshua, if you are not consciously, actively pursuing Him with the intention of continuing this pursuit for the rest of your life, then you cannot be His disciple.

PREREQUISITE #5:

FORSAKING ALL THAT YOU HAVE

"So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple." To for-

sake means to abandon. "All that you have" means all that you have. Some translations state it in its more literal sense, "all of his own possessions." If you do not do this, Yeshua said, you cannot be His disciple. Forsaking all of your possessions is not optional; it is a prerequisite if you wish to be His student. You are not even qualified to study His teachings until after you have done this.

This is one of the "hard sayings" of Yeshua. How can a man forsake every last possession that he has? To do so in an absolute literal sense would require a man to go forth naked and barefoot with nothing in his hand, not even a Bible nor a toothbrush. Obviously the Lord does not want His disciples to go about that way. In the Sermon on the Mount, He spoke about trusting the Father for food and raiment. If He wants us to have food, then it is safe to assume that He is not opposed to our possessing dishes and a kitchen and utensils for the preparation and eating of the food. If He wants us to be clothed and sheltered from the elements, then it is safe to assume that He is not opposed to our having a house. If He expects us to show hospitality, then it is safe to assume that He is not opposed to our having some furnishings in our house. So what did He mean when He said that forsaking all of one's own possessions is a prerequisite to being His disciple? How can a person forsake all that he has?

Some believers do literally forsake all - or very nearly all - to be His disciples. Christians who go to remote, uncivilized places to be missionaries must leave behind all but a few bare essentials. Other Christians join communes and forsake all of their own possessions by having "all things common," so that there is no such thing as private ownership. (Although private ownership is never totally eliminated, not even in the strictest communes - unless there are communes where even the combs and toothbrushes are held as common property and shared by everyone.)

Not everyone is called to go to a remote, uncivilized place as a missionary, and not everyone is called to join a community where everybody lives under one roof and has one common purse. If you are not a foreign missionary or a Christian communist, how do you forsake all? You do it by living with a profound understanding and a constant awareness that you are not the true owner of your possessions. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1).

God is the true Owner of everything you have. You are just a steward of His possessions that He has put into your hands. So if He tells you by His Holy Spirit, "Give that item away," you give it away. If He tells you to sell something, or fix it, or change it, or throw it away, you do as He says.

In order to have the right attitude toward material possessions, it helps me to think like a teenager. Let me explain. When I was 17, there were five teenagers in our home. (We were a "Brady Bunch" family. My mother, a

widow with three children, married a widower with three children.) That summer our parents went on vacation and left us five teenagers in charge of the house. (Parents please note: This is *not* a good idea!) While our folks were away, we had access to the entire house, to the car, and to the money they left with us. There was no adult there to supervise us. However, we knew that we were not the real, permanent owners of the house, the car, and the money. We knew that we were just temporary stewards, and that we would give an account when our parents returned at the end of the week.

Disciples of Yeshua must likewise live as stewards who know that they will give an account when the Lord returns at the end of the age. We are stewards of all the possessions which the Father allows us to use in this life. If you are not truly living as a steward in regard to your possessions, if you still think of them as your own possessions, then you cannot be Yeshua's disciple.

COUNTING THE COST

Between Prerequisite #4 (Coming After Him) and Prerequisite #5 (Forsaking All), Yeshua spoke two parables about the importance of counting the cost. The first parable was about a man who started building a tower without first counting the cost. When he ran out of materials and money, people mocked him for his unfinished tower. The second parable was about a king who realized that his army was outnumbered two-to-one by the army of an enemy king. After counting the cost, the king made peace, not war, with the other king.

People who are interested in being a disciple of Yeshua need to count the cost. They need to be aware of what they are getting themselves into, namely, a life-long, whole-hearted commitment to follow the Lord and to do whatever He says to do. Once discipleship is entered into, there is no turning back - not to please family, not to please self, not to avoid the cross, not to seek other things, not for material possessions - not unless you want to be mocked for your folly like the man with the unfinished tower.

Like the king who was greatly outnumbered, people need to realize that they are greatly outnumbered by the army of the Lord of Hosts. Their only hope is to desire conditions of peace, like the king in the parable. And the only way to make peace with the King of kings is unconditional surrender on your part. Then you will be ready to take care of those prerequisites and start on the road to discipleship.

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There is an important point to be made before we can continue: The only person who can pray it, as distinguished from merely saying it, is he who loves and fears God and believes that he exists. Jesus did not teach this model prayer to everybody, and he did not commend it to everybody. He gave it to his disciples, and I believe that includes you and me.

While Jesus is not suggesting a simple repetition of this prayer, he offers it as a model. However, praying it and frequently pausing to express your heart at each thought is a marvelous way to keep focus and effectively talk to God. There is nothing wrong with having a form of words composed by someone to guide and inspire our personal prayers. The Psalms of David are prayers in song and should also be guides for prayer.

Line by Line

After directing our prayer to the Father, there are three specific prayer requests that address God, followed by three personal requests. Let's slowly unpack the wisdom in this model, perfect prayer. Most of the things we want to pray about are taken care of within this prayer. Like Jesus' parables, it is small in scale but huge in coverage.

"Our Father in heaven." Jesus used the Aramaic word *Abba* ("dear Father") in virtually every prayer he made to God. *Abba* would naturally be translated pater in the Greek texts which preserved and transmitted the New Testament from the first century forward. Against the customary patterns for addressing God, Jesus' habit of addressing God as his own Father was unusual, and to some, shocking.

This opening designation establishes the kind of God to whom prayer is offered. He is a personal being, not some deep concept of an inner self, no mere "ground of being," no amorphous spirit essence or impersonal "godhead" or generalized "divinity." He is a caring Father (not a tyrant or an ogre) who has established a special, personal relationship with his sons and daughters. This Father-bond is powerful and coupled with his location in heaven conveys both tender, fatherly kindness and the power necessary to protect us and answer our requests.

Here is a good place to pause in prayer to consider how incredible it is that we should be a son or daughter of His Majesty in heaven. What a spectacular privilege and honor! Is there a higher title than to be called a "son of God"? Could we ask for anything greater than to have God as our Father?

"Hallowed be your name." God's name is a reflection of who He is. God's name is God himself as He is and as He has revealed himself. This is not a request that God may become holy, for He already is holy, but that He may be treated as holy—that He may be

acknowledged by all who dwell on earth as the Holy One. It is a prayer that all will come to know the one true God, his goodness, his righteousness, his mercy, his justice and worship and obey him. This is a prayer about God's honor and glory and our desire to give Him honor and to encourage others to revere Him. It is an expression of praise and worship—a fitting way to begin every prayer.

"Your kingdom come." The kingdom of God was never far from Jesus' mind. It was his message; it is the gospel. We join Jesus in praying that the kingdom come...soon. This prayer is a way of saying Jesus has caught me with his good news of the coming kingdom, and I want to be part of his kingdom-movement. We are praying that the kingdom that has broken into the world with Christ's ministry will soon be consummated at the end of the age with Jesus' return and the inauguration of his messianic kingdom.

If we are praying for the kingdom to come, we must be preparing ourselves spiritually for its arrival. This should be an all-consuming goal and purpose that drives every area of life. By making this request to our Father in heart-felt sincerity, we are committing ourselves to work for and support its coming. This is not just a pleasant thought Jesus injects in a prayer liturgy. It is the heart of the gospel, the mission of the church, and the Christian hope. We must pray for, work for, support, and make the Kingdom of God our dream, our eternal hope.

"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." What is God's will? Here is another point to pause and reflect on the Father's will for mankind and for us personally. How are we getting in sync with God's ways and mind? Can we sincerely ask that God's will be done on earth and seek, as Jesus did, "that not my will but thine be done?" Jesus acknowledges that on the subject of his impending capture, torture, and death, he didn't want it. Our will must yield to God's. In this plea we are asking that the Father's new creation begin with our conforming to his good and perfect will. This is a request of God to bring his plan to completion by bringing the entire world into the perfect harmony of his heavenly realm.

Savor in your mind's eye the picture of a happy, carefree child, a little lamb, and a large lion peacefully lying together on a green pasture. Put yourself into that picture of paradise on earth. Think of how the daily news would be different, how marvelous that world without evil and tears would be. This is the coming reality, and we can live it every day of our lives.

These first three petitions, though they focus on God's name, God's kingdom, and God's will, are nevertheless prayers that the Father would act in such a way that his people would hallow his name, submit to his reign, and do his will. It is therefore impossible

to pray this prayer in sincerity without humbly committing oneself to such a course.

God First, You Second

"Give us this day our daily bread." These last three petitions explicitly request things for us. God welcomes and asks for us to bring him our requests. The first mentions "bread," a common biblical term referring to all kinds of food. It represents a category of needs necessary to sustain us: food, water, shelter, clothes, safety, money, work, family, friends, church, etc. In the broader sense it could include whatever we need to prosper and be in good health and should also focus on the needs of others.

It is a prayer for our needs not our greeds. But our Father is not stingy as Jesus illustrates in the parables on prayer immediately following his giving of the model prayer in Luke 11; "ask and it will be given to you," "which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish will give him a snake instead?"

Our heavenly Father is the great heart-searcher and he can sense needs our weak words insufficiently express (Romans 8:27). As we live in the daily present dealing with today's needs and challenges and we must daily remain in prayerful conversation with our Father. He sustains us one day at a time with "today's daily bread."

"Forgive us our debts, as we too have forgiven our debtors." Isn't it remarkable that here, at the heart of the prayer, we commit ourselves to live in a particular way, a way we find difficult. It is not enough that the Father sustain us with "food," we need more, much more. We need forgiveness of our sins, mercy, and God's abundant grace. We all share the "human condition" with its many lusts and weaknesses; we stray from the paths of righteousness. We live in a world where evil is still powerful and sin a daily threat.

A cry for forgiveness must be accompanied with real repentance, not merely a self-regarding remorse for the mess we've gotten ourselves into, or a perfunctory, rote repetition of a pious expression. Our sins are an offense against our Father and for them we must seek forgiveness.

Part of the selfish human condition is the tendency to minimize our offenses and exaggerate the offenses of others toward us. The Father wants us to extend the same forgiving spirit towards others that we seek him to have towards us. "As we too have forgiven our debtors" suggests a prevailing attitude of heart that makes forgiveness possible when others offend and sin against us. We must pass on God's gift of mercy if we expect him to continually offer it to us.

The warm glance from our heavenly Father lets us know we are forgiven and safe in his protective hand. Forgiveness makes for a clear conscience, peace of mind, security, and the knowledge we are loved. The three key things all humans crave in relationships are

love, acceptance, and forgiveness. These we want from our Father, and these we must offer to our fellows.

"Do not bring us to the time of trial." It helps to pray the Lord's Prayer slowly, pausing every few words to hold before God the particular things which come from our hearts in that category. Prayer is where heaven and earth overlap. We are called to live in both spheres—God's presence and future and this world's present. The model prayer is simple in that a child can do it, but it is hard in the demands it makes of us as we go through it.

The word "temptation" (*peirasmos*) in the common recitation of the Lord's Prayer does not carry the connotation of temptation to sin or do evil. It more precisely refers to "testing" or "trials." James assures us that "God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone [with evil]" (James 1:13-14). In this light, to pray God would not do what in fact he cannot do is akin to praying that God would not sin.

Asking God to deliver us, to save us, out of trials that could overcome us is important to navigating successfully the mine field the enemy has laid out. This is a request of the Father to spare us, not from trial or testing as that is part of life even for a Christian, but from failing; being spared from a trial or temptation that results in our fall. Jesus prayed a similar prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane for himself, and asked the disciples to do the same lest they fall into temptation and fail. They didn't and failed and fled, Peter even disowning Jesus. Jesus prayed that God would see him through the hour of trial to victory, and God did.

This plea to the Father is that we not fail under trials that without his help could overwhelm us. I've seen friends give up their faith while undergoing severe trials—falling under trials of sickness, finances, divorce, the death of a child, disillusionment with churches and leaders, addictions, etc. We are not strong enough on our own to survive some of the difficult trials the future, and the evil one, may bring. We won't fail if we tightly hold God's hand.

"But rescue us from the evil one." Completing the thought of the previous request Jesus speaks plainly that the source of many of our trials, though not all, is the evil one—Satan, the adversary. It is regarded as sophisticated and modern nowadays to ridicule the idea of a literal devil and to call him a silly superstition, or to spiritualize evil or the evil one as nothing more than our lower nature or simply the absence of good. Jesus tolerated no such ignorance. His explanation for the source evil is Satan, not God or man.

Satan brought evil into the world and has brought much of mankind to drink from his poisonous cup. The Bible acknowledges both angelic and demonic kingdoms in continual conflict. Jesus, who dealt with Satan, was tempted by him, and would eventually be

slain by his minions, warns us to pray for God to keep us safe from the evil one. Jesus successfully defeated and dethroned Satan rendering his evil null and void when by the power of God he was raised from the dead, glorified, exalted, and given eternal life.

An ignored theme of Scripture is that of "God at war," which theme should be plainly apparent from the Garden of Eden to the last chapters of the Book of Revelation. There exists an adversary determined to thwart God's plan by tempting and destroying those made in the Creator's image. Jesus' ministry began by confronting the Devil—a battle Jesus won. As he traveled about Judea preaching the Kingdom of God, casting out demons, and healing all who came to him, he continually demonstrated that the Prince of the Kingdom of Darkness has been defeated. In the words of Martin Luther's triumphal hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,"

*The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure....*

By requesting the Father's protection from Satan, we are agreeing to "submit to God, resist the devil," and we have God's promise that the devil will "flee from you" (James 4:7). By this request we are also agreeing to forsake the devil's enticements to indulge the lusts of our flesh and reject his cunning appeals to disobey our heavenly Father. We need to take the threat of evil seriously and pray for God's strength to resist and keep us safe from the Devil's strength and wiles.

"For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen." To close this model prayer what could be more fitting than a praise-filled request that God's will prevail now and forever. We, of course, have only power to let God's will prevail in our lives, but we should also use all our strength to proclaim the Father's kingdom to all within our reach.

Will God Hear Your Prayer?

A blind man healed by Jesus wisely said, "We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will" (John 9:31). But we

know that all men are sinners, yet God hears their prayers. The sinner God listens to is the one who wants to do God's will and repent of his or her sins. God hears repentant sinners, not unrepentant sinners. Jesus said the sinner who prayed, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner", would be "justified before God" (Luke 18:13). The Father's goal is to save sinners and he begins that work by listening to their prayers. Our Father listens to our every word if we come with a humble, repentant heart seeking his will and his help. Following Jesus' advice on prayer is strong assurance that God is listening.

Every Prayer an Answered Prayer

Several years ago my friend Ken Ryland opened up my eyes to an important truth: God answers every prayer. If he listens to a prayer (see above), he answers. How is that? Well, he can answer "no," "yes," or exercise a "line item veto" by granting some requests and rejecting others. He makes his decisions based on what is in harmony with the righteousness of his will, what is ultimately best for us, and the sincerity, honesty, motivation, and perseverance of the petitioner. He regards our needs and can see the immediacy of our situations. God with wisdom chooses the timing and manner in which he answers our requests, considering factors far beyond our horizon.

Keep in mind that some prayers and promises of God are answered after death (*i.e.* blessings on our children and grandchildren, the conversion of a loved one, the preaching of the gospel to the lost, freeing someone who is oppressed, and, of course, bringing the Kingdom of God, and "Come, Lord Jesus" [Revelation 22:20]). The effects of some prayers may reach out for generations to come. Jesus prayed for you and me two thousand years ago, and now in the 21st century his prayers are being answered daily (John 17:20).

Our heavenly Father will not ignore the prayers of his children. Talk with him daily in perfect prayer. Amen.

Ken Westby is the founder and director of the Association for Christian Development, P.O. Box 4748, Federal Way, WA 98063 (www.godward.org). Ken is also a director emeritus of the BSA.

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The Church in the World

Wednesday June 20, 2007

PAKISTAN: Mob Assaults Christians with Axes and Guns

Christian families fled a Pakistani village in Punjab province this week after an armed mob injured Protestants preparing for an evangelistic meeting, the victims' lawyer said.

Seven Christians were injured when at least 41 Muslim men armed with guns, axes and wooden sticks attacked a Salvation Army church in Chak 248 north of Faisalabad on Sunday night (June 17), lawyer Khalil Tahir Sindhu said.

The Christians' refusal to give in to demands that they cancel the evangelistic meeting prompted the attack, Sindhu said.

Armed Muslims had stormed the home of Christian Sawar Masih on June 16, injuring his teenage son, Shahbaz, and daughter, Robeela. They warned Masih, a member of the Human Life Association that was organizing the outreach, to cancel the evangelistic meeting scheduled for the following day at 6 p.m.

"They had just put up posters advertising the event two or three days before, so this is what triggered the attack," Sindhu told Compass from Faisalabad.

Emboldened by the fact that they had obtained written permission from local union council head, Badir Munir, to mount a loudspeaker that would broadcast the sermon, the Christians continued with their plans to stage the event. Believers were already at the church carrying out preparations when the mob attacked at 5 p.m. on Sunday evening.

According to Sindhu, the mob used axes and wooden sticks to assault the Christians and desecrate the church, firing pistols into the air to cause panic. He said that many of the church books were ruined and that seven Christians suffered from bruises and fractured bones. In some cases, the bones were exposed.

"Some of the injuries were caused by being hit with the blunt side of an axe, while others were caused by the weapon's sharp side," Sindhu said.

The lawyer said that Christians had fought back against the attackers outside the church, and that one Muslim had allegedly been injured.

He said that Muslims from Chak 248 had also registered a First Information Report (FIR) yesterday



against four Christian men whom they claimed had started the fighting.

Police Drag Feet

Police initially refused to file a case against the mob, lodging an FIR only yesterday evening after Sindhu and 50 Christians from the village lobbied the district inspector general.

"They finally registered a case because they knew that it would get bad attention if they didn't," Sindhu told Compass today.

The injured victims had received medical examinations at Dijkot hospital. The problem was that doctors came under pressure from the Muslim attackers to under-report the Christians' wounds.

"Five of the medical certificates are incorrect, including the certificate of Shahbaz Masih, because it fails to mention his fractured bones," Sindhu said.

The lawyer plans to submit a petition tomorrow for Faisalabad district and sessions judge Muhammad Yusuf to order a second medical examination to correct the mistakes.

Sindhu is helping to house and feed 28 Christians from Chak 248, who are afraid to return home.

Christian politicians told Compass today that they plan to increase lobbying efforts to ensure that the case is not dropped.

"We all condemn this tragic event," Shahid Arif, a former district assembly member, told Compass from Faisalabad while on his way with several other Christian leaders to discuss the incident with district assembly head Rana Zahid Tauseef.

(Compass Direct News)

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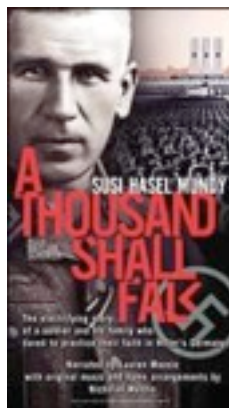


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A Thousand Shall Fall

by Susi Hasel Mundy



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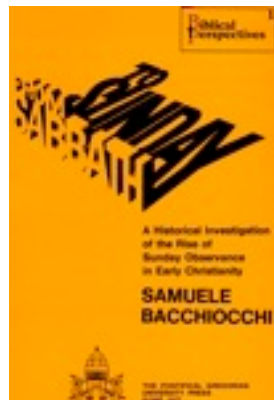
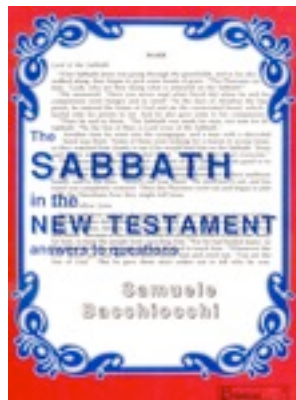
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