

THE Sabbath Sentinel

November–December 2008



Brilliant Plans,
Not Blessed by God

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association
Jesus said, "the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath"

The Sabbath Sentinel

November–December 2008 Volume 60, No. 6 Issue 534

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Our Cover:

Jean Leon Gerome Ferris' historic painting of the surrender of General Lee to General Grant at Appomattox.
(Courtesy Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia)

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Subscriptions: Call (888) 687-5191 or write to: The Bible Sabbath Association, 802 N. W. 21st Ave., Battle Ground, WA 98604 or contact us at the office nearest you (see international addresses below). *The Sabbath Sentinel* is sent free of charge to all who request it. Your subscription is provided by the voluntary contributions of the membership of the The Bible Sabbath Association.

Donations are gratefully accepted and are tax deductible in the United States. Those who choose to voluntarily support this international work to promote the Sabbath and proclaim gospel of the kingdom of God are welcomed as contributors.

Annual membership contributions: regular membership \$25; Family Membership \$30; Life Membership \$500. All memberships include an annual subscription to *The Sabbath Sentinel*. Make all checks, drafts and money orders payable to *The Bible Sabbath Association*. (Visa and MasterCard accepted).

The Bible Sabbath Association is dedicated to promote the seventh day Sabbath. As a nonsectarian association for Sabbath-observing Christians, BSA accepts members who acknowledge Jesus Christ (Yahshua the Messiah) as their Savior, believe the Bible to be the Word of the Eternal, and uphold the seventh day Sabbath. BSA takes no official position on other theological issues, and publishes *The Sabbath Sentinel* as a forum to promote understanding and to share items of interest to Sabbath observing groups and individuals.

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Is the Perfect Plan Always God's Plan?

A Note of Thanks

Before beginning my editorial, I would like to say thank you to the Pleasant Hills Christian Church (affiliated with the Church of God, Seventh Day) in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, for extending me an invitation to speak at their Feast of Tabernacles celebration in October. My wife, Patti, and I truly enjoyed our time with the people there, and we would like to give our special thanks to Pastors Chesney and Wertz for making our trip possible, and to Gene and Ruth Wertz for opening their home to us and taking us to see the sites in that area of Pennsylvania.

While we were in the Harrisburg area we had the opportunity to visit the famous Civil War site of Gettysburg. (In the southern part of the U.S. the Civil War is referred to as the "War between the States.") The battle of Gettysburg was probably the pivotal point of the Civil War. It was both fascinating and sobering to examine close-up the progression of the war and the battle of Gettysburg itself.

In 1863 General Robert E. Lee, commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, conceived a brilliant plan. Lee believed that launching a second invasion of the North (the first being the unsuccessful Battle of Antietam) would shatter Northern morale if his army were to win the battle. He believed that the Northern armies that were at that time besieging Vicksburg and already had control of New Orleans, the South's

largest city and biggest port, would be forced to withdraw their troops back to Northern territory.

Also, food and other military supplies were plentiful in the North since war had not ravaged the Northern countrysides and towns. Lee believed that he could replenish his supplies in the North as well as allow Southern territory some relief to plant crops and rebuild their industries.

The principal objective of Lee's plan was to shatter Northern morale. The antiwar movement in the North was gaining momentum, and Lee was counting on that sentiment accelerating if he could bring about a Southern victory in Northern territory. So, on July 1, 1863, Lee's forces launched an invasion of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Gettysburg was a major crossroads for travel, troop movement, and supplies – a choke point for that area of Pennsylvania.

Lee's army came to battle with superior numbers, but the Northern troops held the high ground and had set up a formidable defensive position. Before the Southern army's attack, Lee had assembled his generals to discuss battle tactics. One of his generals was to launch an attack from the northeast flank while the remainder of Lee's troops, spread out over several miles, were to begin their assault from the west. However, the orders to the troops to the northeast were somehow muddled, and that diversion failed. This meant that the entirety of the fighting was to take place on the west.

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Update on the 2009 Directory of Sabbath Observing Groups.

I've been getting a lot of questions as to why the Directory has not been published. After the death of my husband in 2006 and subsequent move to Washington, I just have not been able to do the work it takes to put such a huge project together. My husband Richard wrote and published the 2001 edition. I do not have his expertise or computer skills, so for me, it's like working through a minefield. Those of you who have paid for the directory, don't worry. I have a file with your name and payment. I am just about finished with the editing and data entries and should be sending out the files for corrections by November. Then, there is the matter of trying to get it printed. Please be patient. I will get it done as soon as humanly possible. *Shirley Nickels*

9-1-1 Calls to God



The 9-1-1 emergency phone system we have in America is a tremendous service. Dial it for medical emergencies, during a home break-in, when witnessing a crime, when coming upon an automobile accident, seeing a house on fire, reporting a lost child, or any emergency that might require police, rescue, or fire department assistance. Not all nations have this kind of emergency service. My life was once saved after 9-1-1 help arrived. It shouldn't surprise us that God has been answering 9-1-1 type calls for thousands of years.

by Kenneth Westby

My heart was racing as I struggled to breathe. Panic was setting in. I awakened JoAn and mumbled, "I'm in trouble." She immediately suggested calling the emergency 9-1-1 service. I said let's wait a few minutes and see if I get better. It was 3:00 AM and the thought of fire engines and aid cars rushing into our quite little neighborhood seemed an embarrassing commotion. Maybe my distress would lessen.

It got worse. My heart raced wildly and I was fighting for every shallow little breath of air. JoAn said, "I'm calling 9-1-1." I said, "okay."

The preceding weeks had been some of the toughest of my life. Six weeks earlier I'd had open-heart quadruple by-pass surgery and was not fully recovered. My chest wound and leg wounds (where the surgeons stripped a vein to use in the by-passes) were still tender. One week earlier I had just finished hosting our first One God Seminar looking into the doctrine of God issues. We had speakers from around the nation attending the three-day affair including one speaker from England and his wife who stayed in our home. The last of our several house guests had been gone just three days.

Those three days were the very worst of times. Family problems, caused by some very nasty bureaucrats, resulted in three of our grandchildren staying with us for a few days. They all had colds or the flu. As soon as they moved in JoAn was in an auto accident that totaled our car but caused no serious injury. But we discovered that during the turmoil of the past few months we'd neglected to renew the insurance on the car, so all was lost.

A combination of all the stress, being still weak from heart surgery, and then catching whatever the grandkids had, put me into a serious health crisis.

I struggled down the stairs just in time to open the door for the first fire engine company to arrive. JoAn was a few steps behind me. Immediately the EMTs had me sit down, told me to try to relax as they began asking questions and unpacking their gear. Then the second engine company arrived with more rescue personnel. I hadn't been in the living room chair but a minute when it happened.

Needless to say, I'd never "died" before and didn't know quite what to expect. But when I felt the blood beginning to drain from my brain I was able to get out two short phrases to alert the team of men surrounding me: "I'm going. I'm going."

It felt like a black curtain was being quickly pulled down in my head. That was it. My heart had stopped. I had flat-lined.

The next thing I remember was opening my eyes on the floor looking up at our living room ceiling—a vantage I'd never seen before. Atop me was one of those burley firemen pounding his fist on my chest. My immediate thought was please don't break open my breast bone, still being held together with staples from the surgery. Well, that was the least of my worries.

I was back alive! The men helped me sit up. I vomited. They loaded me on a wheeled gurney and rushed me to the hospital. During my week there I was treated for pneumonia, examined, and recommended for a pacemaker and defibrillator implant, which I now have.

God was merciful and spared my life. If JoAn hadn't called 9-1-1 when she did, I wouldn't be writing this article. The most upsetting part to me was that my dear wife had to watch all this. Later she told me what happened after my heart stopped—as

well as the private thoughts of her heart as events unfolded.

She said as soon as I fell out of my chair, the room full of firefighters and EMTs sprang into frenetic action, throwing tables aside, clearing room, and feverishly unpacking gear as one of them immediately began pounding on my chest.

JoAn said it was a surreal moment. She said to herself, sadly, "So this is how it ends." Her next thought was, "Was I nice to him since I woke up?" Thanks to God's great kindness she was able to share those thoughts with me and I was able to thank her. Yes, she had been truly nice...and has always been nice to me. In those bleak and dark 3:00 AM moments JoAn and I were sending our desperate cries to God for help. He heard and answered.

God Answers the 9-1-1 Line

I don't know if one can quite be the same after such a brush with death. When I think of it, I'm amazed anew over God's closeness and willing readiness to hear and answer our cries for help.

Our God is a God near, not far away. "...Yahweh our God is near us whenever we pray to him....Seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart, and with all your soul" (Deut 4:7, 29).

When we think of God up in the heavens, we need not think of him as residing one billion light years removed from our galaxy. Why not think of him as near? The whole notion of heaven being far away is not necessarily a biblical one. Heaven or God's abode could just as easily be surrounding earth as God's kingdom is invisible to us. Of course, God is not restricted to the speed of light, so it matters not "where" God is at any moment. What matters is that his attention is directed toward you and your requests. I think it is helpful to think of him as "physically" at hand, imminently near rather than being in some far corner of the cosmos.

This seems to be the way he wants his people to relate to him. To pray is to bring God into our personal world. Righteous believers who were close to God and experienced answered prayers confidently advise us to "make our requests known to God" (Phil 4:6; 1 Jn 5:14-15).

When you are in trouble and your "enemies" are all too close and getting closer (whether the "enemies" be financial, health, or people troubles), God is closer. As the Psalmist puts it:

Those who devise wicked schemes are near,
but they are far from your law.
Yet you are near, O Lord,
and all your commands are true. (Psalm 119:151)

The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.
He fulfills the desires of those who fear him;
He hears their cry and saves them. (Psalm
145:18-19)

Many Christians, I fear, do not pray as passionately as they could because they don't think God is near and listening. Or they don't see how their prayers could make any significant difference. They pray, but they often do so out of sheer obedience and without any sense of urgency and without much confidence that God hears or will actually answer. 9-1-1 type prayers, however, require a sense of urgency and expectation.

Perhaps our prayers lack urgency because in our hearts we doubt we can influence God. Much of Christianity teaches that God's sovereignty means exhaustive control of all events. We're told that all events are predestined by God and the future is settled. If that is so, what real difference could prayer possibly make? Some theologians like to answer, "prayer changes us, not God" but this saying contradicts the scriptural record and doesn't reflect the urgency that Scripture gives to petitionary prayer. Are we praying to ourselves as some psychological exercise, or are we are praying to get God to respond?

The way God has chosen to create his world allows for his creatures to have freedom. He has willingly restrained his power to not control all human events. He has chosen to have free relationships with those made in his image.

Men and women have key roles in deciding things and God says all will be judged by what we do. All that humans do is not controlled or predictable. God has allowed the future to be partly open and partly settled. The settled part is what God ultimately plans to achieve. The future is not totally settled and prayer affects what happens in our lives, what God does, and at times even causes him to change his mind and accede to the one praying. Prayer changes things because God changes things.

Jesus told the parable of the unjust judge who was persistently bothered by a widow until he finally granted her justice. Jesus' point was that we "need to pray and not lose heart." If an unjust judge will relent and hear a widow's persistent plea, how much more will our loving Father be affected by our persistent pleas? Jesus asks, "Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?" (Luke 18:1-6).

Prayer has many forms including praise, confession, intercession, worship, and meditation. Our fo-

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Christians Should Bear Fruit

“Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?” (Luke 9:46)

By Brian Knowles

Jesus does not expect his followers to live empty, fruitless lives. He expects us to produce fruit for his kingdom. Yet, we cannot bear fruit unless we are connected to the source of spiritual nourishment that makes it possible. In order to show us how to produce fruit, Jesus used a picture of the grape vine. It is recorded in John 15:1-8.

“I am the vine...”

In this analogy Jesus likens himself to a grapevine. God the Father is the “gardener” or vinedresser. The followers of Jesus are the branches or tendrils emanating from the vine. The Father is pictured examining the vine for unfruitful, dead branches and then pruning them off “so that it [the vine] will be even more fruitful,” (John 15:2b).

Anyone who works with fruit trees, grapevines or plants knows that trimming away the deadwood renders a plant healthier. Unfruitful branches are a burden on the healthy portions of the plant. When they are trimmed off, the healthy branches become more productive. God the Father, the vinedresser, wants to see healthy, fruit-bearing branches emanating from the vine that represents his Son in this analogy.

How does this “pruning” take place? People who work with wood and tree branches often speak of “cleaning” them. In the case of lumber, this may mean removing nails and rotted parts. The other day I “cleaned” some facing boards my stepson had removed from the eaves of our house. If I cut a branch from our camphor tree, I will clean it of twigs before chopping it up for disposal. To clean a branch on a growing vine is to remove all of the unproductive parts leaving only healthy parts. This apparently is what Jesus had in mind when he said to his talmidim (disciples or students), “You are already clean...” (John 15:3a). As a result of their time with Jesus, they were trimmed, productive and ready to bear fruit. But how had they been cleaned?

Note: The Greek word translated “prunes” in verse 2 means “to clean or trim by removing superfluous wood,” (BAG, p. 386d). The word “clean” is *katharoi*. Notice how similar this idea is to our English term “purge” or “catharsis.” The verb *katharizo* is used in the New Testament of ritual cleansing or purification

(Matthew 23:25; Mark 7:9 etc.). To produce fruit for the Kingdom, each of us must be cleansed and purified so that we can draw spiritual energy from the “vine” – Christ. How did God (the vinedresser) accomplish this cleansing?

Jesus answers, “You are already clean because of [“through” – KJV] the word I have spoken to you,” (John 15:3). Jesus’ words – his teachings – had the effect of purging the deadwood from the disciple’s lives. This returns us to the theme passage of this series: “the things that Jesus said.” To remain in Christ, we must remain in his words – his teachings. One of the great problems in mainstream Christian churches today is that there is much emphasis on the person of Christ at the expense of his teachings. Part of the reason for this imbalanced emphasis is probably fear of “legalism.” Yet, to bear fruit, we must come to know, understand and live his instructions and teachings. This is easier said than done.

Disconnected Branches

If we cut ourselves off from Jesus’ teachings by ignoring them, or by replacing them with cultic shibboleths, we will cease to produce fruit. “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me,” (John 15:4b). To remain in Christ is to remain connected with him and with his teachings. In another place, Jesus is recorded as saying, “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life,” (John 6:63b).

Jesus placed great stress on the importance of his words, “If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels,” (Mark 8:38).

Returning to our main study text we read, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing,” (John 15:5). The thought here is similar to that of Psalm 127:1, “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain,”

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Should I Kill Insects?

by **Dusti Howell**

(October 29, 2008) There are 256 types of mosquitoes here in Thailand. A visit in Chiang Mai, Thailand to one of the many insect museums showcases the amazing designs of these fascinating blood suckers. Some of them are so small that you might mistake them for a fruit fly, but after swatting them, you marvel at how something so small could have been successful and sucking so much blood. As much as I dislike mosquitoes, ants are a bigger nuisance here. I've learned to always inspect my large 32oz big gulp cup drinking from it or before filling it up with water. One day I was in a bit of a rush to get to class. I still had nearly half a cup of water in the cup and decided to drink the entire cup in one gulp. I was half way through my enormous gulp when I noticed a huge trail of ants around the rim of the cup... Aaah... I'd just swallowed a bunch of small ants. Yuck. Interestingly, the ants will find my water cup everywhere, even on top of a seven foot bookshelf.

The ants here come in lots of sizes. One day I killed a big ant but left it on the carpet. The next day I just happened to notice a large trail of very small ants. They were working on devouring the body of the large ant I had killed the day before. So don't kill a big ant on your bed or you'll have a trail of ants there later. My son caught two small lizards just under three inches in length and put them in fairly large plastic bins as pets. He has a pet frog back home in Kansas, so he was pretty excited about this. The next day both were dead. They had been killed by ants. Large trails of ants were found working on devouring the bodies. It was after one of these instances that the scripture reading for church was from Proverbs, exhorting us to go to the ant you sluggard. They are relentless and they don't stop.

One of the Buddhist students at the school here, learning about Christianity, said that he really appreciated one of the former teachers because he wouldn't kill insects. Even the Queen of Thailand does not kill mosquitoes but fans them away. So I do my best not to offend students by fanning mosquitoes away in public. But my natural instincts too often kick in and another mosquito or ant is dead. The vast majority of students kill insects. However, the Buddhist belief in reincarnation means that when you kill a living being, you might be swatting a former relative.

Small Portions

One of the things I didn't like when I got to Thailand was the fact that everything comes in small containers. The energy drinks here come in 8 ounce containers. In the states I can buy monster drinks that are easily two or three times bigger. The bags of chips

that are sold here are very small. Even the size of the portions served at the fast food restaurants are very small. At first I had to order two meals to get what I felt was one meal in the USA. However, as time has gone on, I've gotten used to the smaller portions and now appreciate the fact that I've lost ten pounds without even working at it. I think we are too used to eating too much in the USA.

Blessing the Land and Spirit Houses

The Free Burma Rangers^[1] is a Christian backed humanitarian organization that helps provide Bibles and assistance to those hill tribes struggling with the Burmese government in the ongoing 60-year civil war. One of the Christian leaders of this organization just inherited some land here in Thailand and asked several different ministers to pray over the foundation of the house and guesthouse that were being built there. I had been in Thailand for less than a week when I was asked to represent Legacy Institute at this ceremony. I was glad to help out and did my part in praying for a blessing on the house. What was interesting was how we started the prayer. One of the American ministers that had been in Thailand for 40-years, prayed in English and then translated his prayer into Thai for the benefit of the local Thais that were there. He began by praying to the highest God of all the land. It was clear to all the Christians that he was praying to our God. But the way he did it made all the Thais very interested in the ceremony. A Buddhist worker for Legacy Institute had driven me to the location. He told me that the prayer was very good and that the minister who prayed it was a very, very good man. He had never met the minister before but said this because of his prayer. Thais believe in a hierarchy in the spirit world, as do most Christians. By appealing the highest God of the land, the highest spirit of all, the locals become more interested in these types of Christian outreach.

Most Thais are Buddhists, but even the Buddhist accepts different religious practices from other religions. For example, there are spirit houses everywhere here in Thailand, but this is a Hindu practice. Spirit houses look like temples, are about the size of large dollhouses, and they are on pedestals.^[2] You see them next to a lot of houses in Thailand. The belief is that if you build a house or a hotel here, you are displacing the spirit of that land. In order to keep the spirit happy, you need to erect a spirit house for the spirit to live in. You can give daily offerings of bananas or fragrant flowers at the little entrances to these houses to keep the spirit happy. There are also

spirit houses next to huge trees because there is a spirit of the tree. There are also spirit houses in middle of nowhere, at the base of small mountains or large hills. By appealing to the highest spirit of all spirits, the God of the universe, the Thais feel very good that you are not offending any of the spirits, and that you are being a very good steward of your land.

Burma Visa Run and Lahu Village Visit

Last week we had to cross the border into Burma in order to renew our visas. We do this every 90-days. On the way back from Burma, I was able to visit one of our Lahu students' villages.^[3] Jaseefu had already gone to three years of Bible school before enrolling in our Sabbatarian school at Legacy.^[4] We first drove to a neighboring village to attend its thanksgiving celebration for the harvest of the first fruits in one of the area villages. One of the village leaders and Jaseefu's former pastor served us lunch. I was asked to give a blessing on the food. Lahu dishes here were served with sticky rice in a large banana like leaf. This was how I ate with members in Sri Lanka years ago. The leaf becomes your plate once you open it up. Each serving dish has a spoon, which allows you to move some of the food to your leaf. The sticky rice then becomes your only utensil. You take a ball of it and then squish it around greens or meat chunks in order to pinch the food. Then you move the pinched food with sticky rice to your mouth. By holding your fingers straight, you can push the food into your mouth with your thumb. At this meal we immediately found out that everything had pork in it. We told them we couldn't eat pork and just enjoyed the sticky rice. Soon they brought us some vegetables and a very tasty spicy sauce which we used to dip our sticky rice in. In two weeks Jaseefu's village will have its own thanksgiving for its own first fruits harvest. It seems that every village sets its own dates for their thanksgiving ceremony. That evening we visited two other villages before going to his village at the top of a mountain, a few miles from the Burmese border. In the morning I woke up looking out of his mother's Bamboo house to see clouds floating by in the valley below.

One note of interest was that every Bamboo hut in his village (100 huts) had a solar panel tied to a battery in the house. A certificate in each house, next to the electrical unit, looks like a 'Bill of Rights' and claims that every Thai has the right to electricity. The picture on this certificate is of former Prime Minister Taksin, who is in exile in England. His wife was just sentenced to prison before the Olympics. Taksin and his wife got a special allowance to attend the Olympics but never came back afterwards. Television antennas were everywhere and the Lahu were singing and watching Karaoke music videos or broadcast television and DVDs in most of the village that evening. Thailand is close to erupting into a civil war as the red shirted Thais from urban areas hold massive protests, trying to get Taksin's brother-in-law to resign. Taksin is a billionaire and appears to have made

much of his money in a tax-free manner, which angers many urbanites. However, if Thais would have new elections today, Taksin would win easily. The rural Thais love him. The urbanites say that is because the rural voters are not well educated. However, it seems that none of the other prime ministers ever gave the rural people much. Taksin, on the other hand, gave them electricity and for many that means that life has become a bit easier.

Full Health Care and Discrimination

Thailand had complete health care for its citizens. It seems that our students are always going to the hospital, even for the slightest of sore throats. Why not? It's free.

Over two months ago Jay took a spill on his bicycle and fractured his shoulder. The hospital reset his shoulder and told him to come back. However, his ID card was in his village, so he didn't go to his appointment at the hospital. There was a small kitchen fire here which Jay helped put out but in the process his arm became dislocated again. After he got his ID card and went to the hospital, the doctor refused to see him because he missed his appointment. There is free medical care in Thailand (if you have a card), but if you are a minority (hill tribe), they can treat you like dirt. Jay actually left Legacy for a couple weeks to get treatment in his own village, but the therapist there was too old and not strong enough to put his arm back in place. So for several weeks his arm was in a lot of pain and out of joint. When he got back to Legacy, we got him an appointment at another hospital. Before he went in, he went and played soccer with the Legacy team. He tried to avoid a collision with another player in the game and accidentally reset his arm. We took him to about a dozen physical therapy sessions at the new hospital. He still can't raise his right hand all the way, but his range of motion is slowly coming back.

End Notes:

[1] <http://www.freeburmarangers.org/>

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spirit_house

[3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lahu_people

[4] <http://www.legacyinstitute.org/>

Dusti Howell, a, BSA board members, is on sabbatical from his normal job of teaching at Emporia State University in Emporia, Kansas, to work with the Legacy Institute in Thailand (Legacy-institute.org). While on Sabbatical in northern Thailand, he is teaching Bible, study skills, and technology classes to hill-tribe students at Legacy Institute (a Sabbatarian school).

Dusti earned a Ph.D. major in Educational Communications and Technology and a Ph.D. minor in Educational Psychology from the University of Wisconsin. He is an Associate Professor of Instructional Design and Technology at Emporia State University in Kansas. He has written over a dozen books on technology and academic success.

What Do We Do When God Says Nothing?

By Bill Ellis

Special to ASSIST News Service

SCOTT DEPOT, WV — Some people say, “God always answers my prayers!” Many, however, know what it is like when God says nothing: the deafening blow of silence.

Jesus had fed “five thousand men besides women and children” with just five loaves and two fish. After they had all eaten, they had 12 baskets full left over. You may read this story in Matthew 14, and also about Jesus and Peter walking on water. Jesus did it better than Peter.

The next chapter tells about Jesus going to the area of Tyre and Sidon. “And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed’ ” (Matthew 15:22). The very next verse says, “But He answered her not a word.”

This grieving mother made her plea and heard not one word of comfort. That must have been for her, and would be for any of us, a very discouraging time.

We live in a day when our hearts often fail us with fear. The needs are great and resources for support are plentiful, but none are offered. It is easy then to feel helpless and all alone. Discouragement leads to despair. It is at such a time that people want to give up and many do. When face to face with desperate circumstances, anyone who has the ability to make a positive difference should do so.

On the Sabbath Day of July 19, 2008, Kitty and I were guests at the Shiloh Seventh Day Adventist Church in Huntington, West Virginia, to hear one of the great preachers of the world. We listened to the Rev. Dr. Barry C. Black, the 62nd Chaplain of the United States Senate. Prior to his call to Capitol Hill on June 27, 2003, he had completed 27 years in the U. S. Navy and had served as Chief of Navy Chaplains with the rank of Rear Admiral.

Chaplain Black’s message was titled, “When God Says Nothing.” After taking note of world conditions and the problems faced by our nation, he made several statements that caught my attention. He counseled us on how to deal with life when God says nothing in response to our cries for help.

Black said, “We sing, ‘Take your burdens to the Lord and leave them there.’ The heaviest burdens may be those we leave at home.” A sick child, a slowly dying spouse, a house we can no longer afford, cupboards that are bare — may be among the burdens we leave behind.

Dr. Black quoted Scripture that reminds us to “have no anxiety about anything, but to pray about everything.” When we have brought all our burdens, even our heaviest ones, to the Lord, he cautioned, “Be prepared for opposition and overcome it.” He added, “If you want to confuse the enemy, praise God when everything goes wrong.”

One encouraging word that Sabbath morning was, “Know your identity in Jesus Christ. As a child of your Heavenly Father you have the privilege of having all your needs supplied.”

A closing admonition was, “Keep on keeping on to see what the end will be.” It may be that when God says nothing, we just have to sing the words of an old Gospel song, “We’ll understand it better by and by.” The Scriptural story said, “But He answered not a word.”

It is at such a time that millions have testified in abiding faith, “All the way my Savior leads me.” Cultivate that kind of faith for the time when there seems to be no good answer for the problems you may be facing. If you can make a positive difference for somebody, do not wait any longer to do so.

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

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The Holy Kiss

Peacemaking in a Divided World

by Jason Overman

My parents divorced when I was a baby. They had been childhood sweethearts, dating through high school and after. When Mom realized she was pregnant, she decided against abortion and married Dad instead. They did not know God back then, but they did love each other. Love, it turned out, would not be enough to hold them together; “irreconcilable differences” tore the family apart within two years.

The world too is broken. Divorce names but one of the many faces our brokenness takes — a metaphor for all that is sundered and torn. There is no doubting the existence of love in our world, often signified by a kiss. But there is also no doubting the pervasive taint that tends to subvert and spoil that love. From the inter-personal to the inter-national, from families to friends, from races to religions, from neighbors to nations, human relationships are in turmoil. The causes are legion: from trivial pride and misunderstanding to profound betrayal and victimization. In this world of sin and evil, humans become estranged; things fall apart.

We need look no further than our own hearts to locate the source and the scars of a ruptured reality. Others have afflicted us, but our own natures also conspire against us — and against others. Sometimes these fractures are hairline and carefully masked beneath a veneer of normalcy. Other times they are gaping crevices that cannot be hidden. Either way we are all wrestling at the divide, in conflict not only with others but also with ourselves and, behind that, with God.

How can these conflicts, this brokenness, be resolved? Reconciliation is the Bible’s answer. And a kiss, though it can deceive, may be its best symbol.

A Coming Kiss

“Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed” (Psalm 85:10).

Genesis offers a view of our severed origins. Humans were created for fellowship, for communion with God and creation. Eden is accord, harmony on every level — spiritual, personal, matrimonial, environmental — and the Fall names the loss. When Adam and Eve overreached the boundary God set, their sin was, before anything else, a heavy blow to their relationships with heaven. This vertical breach quickly overtook everything horizontal as well. In its wake came personal fear and guilt (3:8-10), marital suspicion and conflict (vv. 11-16), environmental estrangement and hostility (vv. 17-19).

Ancient Israel knew the divisive curse that sin drapes over the world. She also knew that her God would not surrender His creation to sin’s cleavage. Sin is abandonment of the righteousness that sustains our relationship with God. The result is the collapse of peace for humanity. But the poets and prophets of Israel anticipated a reversal, a return — a great kiss of reconciliation. And they knew themselves well enough to realize that this work would be not theirs but God’s on their behalf.

Psalm 85 celebrates this work — the triumph of mercy over wrath, restoration and revival over iniquity and exile. The poem provides a vivid account of this coming salvation, when “righteousness and peace have kissed” (v. 10). Isaiah echoes this reconciling promise with the words “The work of righteousness will be peace” (32:17).

A Cruciform Kiss

“Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him” (Matthew 26:48).

Jesus is this righteousness made flesh. As Jacob deceived Isaac with a kiss, so Judas betrayed Jesus with this intimate act. Here the symbol of reconciliation inflicts a deadly wound and proves our separation from God. Yet in the face of our failure, God’s surprising love in Christ draws near to restore peace where none is deserved. Despite barren kisses, His righteousness does not hesitate to descend and heal among the severed and betrayed.

We glimpse this truth when Jesus eats with Simon the Pharisee. Simon offers Jesus no kiss, but a woman alienated and shackled by sin appears on the scene and cannot cease to kiss Jesus’ feet (Luke 7:38, 45). The same truth leaps from the story of a prodigal, whose first word is “Father, give me” and whose last is “Father, I have sinned.” In between is a wasted life and a dad who “runs and kisses” the lost (15:11-21). Such kisses — of a betraying brother, of a sinning woman, and of a forgiving father — anticipate a cross.

To the Romans, Paul explains that in the cross the “righteousness of God” has appeared so that we now have “peace with God” (3:21-26; 4:13—5:1). Here is the cosmic kiss:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us... when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son... (vv. 8, 10).

The alienation and wrath that have defined our past and future are overcome. The relationship severed selfishly in Adam is restored sacrificially in Christ (Colossians 1:19-21).

The good news is that in Christ, righteousness and peace have finally kissed and relationship with God is restored. But this reconciliation is not confined to you and me as individuals. Now all things are reconciled (Ephesians 1:10) — not just to God but to each other, and to ourselves as well. Old conflicts can be mended as the new creation begins. If Paul can envision the end of enmity between ancient rivals — Jews and Gentiles — by the blood of Christ (2:11-21), how much more the end of all petty divisions that haunt us today.

A Christian Kiss

“Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus” (1 Peter 5:14).

Like Peter, Apostle Paul calls the churches to greet one other with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20). This is no quaint, culturally conditioned gesture but a potent sign that we are decisively shaped by the costly reconciliation of God in Christ. It signifies that we are not merely recipients of this reconciliation but representatives of it as well. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, it is not just that Jesus is “the righteousness of God” but “that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” It is not just that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” but that He “has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18, 21). As ambassadors of Christ (to our amazement), “we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (v. 20).

But reconciliation is not simple or sentimental; it is not cheap. It is a divine process that takes sin and suffering seriously. Reconciliation issues from forgiveness, but as L. Gregory Jones writes in *Embodying Forgiveness*, it is not a forgiveness that merely helps people... “cope” with their situation — without having to engage in struggles to change and transform the patterns of their relationships... people are mistaken if they think of Christian forgiveness primarily as absolution from guilt; the purpose of forgiveness is the restoration of communion, the reconciliation of brokenness... In response, people are called to embody that forgiveness by unlearning patterns of sin and struggling for reconciliation wherever there is brokenness.¹

A Costly Kiss

“Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way” (Psalm 2:12).

Christian reconciliation does not traffic in easy answers or easy outs; it is costly. As Jones writes, “Unfortunately, the cost of forgiveness is too high for many people” because it “confronts them with the truth about themselves” and because it directs them

to own their sin through confession, repentance, and restitution. This sin “cannot be overlooked or forgotten; it must be confronted and judged...” But it is a judgment “wholly in the service of mercy, reconciliation, and new life.”²

Despite the victory of the cross, our world remains enthralled with the destructiveness of sin. The cycles of sin and suffering run deep, and sometimes we cling to them, like Jonah who seemed unable to accept the transformation of his enemies in Nineveh to friends, by God’s grace. Regardless of whether the world, the neighbor, or the brother is ready to reconcile, the church exists to embody it, to make space for it, as our Lord did.

At the very least this means that the church must be a community committed to practicing reconciliation within. That we are more often characterized by our splits and conflicts than by our unity and peace is perhaps the greatest indictment the world can level against the validity of our faith.

A Concluding Kiss

“Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept” (Genesis 29:11).

Perhaps we are all a little like Jacob, wrestling with God as he ran from — and toward — the litter of shattered trusts. Peniel, we recall, looks back on Jacob’s flight from angry Laban and forward to his fears of meeting bitter Esau. We cannot help but be startled by the “kisses” each of them extends when hostility is what Jacob dreadfully, deservedly, expected (32:24; 31:55; 33:4). Such is the surprising reconciling grace of God!

That kind of grace happened in our home, it turned out. My parents have been married for almost forty years now — the second time. After their divorce, my father became a Christian, and the minister challenged him to humbly face his past and seek to be reconciled to his family just as he had been to God. He did, and it took time. Eventually Mom accepted Christ and Dad too, and they remarried.

Not all our reunion stories have happy endings, but we have stories just the same. As we wrestle through the Spirit with enduring brokenness, we cannot help but expect more stories to encourage them and strive for them. Reconciliation, after all, is the ministry God has given us in the world.

Reprinted from *Bible Advocate*, March 2008, p. 4. Jason Overman lives and ministers in Jasper, Arkansas, with his wife, Stephanie, and their two children, Tabitha and Isaac.

References:

1. L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, pp. 6, 5
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 11, 14, 15

The Earth Is the Lord's

By Terril D. Littrell, Ph.D.

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein" (Psalms 24:1).

The earth and all its inhabitants belong to the Lord God Yahweh. For this reason God has maintained a covenant relationship with the people and a covenant support for the Land. It is the responsibility of humankind to partner with God in the stewardship of the earth.

The Torah makes significant claims about the handiwork of Yahweh, the great architect of the universe. On each day of creation, a loving God observed that what he had made was "good" and, in his final act of creation, he noted that it was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Yahweh, the creator God, is a covenant God. There are many covenants mentioned in the Bible, with the first being the Edenic Covenant or the earth covenant of expansion and dominion given to Adam and Eve, humanity's first parents, before sin entered into the world.

Although the word covenant is not used, it is most assuredly implied with its divine promises and ordinances. The command was given by God to humankind to "be fruitful and multiply" and to "fill and subdue" the earth (Genesis 1:28). God said, "Let us make man in our image after our likeness; and let them have dominion... over all the earth" (Genesis 1:26). God calls humankind to the task of stewardship over his bounty by giving us special responsibility to care for his creation. "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden" to fill, till, and keep the earth (Genesis 2:15). The heavens are the Lord's, but the earth he has given to humankind (Psalm 115:16). God delights in creation, and creation delights in praising the Creator. "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord" (Psalm 150:6).

There is a tremendous difference between the false concept of dominion that means control and exploitation of the natural environment and the truth that we are a part of the creation of God and given an important role in this covenant relationship to "keep" this beautiful garden called Earth! We are given dominion, not domination of the earth. We are to subdue, not exploit it. God never relinquished ownership over the earth. The creation of humanity on the sixth day and God's command to "keep" it is an eschatological sign of the perfect kingdom where there will be no more corruption or death (Revelation 21). The special responsibility of humankind to keep or care for the earth reflects the Creator's way of governing and ordering all of his creation in every culture and era of human history.

The Adamic Covenant

Not content with his assignment upon the earth as caretaker or guardian, the first man, Adam, rebelled against his Creator and lost his domain in the Garden of Eden. After sin

brought about a curse upon the whole created order, a loving Creator made a covenant with Adam promising redemption of all God's creation (Genesis 3:1-24).

The Noahic Covenant

The word *covenant* is used for the first time in the Bible regarding God's promise never again to destroy the whole earth through a flood (Genesis 9:9-17). This promise of God's continual blessing, first made to Adam and Eve and now to Noah and his family, of expansion and land preservation is set in the context of an interdependent household or "*oikos*" from which the word ecology is derived. Ecology is an integral part of the weave of relationships between God, humanity, and the rest of the natural world.

The word *covenant* implies mutual trust, responsibility, and relationship between God and the family of Noah. As long as human beings protect and preserve the welfare of the inhabitants of the ark, God sees to it that the needs of all creatures are met. The entire creation suffers when the human family suffers or is unfaithful to its covenant.

The Abrahamic Covenant

The covenant that God made with father Abraham and his family was also a covenant of land expansion and preservation. Abraham's descendants were to be many and were to become a great nation that would inherit the "promised land," later called the "Land of Israel" (Genesis 13:15-17; 15:5; 17:16-20; 18:18-19; 22:18). God's covenant with Abraham was restated and confirmed to Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 26:1-5; 28:13-15).

In the Torah the word *land* means more than real estate, dirt, or soil. When the people of God struggled to live in the land, that suggests "life," so the "land" has both literal and symbolic functions, giving it both the sense of "place" as well as of "being," both of which are gifts from God that are always in relationship to creation.

The Mosaic Covenant

The covenant which Yahweh made with Moses and his family, the Israelites, was also a "land covenant." The entire book of Deuteronomy deals with the time just before Israel entered the "Promised Land." The book poses one major question of how Israel was to live in the land if God's chosen people were to enjoy *Shalom*!

Some boundaries had to be established related to "life in the land." Yahweh said, "The land is mine" (Leviticus 25:23), and then he added, "You are strangers and sojourners." Thus the land was a gift in covenant with God which involved the stewardship of "keeping" and "tend-

ing” the land for present and future generations. As God’s creation, land has the need of regeneration that it may sustain life and enjoy Shalom! This land is a common gift to all of life requiring merely guidance for land use. Jewish tradition views the environment as God’s domain and enjoins humankind from upsetting its created order, thereby establishing an eco-environmental ethic based on an attitude of gratitude toward the Creator and his creation.

The Torah regards the proper care of the land and creation as socially, economically, religiously, and ecologically central to the law of God. The weekly Sabbath rest, as well as the seventh-year rest (*shmita* or septennial cycle), and the year of Jubilee implies stewardship, balance and wholeness when humans and animals in their charge create nothing, destroy nothing, and enjoy the beauty of the earth (Exodus 20:8–11; Leviticus 25:4).

Thus, the people of God are reminded that they may not press creation relentlessly in an effort to maximize productivity. Violating the covenant relationship defiles the people and the land which vomits out their inhabitants (Leviticus 18:25). Israel’s failure to follow the laws related to the land was considered a cause of the exile in Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:20–21).

A Broken Covenant

The prophets of old saw the patterns of economic exploitation, social class consciousness and exclusiveness, judicial corruption, political opposition, and failure to care for the land as opposed to God’s desire for life and wholeness for all—Shalom! (Amos 2:8; Isaiah 5:1; Jeremiah 2:7–8). The prophet Amos saw the sin and captivity of Israel as a result of their treating the earth as a boundless warehouse which allowed the rich and the powerful to exploit the boundaries that Yahweh had established for it (Amos 5:6–17). The prophet Hosea warned that as the consequences of disobedience, selfishness, and greed, “the land mourns and everyone that dwells therein languishes with beasts of the field and the fowls of heaven ... even the sea are perishing” (Hosea 4:1–3).

Today we are recognizing in new and alarming ways the truth-with which these prophets spoke. Many parts of the globe suffer from the same maladies as did ancient Israel. Creation groans wider the burden of our abuse and misuse of God’s gifts to humanity. For the past century humankind has acted as “master” and “lord” of the environment, paying little attention to the effects of our sinful acts against the environment; therefore, we are experiencing nature as an instrument of God’s judgment on our unfaithfulness as good stewards of God’s bounty.

Due to our escalating consumption patterns everywhere forests are over-logged, agricultural lands are over-cultivated with top soil depletion, water-polluted grasslands are over-grazed, wetlands are over-drained, ground waters are over-tapped, seas are over-fished, and marine environments are over-polluted with chemical and radioactive poisons. Some species of animal life have become extinct. There mainly many improvements that can be made.

A New Covenant

Christ Jesus, who created all things (John 1:1–10), has given us a New Covenant that speaks of the redemption of all things, including our present world crisis (Colossians 1:13–20). As New Covenant believers we eagerly look forward to the redemption of all creation, which does, indeed, groan to be delivered (Romans 8:19–23; Ephesians 1:10). What the first man Adam lost through disobedience, the second man Adam (Christ) regained for humanity through his obedience to death on the cross and through his resurrection to eternal life (Romans 5:17; I Corinthians 15:22–47).

This covenant goes beyond the Mosaic Covenant that Yahweh made with our fathers when he took them out of Egypt and eventually into the Promised Land in that when God takes away unrighteousness, sins, and iniquities, he remembers them no more (Romans 11:27; Hebrews 8:12–13).

As New Covenant believers we are called to speak of God’s Lordship and life in creation and to be a light to the nations (Acts 13:47). God has given to us the ministry and word of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18–19), and he has given us the power through Jesus Christ to effect a change for a better world. We are messengers of Good News that the redemption of the world has already begun through him in us. We are agents of that redemptive, creative power in him for Shalom! The God of justice calls us to reconcile and restore creation which begins with the confession of our ecological sins against God’s creation and to repent so that all God’s creation may know the joy of abundant life through Christ the Redeemer.

Our Covenant Task

Both Christians and Jews are covenant people of God who acknowledge that our lives depend upon the gracious covenant of God’s love at work in the world. We strive to live more clearly and more faithfully the terms of the covenant God who made us and all creation for wholeness, health, and unity in the earth’s ecosystems.

We have an opportunity for both synagogue and church to work together to foster a positive ecumenical and interfaith spirit with a variety of local community programs that embrace all members’ well-being and self-worth in ecological balance and harmony. One of the things that we can do together is to schedule an Earth Day Sabbath Celebration. Invite a naturalist from your state Department of Conservation as a guest speaker who can help raise the level of consciousness concerning the ecological crisis we face and point out the commitment to ecological restoration as far as is possible. Together, organize a coalition in response to the people’s desire to act to stop global pollution and destruction.

Together, Jews and Christians can support policies to protect the earth so that life may be cherished for the sake of the all humanity. May the good and fruitful earth show God’s glory and sing God’s praises forever!

Reprinted from RESTORE magazine, August, 2008. Dr. Terri D. Littrell is a retired pastor with over forty years of experience in teaching and ministry. He and his wife, Chloe, live in Cleveland, Tennessee.

Celtic Sabbath Keeping

by Richard Nickels

Giving and Sharing Study No. 264

Proof of Celtic Sabbath-keeping is easy to find. The curious thing is why Church of God missionaries do not return to Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, and thunder the Gospel message of repentance, calling on today's Celtic peoples to return to the faith of their fathers.

Henry Charles Lea, the foremost authority on the Papal Inquisitions, records in the period of the commencement of persecution involving judicial capital punishment for heresy, that at the time of the execution of Priscillian with six of his followers in 385 AD., that "others were banished to a barbarous island beyond Britain," *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, vol. 1, New York: Harper & Brothers 1887, p. 213.

What was this barbarous island? Most likely, it would appear to be Ireland. Britain and Ireland were favorite places for banishment and the marketing of slaves in those days. If indeed many faithful "heretics" were banished to Ireland for centuries, it could not but have had a profound effect on that island, which became a great center of light under Patrick (5th century), Columba (521-597), and Columbanus (c. 540-615) as the darkness of papal tyranny descended over the continent. Missionaries went forth from Ireland to Switzerland, Bohemia, and Kiev. Ireland was one of the most difficult areas for Rome to subjugate, and this explains why such unending efforts have been made for over 1200 years to completely subjugate this island.

The Celtic Church which occupied Ireland, Scotland, and Britain had the Syriac (Byzantine) scriptures instead of the Latin vulgate of Rome. The Celtic Church, with the Waldenses and the Eastern empire, kept the seventh-day Sabbath.

When Queen Margaret fled to Scotland with her father Edward Atheling, a pretender to the English throne, she wrote "to her English cousins expressing astonishment at the religious practices of the Scots. Among the 'peculiarities' of the Scots was that 'they work on Sunday, but keep Saturday in a sabbatical manner.' To another correspondent she complained, 'They are accustomed also to neglect reverence for the Lord's days (Sun-days); and thus to continue upon them as upon other days all the labours of earthly work.'"

David Marshall tells us, "The observance of the Saturday Sabbath by most Scots went hand in hand with their refusal to 'recognize the overlordship of the Pope in matters spiritual.' Despite the best efforts of King Nectan centuries earlier, Scottish Christianity was still of the 'Columban' or 'Celtic,' not the 'Roman,' variety.

"The most popular narrative history of Scotland — Scotland: A Concise History by P. Hume Brown (Langsyne) — confirms that at Margaret's accession, 'the people worked on Sundays and observed Saturday as the Sabbath day.' Peter Berresford Ellis in Celtic Inheritance (Constable, 1992) page 45 writes: 'When Rome began to take a particular interest in the Celtic Church towards the end of the sixth century A.D., there were several differences between them The Celtic Sabbath was celebrated on a Saturday.' Ellis's comment covers the Celtic Church in Wales, Ireland, Cornwall and Gaul, as well as Scotland. Romanism was apparently coming into Scotland but had no strength north of the Forth.

"This gave Queen Margaret her crusade (and her route to canonization): 'Margaret did all she could to make the Scottish clergy do and believe exactly what the Church of Rome commanded.' This involved the enforcement of Sunday-keeping, a policy continued by her son, King David I. Nevertheless, on the eve of the Reformation, there were still many communities in the Scottish Highland loyal to the seventh-day Sabbath, as opposed to 'the Papal Sunday.'

"Two books published in 1963 — to commemorate Columba's landing at Iona in 563 — concerned themselves with the 'Celtic distinctives' and counted among them the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. Dr. W.D. Simpson published *The Historical St. Columba in Edinburgh*. He confirms that Columba and his companions kept 'the day of the Sabbath' and in case there should be any doubt adds in a footnote 'Saturday, of course' F.W. Fawcett was commissioned to write his *Columba — Pilgrim for Christ* by the Lord Bishop of Derry and Raphoe. His book was published in Londonderry and printed by the Derry Standard in connection with the Irish commemoration of Columba's mission. Fawcett outlines eight Celtic distinctives. Among these that the Celts had a married priesthood and that they observed the seventh day as the Sabbath." — David

Marshall, *The Celtic Connection*. England: Stanborough Press, 1994, pp. 29, 30.

"The reason why Pope Gregory I had perceived the Celtic Church as such a major threat and why he and his successors expended such efforts in destroying the distinctive 'Irish customs' became massively evident.

"A.O. and M.O. Anderson, in the Introduction to their *Adomnan's Life of Columba* (Thomas Nelson 1961), shed light, not only on Columba's seventh-day Sabbath keeping practice, but on the gradual 'adjustment' of manuscripts by generations of Roman copyists, in an attempt to provide an impression that the Celtic saints held Sunday sacred.

"Adomnan's use of sabbatum for Saturday, the seventh day of the week, is clear indication from 'Columba's mouth' that 'Sabbath was not Sunday.' Sunday, the first day of the week is 'Lord's day.' Adomnan's attitude to Sunday is important, because he wrote at a time when there was controversy over the question whether the ritual of the biblical Sabbath was to be transferred to the Christian's Lord's day." — A.O. and M.O. Anderson (editors) *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, Thomas Nelson's *Medieval Texts*, 1961, pages 25-26.

"The Old Testament required seventh-day Sabbath observance and, reason Adomnan's editors, since the New Testament nowhere repealed the fourth commandment, the seventh day was observed by all early Christians. The evidence they adduce suggests that no actual confusion between Sunday and 'the Sabbath' occurred until the early sixth century, and then in the writings of the rather obscure Caesarius of Arles. (*Ibid.*, page 26.)

"In England, the question of Sunday may have been among the 'other ecclesiastical matters' discussed by the Synod of Whitby in 664, reason the Andersons, in addition to the date of Easter which could not have caused such a rift. A weekly, not just a yearly observance, separated the Celts from the Romans. But, the Romans had the task of writing the history of the Church and of copying the writings of Church fathers. While those who copied the Scriptures appear to have been constrained by the Scriptural injunction not to add or take away from the words of the Book and, in the main, to have done a conscientious job, the same scruples did not apply when they copied out the writings of the Church fathers. As the centuries progressed the writings of the Celtic saints, including Patrick were 'amended' to convey the impression that the saints held Sunday sacred, whereas, in the earliest versions of their manuscripts, it is clear that they observed the seventh-day Sabbath. (*Ibid.*, pages 26-28).

"The Roman 'movement' to supersede the Celtic Sabbath with Sunday 'culminated in the production of an (apocryphal) 'Letter of Jesus', or 'Letter of Lord's day,' alleged to have been found on the altar of Peter in Rome; and is said in the annals to have been brought to Ireland by a pilgrim (c. 886). Upon this basis laws were promulgated, imposing heavy penalties for those that violated on Sunday certain regulations derived from Jewish prohibitions for Sabbath.... There is in fact no historical evidence that Ninian, or Patrick, or Columba, or any of their contemporaries in Ireland, kept Sunday as a Sabbath.' (*Ibid.*, page 28.)

"The seventh-day Sabbath, enjoined by the fourth of the Ten Commandments, had been observed by Jesus and nowhere in Scripture had its sacredness been diminished or transferred to another day...

"An early version of *The Rule of Columba* is reproduced in *Columba—Pilgrim for Christ* by F.W. Fawcett, MA. Fawcett is a Church of Ireland clergyman. He was commissioned by the Lord Bishop of Derry and Raphoe to produce this book as part of the celebrations in 1963 of the departure of Columba for Iona in AD 563." — Marshall, *The Celtic Connection*, 46.

The fifth rule of the Celtic Church listed in *The Rule of Columba* is "The Seventh Day was observed as the Sabbath."

(Taken from "Cherith Chronicle," April-June 1998, pp. 46-47.)

We recommend *The Celtic Church in Britain*, by Leslie Hardinge, 265 pages, \$9.00 (\$3 P/H for non-members), BSA Item #B208

Possibly Oldest Hebrew Inscription May Have Been Found by Israeli Archaeologist

HIRBET QEYAFYA, ISRAEL (ANS) — An Israeli archaeologist digging at a hilltop south of Jerusalem believes a ceramic shard found in the ruins of an ancient town bears the oldest Hebrew inscription ever discovered, a find that could provide an important glimpse into the culture and language of the Holy Land at the time of the Bible.

According to FOX News, the five lines of faded characters written 3,000 years ago, and the ruins of the fortified settlement where they were found, are indications that a powerful Israelite kingdom existed at the time of the Old Testament's King David, says Yossi Garfinkel, the Hebrew University archaeologist in charge of the new dig at Hirbet Qeiyafa.

The site overlooks the Elah Valley, said to be the scene of the slingshot showdown between David and the Philistine giant Goliath, and lies near the ruins of Goliath's hometown in the Philistine metropolis of Gath.

—Michael Ireland, *Assist News Chief Correspondent*

cus is another form of prayer—the 9-1-1 emergency prayer for help, petitionary prayer. We expect God to do something because we request it (this type of petitionary prayer is called “impetratory” prayer because of its bold and urgent expectation of God’s answer).

Some 9-1-1 Prayers

The Bible is full of examples of prayers to God that change things, even God’s mind. Consider just a few of them. How about God’s answer to Jacob’s emergency prayer for God’s blessing upon the impending meeting with his violent and revengeful brother Esau?¹ And this fire alarm call: Yahweh was in the process of judging Israel by fire for its blatant complaining, but Moses intervened and prayed for God to stop. God did, “and the fire abated.”²

It seems Moses offered a lot of 9-1-1 prayers like the time Israel’s bickering became too much and God said: “I will strike them with pestilence and disinherit them.” Moses asked God to please forgive the people and God did, “just as you have asked.”³ After the terrible rebellion of Korah the people were being justly punished by plague and began dying. Moses immediately prayed and directed Aaron to quickly make atonement for their sins, “and the plague was stopped.”⁴

Did God answer the 9-1-1 prayers of the young Hebrew men thrown into the furnace?⁵ How about Daniel’s emergency need to have God shut the mouths of a den of lions?⁶ Did God answer Sampson’s dying request? “O Sovereign Lord, remember me O God, please strengthen me just one more...”⁷

We could recount the desperate prayers of Elijah and Elisha and the prophets. The synagogue ruler Jairus who cried to Jesus, “My little daughter is dying, please come.”⁸ Or when Peter was thrown in prison where the 9-1-1 prayers of others help determine his fate: “but the church was earnestly praying to God for him” and with quick results as Peter exclaimed, “the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches...”⁹

There are many things God would not otherwise do but will do because we ask him. How else can we understand James’ assertion that “you have not because you ask not” (4:2)? James further states that the prayers of righteous people make a difference (5:16). God may be prevailed upon. He makes himself open to us. Biblical characters prayed boldly because they believed their prayers could change things—even God’s mind. They understood that they were working with God to determine the future.¹⁰

We don’t always get what we specifically want, but we can receive what God wants for us. There is no better example than the impassioned prayers of Jesus on Passover eve. Three times Jesus prays the same prayer: “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup [of suffering and death] pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want” (Matt 26:39, 44). It was not a simple petition: “Give me strength to drink this cup.” Rather, he prayed to “remove this cup from me.” Jesus loved life and didn’t want to die. He was not suicidal. Yet he understood there were purposes of God greater than even his life.

God wants to hear our needs and wants, but always, even in panic matters of life and death, we must temper our requests with “thy will be done.” The Hebrew boys about to be thrown into the furnace expressed the same resolve to faithfully yield to God’s will: “Even if God doesn’t save us out of the fire we will not, O king, serve your false gods of gold but serve only the One True God.”

Nowhere Else to Turn

There are many moments in life when we come face to wall with the reality we have nowhere to turn but God. In truth, we should acknowledge that reality more than just when we are in distress. But when you have run out of options, feeling hopeless and discouraged, know that God is waiting for your 9-1-1 call. Like his Son Jesus, God is gentle, kind, merciful, just, and quick and powerful to act.¹¹ He loves his children.

I took a lot of space in the beginning of this article describing my experience with God’s saving hand. Indulge me with one more biblical example that I’ve come to identify with ever so closely. It is the case of king Hezekiah who was very sick to the point of death. God sent Isaiah to give him the bad news that “you are going to die; you will not recover.” Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and burst into tears as he expressed his total devotion to God and wept bitterly for God’s help and mercy.

Isaiah was already halfway out of the palace when God stopped him and said “Go back and tell Hezekiah...I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you.” In addition God said to Hezekiah “I will add fifteen years to your life” (2 Kings 20) Astonishing. God changed his prophecy at the prayer of Hezekiah, a mere man.

God is just as open to our prayers now as he was in king Hezekiah’s day. In my case, I don’t know if God will give me fifteen more years (he’s already given me almost seven), but I praise him for his mercy and kindness.

This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles (Psalm 34:6).

END NOTES

1. Genesis 32
2. Numbers 11:1-2
3. Numbers 14:12-20
4. Numbers 16:41-48
5. Daniel 3:16-17
6. Daniel 6:21-23
7. Judges 16:28
8. Mark 5:22-43
9. Acts 12:1-12
10. See John Sanders' fine book, *The God Who Risks—A Theology of Providence*, IVP, 1998, pp. 271-3.
11. Matthew 11:28-29; Jeremiah 9:24

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Knowles: Bear Fruit ...—Continued from page 6.

As Christians, we must partner with God and take Jesus' words seriously if we are to bear fruit for the kingdom. Cut off from Jesus and his teachings we will be fruitless and barren. The only house worth building is the one God builds. No amount of military technology can protect a nation that cuts itself off from divine protection.

Fruitless branches will be gathered and burned (John 15: 6). But, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples (*talmidim*), (John 15:8).

If we can learn to study, understand, and apply in our lives, the words and teachings of Yeshua the rabbi, we can begin to bear the kind of fruit the Great Vinedresser wants to see. We will be nourished by the rich sap that flows from the vine into the branches. Cut off from that nourishing flow, we will wither and die.

This series of articles is designed to remind us all of Jesus' life-giving instructions and teachings that we might become practiced in living them. The result will be bountiful fruit for the Kingdom of God.

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

Sabbath Morning Companion

The Arrogance of Power

Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. — Lord Acton

It is a challenging task to remain humble when people tell you how great you are. Look at the leaders of Israel, many of whom began as humble servants, but who later battled and sometimes lost the war with their egos.

Moses, who was called the meekest man on earth, one time lost his patience and struck a rock for water, shouting, "Must we fetch water from a rock for you?" In thus doing, he claimed the credit for himself, and not for God.

King Saul, the reluctant first king of Israel, came to crave his position and power so much that he ceased to obey God and his prophet, seeking his own ways.

King David, called a man after God's own heart, abandoned God's ways too many times, stealing other men's wives, having innocent men killed, allowing his wayward children to wreck the nation, and taking a military census in order to glorify his own power rather than God's. His repeated acts of sincere repentance brought him back to God, but it could not undo much of the damage he brought to others' lives.

David's son Solomon began his reign humbled before God. "I am but a child," he proclaimed. The greatness God gave him was his ruin, as he accumulated wealth through heavy taxation and worker's levies, pursued too many women, built too many palaces, and followed too many gods.

Hezekiah, Josiah, and Jehosaphat, generally righteous kings, all succumbed to the arrogance of power.

All of these men were men of God and knew his greatness. When they were little in their own eyes, God honored them as they honored God, but success has a way of taking a surrendered, humble disposition and turning it into an overbearing presence.

That's a major reason why we should pray for those running for political office, that they may understand the limits of their power. The adulating crowds that surround them are a potential millstone that can drag them – and us – into despair we don't want.

But it is not just the rich and famous who are susceptible to the viper's head of egotism. Anyone given a small bit of notoriety or leadership can come to believe that he deserves it and even created it. Those in leadership at church or employment can succumb to the subtle creep of arrogance. The danger lurks for all of us.

If we realize that it is God who sets up kings and takes down kings, and that authority is a responsibility and not a privilege – if we realize that it is loaned to us for a short time for works of service, then we will not abuse it. We get into trouble when it becomes all about us. That's when the arrogance of power corrupts.

—Lenny Cacchio

Three days of fierce fighting produced the highest casualties of the Civil War as the two sides fought to a draw. Lee's army was forced to withdraw back into Virginia. Rather than destroying the morale of the North, Lee's failure to take Gettysburg and the high number of casualties suffered by the Army of Northern Virginia was the beginning of the crumbling of Southern morale. The surrender of Southern troops and the capitulation of the Confederacy was only a matter of time.

It was not in God's plan to allow the South to succeed in its struggle against the North. All it took was a miscommunication of orders, and a victory for the South at Gettysburg was lost in spite of the brilliance of Lee's plan. I can say unequivocally that God did not want slavery to extend itself west into new American territory, and that was what was at stake in the Civil War. New territories west of the Mississippi River had come into the possession of the United States, and most Americans knew that it was only a matter of time before the territory of the U.S. would reach to the Pacific Ocean. That meant that slavery would also extend to the Pacific below the Mason-Dixon Line unless "something" stopped it.

One interesting note about the issue of slavery is that most leaders in the South, including Lee, knew that it was only a matter of time before slavery would come to an end. In their Calvinist perspective they believed that God Himself would, at the right time, bring slavery to an end. He did. The Southern leadership, however, believed that slavery would end as a result of some social process over a period of time. They never dreamed that it would cost our nation over 620,000 lives lost in combat and by other means.

Absalom and Ahithophel

There is an interesting story in the Bible that also illustrates that the best of plans for the wrong reasons will not bring about God's blessings on the outcome. In fact, they sometimes bring God's direct opposition.

If you remember the story of Absalom and the part Ahithophel played in Absalom's short-lived rebellion, it is clear that God was opposed to Absalom's pretensions. (The complete story of Absalom's rise and the part Ahithophel played in it is contained in 2 Samuel 13 through 18.)

Absalom was invited to return to Jerusalem after he had gone into exile for killing his brother, Amnon, who had raped Absalom's sister Tamar. Absalom was the consummate politician. He was able to finagle a horse and chariot along with fifty men to act as his bodyguards. For four years David's son would rise early and station himself and his entourage along the road lead-

ing to Jerusalem's city gate. He would call out to those coming to the city to have their grievances adjudicated by the king and his counselors. Intercepting the disgruntled complainants before they could reach the king's counsel chambers, he would adjudicate their cases always with the eye of gaining their favor. Before long Absalom's fame as a compassionate judge began to spread throughout the tribes of Israel. After stealing the affections of the people, he asked his father, David, if he could go to Hebron to fulfill a vow to God. This was Absalom's pretext for organizing his rebellion against King David and gathering all Israel together to make himself king (2 Samuel 15:1-9).

It was while Absalom was in Hebron that he sent for Ahithophel to be his chief counselor. As the Scripture says of Ahithophel's counsel, "the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days [was] as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God so [was] all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom" (2 Samuel 16:23). The wisdom of Ahithophel's counsel was so good that God had to intervene to prevent his counsel from being carried out so that David would not be killed. Notice 2 Samuel 17:14, "...For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring evil upon Absalom."

When King David became aware of Absalom's treachery, he took his mighty men and other staff and soldiers and fled Jerusalem, for he knew that the throne in Absalom's hands meant that neither he nor any of his loyal servants were safe. When David fled Jerusalem, he left his house in the hands of ten concubines.

When Ahithophel arrived at Absalom's side, the young pretender immediately sought the counselor's advice. "Absalom said to Ahithophel, 'Give us your advice. What should we do?' Ahithophel answered, 'Lie with your father's concubines whom he left to take care of the palace. Then all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench in your father's nostrils, and the hands of everyone with you will be strengthened.' So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he lay with his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel" (2 Samuel 16:20-23 [NIV]).

By this act, which Absalom did as a public spectacle, Absalom showed utter contempt for his father, as well as a complete lack of fear of what King David could do to him. It was a brilliant strategy in that it gave confidence to the leaders of the tribes who wished to follow Absalom. They felt assured that they also had nothing to fear from David.

Then came the *coup de grâce*. After considering that David and his men were exhausted, hungry, and could easily be chased down after fleeing Jerusalem, Absalom sought Ahithophel's counsel on how to put a final end to his father's reign as king over Israel.

Ahithophel's advice was once again brilliant: "Ahithophel said to Absalom, 'Let me pick out twelve thousand men. Then I will go and pursue David this very night. When I catch up with him, he will be exhausted and worn out. I will rout him, and the entire army that is with him will flee. I will kill only the king and will bring the entire army back to you. In exchange for the life of the man you are seeking, you will get back everyone. The entire army will return unharmed.' This seemed like a good idea to Absalom and to all the leaders of Israel" (2 Samuel 17:1-4).

A better plan could not have been conceived. There was just one problem with it; God did not want this plan to succeed. What came next was truly amazing. God muddled Absalom's mind as to the wisdom of Ahithophel's plan. In an unexpected turn of events Absalom calls for Hushai, a man whom David left behind specifically to counter Ahithophel's advice, to hear his view of Ahithophel's strategy.

"Hushai replied to Absalom, 'Ahithophel's advice is not sound this time.' Hushai went on to say, 'You know your father and his men – they are soldiers and are as dangerous as a bear out in the wild that has been robbed of her cubs. Your father is an experienced soldier; he will not stay overnight with the army. At this very moment he is hiding out in one of the caves or in some other similar place. If it should turn out that he attacks our troops first, whoever hears about it will say, "Absalom's army has been slaughtered!" If that happens even the bravest soldier – one who is lion-hearted – will virtually melt away. For all Israel knows that your father is a warrior and that those who are with him are brave. My advice therefore is this: Let all Israel from Dan to Beer Sheba – in number like the sand by the sea – be mustered to you, and you lead them personally into battle. We will come against him wherever he happens to be found. We will descend on him like the dew falls on the ground. Neither he nor any of the men who are with him will be spared alive – not one of them! If he regroups in a city, all Israel will take up ropes to that city and drag it down to the valley, so that not a single pebble will be left there!' Then Absalom and all the men of Israel said, 'The advice of Hushai the Arkite sounds better than the advice of Ahithophel.' Now the Lord had decided to defeat the sound advice of Ahithophel, so that the Lord could bring disaster on Absalom" (2 Samuel 17:7-14).

By following Hushai's advice instead of that of Ahithophel, Absalom's demise was assured. "When Ahithophel realized that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and returned to his house in his hometown. After setting his household

in order, he hanged himself. So he died and was buried in the grave of his father" (2 Samuel 17:23).

The battle between the two armies took place in the forest of Ephraim. Absalom's army was slaughtered, losing 20,000 men in a day. Absalom himself was finished off in a humiliating fashion. As he passed beneath a low-hanging limb of an oak tree, his hair caught in the branches. There he hung until Joab's men found him and thrust him through with spears and swords. Thus ended the rebellion of Absalom.

Summary and Conclusion

There are similarities between Lee's invasion of Gettysburg and Absalom's rebellion against the kingship of his father, David. There were brilliant military strategies presented in both cases, and in both cases they were doomed by improper communications. In Lee's case it was accidental. In Absalom's case it was deliberate in order to confuse the king's son into making the wrong move. In both cases God made sure that neither strategy prevailed. God Himself chose the outcome He wanted and guided events to ensure that outcome.

Following are some interesting points to think about in no particular order:

1) People will often follow a demagogue to their own destruction because he makes them feel good. That definitely occurred in Absalom's rebellion. Think about our recent national, state, and local elections. How many Christians voted for pro-abortion or pro-homosexual rights candidates simply because the candidate made them somehow feel better about themselves? Our Constitution guarantees a "right to life..." as our first right, yet Christians continue to vote for pro-abortion candidates. Christians often vote for candidates who are willing to force their neighbors to hand over more of their income to the government so that they personally can have a larger government check in their own mailboxes, yet they would never think of walking up to their neighbor's door with gun in hand and demanding that same amount of money face to face. I'm sure you can think of other instances in which we yield our souls to unscrupulous and ungodly men and women who do things we would never condone in our own behavior.

2) When David was told that Ahithophel was among the traitors, David prayed to God, "O Lord, I pray, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness" (2 Samuel 15:31).

3) David sent his dear friend and counselor, Hushai the Arkite, back into Jerusalem to pretend to serve Absalom so that he could be there to defeat the wise counsel of Ahithophel. As we saw in 2 Samuel 7:14, "Now the Lord had decided to defeat the sound ad-

vice of Ahithophel, so that the Lord could bring disaster on Absalom." God worked out His strategy through Hushai. Once Absalom chose Hushai's advice over that of Ahithophel, Absalom was guided down the path of defeat, and David was restored to the throne of Israel.

4) Israel belonged to God, and His prophets anointed Israel's kings. David was God's anointed; Absalom was not, and God was not going to allow any man to usurp a throne that He had given to another man. As king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to recognize after his condemnation by God to seven years of madness, "...that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men" (Daniel 4:17).

5) Who was Ahithophel? He was the father of Eliam, one of David's mighty men (2 Samuel 23:34). One of the details of King David's adulterous affair with Bathsheba is the fact that Bathsheba was the daughter of Eliam (2 Samuel 11:3). In other words, Bathsheba was Ahithophel's granddaughter. I see it as a distinct possibility that Ahithophel held a grudge against David for many years because of the shame that David brought on his granddaughter and his family name. If that is the case, then Ahithophel's desertion of David in favor of Absalom makes sense. He may have seen Absalom's ascension to the throne of Israel as his opportunity to avenge himself of King David on behalf of his granddaughter and her murdered husband, Uriah the Hittite.

There is a saying, "Man proposes and God disposes." Whether in biblical times, American Civil War times, or today, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord has an obligation, a requirement, to submit his plans to God before carrying them out. As we have seen in these two examples, failure to seek the Lord's approval for the things we plan can have disastrous results. They don't always cost thousands of lives as was the case with both General Lee and Absalom, but since we cannot see what lies ahead of us, we have to rely on God to walk ahead of us and guide us along the path of life.

"The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD. All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weighs the spirits. Commit your works to the LORD, and your thoughts shall be established" (Proverbs 16:1-3). "Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass" (Psalm 37:5). "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:6).

Our first obligation is to Him, not to our own plans, no matter how brilliant or how impressed we may be with them.

—Kenneth Ryland

WIN A FRIEND BY ASKING A FAVOR

by Donald Mansell

A prince is persuaded by patience; and a soft tongue will break down the strong! Prov. 25:15, Fenton.

In 1736 Benjamin Franklin, American sage and statesman, was elected clerk of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania Colony. The election to that office was annual, and at the end of his term a new member of the assembly, who obviously wanted the position for himself, made a long speech against Franklin. Instead of becoming resentful of the man or trying to gain his favor by showing him servile respect, Franklin chose another strategy. He had heard that the assemblyman had a certain rare book in his library. He wrote the man a note expressing his desire to read it and asking him the favor of letting him borrow it for a week. The assemblyman sent the book to Franklin immediately, and a week later Franklin returned it with a note expressing his thanks and appreciation. The next time the two men met, the book owner greeted Franklin warmly, and the two became great friends. Said Franklin about this experience: "He that has once done you a kindness will be more ready to do you another, than he whom you have placed under obligation by doing a favor."

Jesus used this "strategy" on the woman at the well. Mutual feelings of animosity separated the Jews and the Samaritans, but Jesus bridged the gap by asking a favor: "Give me to drink." Having "nothing to draw with," He placed Himself under obligation to her; yet it was this very fact that opened her heart to His saving message. One would have to have a heart of stone to refuse water to a thirsty traveler. The normal reaction is to want to help one less fortunate.

There are those, of course, who take advantage of this kind of psychology to get their own selfish way, but this will never be the Christian's motivation. He seeks, in the words of the apostle Paul, "not yours, but you" (2 Cor. 12:14). In other words, his motive is God's glory and the eternal welfare of the person whose favor he asks.

There is something in human nature that dislikes asking favors of others. There is a proper place for such feelings, of course, but with many it is a matter of pride, and not justifiable pride either, for it frequently manifests itself in ungrateful behavior toward a benefactor who recognizes a desperate need and unselfishly offers assistance.

The true Christian studies ways that will open hearts to the reception of the gospel message. If asking a favor will accomplish this purpose he will use it, but he will always have as his motive God's glory and the eternal good of the individual whose favor he seeks. Self will be hid.

Donald Mansell, New Every Morning, page 336. Review & Herald Publishing Ass'n. 1981.

The Seven Lean Years

Today a new issue of my trade magazine came in, and I came across a curious item regarding this year's tax rebate "stimulus" package:

"In fact the legacy of the fiscal stimulus was how consumers responded – by lifting their savings rates to a six-year high of 2.6% from 0.3% rather than embarking on a new buying spree.... That was the third-sharpest increase in the savings rate in the past 55 years and a vivid sign that frugality is now replacing frivolity."

Some reports indicate that only 10% – 20% of those government stimulus checks were actually spent. The bulk of the money went into savings or debt reduction.

To you and me that might sound like a great thing, but not according to Michael Gregory, senior economist at BMO Capital Markets, who in the same piece was quoted as saying, "A little cutting back can literally cause a recession."

Regardless of how the government and the economic gurus feel about it, I applaud the average American (whoever he or she may be) for using the "stimulus" check to pay down debt and put in savings. The head-scratcher in my mind is how saving and debt reduction have become the bane of financial well-being instead of the foundation for financial security. The recent turmoil in the financial markets should give the nation pause about the wisdom of using debt to finance prosperity, but some people in high places still don't get it.

The financial markets today are nothing less than individual monetary profligacy writ large. It is witness to a condition where economic growth is inadequate to service financial obligations.

And it is also something else. It is testimony to the common sense notion that trends do not last forever. Good times follow bad times and bad times follow good. Too many live as though the stock market always goes up and paychecks will always flow. They don't, and prudence suggests taking a lesson from Joseph, who as Pharaoh's right hand man had the foresight to save the excess grain from the seven fat years in anticipation of the inevitable seven lean years. Joseph's prudence saved Egypt and much of the world around it from famine.

I fear that too many people eat every kernel that comes from the ground and never stop to consider that the rain might not fall some year. Don't consume it all. Whittle away your debt and set aside some cash. Take to heart the ancient wisdom of Joseph. That will give you more sense than some investment bankers we know about.

—Lenny Cacchio

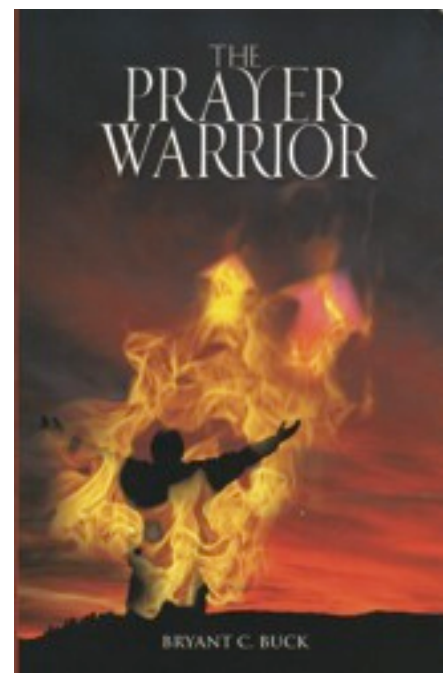
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The Church in the World

LAOS: AUTHORITIES DETAIN 90 CHRISTIANS

Officials crack down in three provinces; some believers held in wooden stocks.

(Compass Direct News) – Authorities in Laos have detained or arrested at least 90 Christians in three provinces in recent weeks, including an arrest of a pastor and two other believers from a house church in Boukham village, Savannakhet province.

Arrests were reported in the southern provinces of Saravan and Savannakhet and in Luang Prabang province in the North.

In one incident on July 21, Compass sources said officials detained 80 Christians in Katin village, in the Tah Oih district of Saravan province, after residents seized a Christian neighbor identified only as Pew and poured rice wine down his throat. The wine flooded his lungs and killed him, according to the sources who spoke on condition of anonymity.

When mourning family members buried him — an immediate necessity because of the warm climate — and put a wooden cross on the grave, village officials accused them of “practicing the rituals of the enemy of the state” and seized a buffalo and another animal from the family as a fine.

A few days later, on July 25, officials rounded up 17 of the 20 Christian families in the village — a total of 80 men, women and children — and detained them in a local school compound, denying them food for three days in an attempt to force the adults to sign documents renouncing their faith.

Three other Christian families in the village had already renounced their faith under increasing pressure from authorities, according to a report from Human Rights Watch for Lao Religious Freedom (HRWLRF).

As their children grew weaker, 10 families signed the documents and on July 30 were allowed to return home. The remaining seven families, however, were evicted from the village and have since settled in an open field outside the village, building small shelters and surviving on food found in the nearby jungle.

Arrests in Boukham



The most recent arrests occurred last Sunday (August 3) in Boukham village, Savannakhet. Officials arrested a leader of a house church identified only as Pastor Sompong, during a worship service at his home, along with two young people identified only as Boot and Khamvan.

HRWLRF reported they were detained at an area police station. On August 2, authorities arrested another villager in Boukham, identified only as Menoy, charging her with “believing in Jesus and worshipping God.”

They handcuffed Menoy and took her to a prison in Ad-Sapangthong district, where she joined two other believers, identified as Kantalee and Loong Peng, who had been arrested the previous day and charged with the same religious offense.

Pastor Sompong Authorities had previously arrested Pastor Sompong and four other believers from the Boukham church on July 20, detaining them for two days in a prison in nearby Dong Haen. Police stormed into the church and ordered the 63 Christians present to cease worshipping or they would face arrest and imprisonment for “believing and worshipping God.”

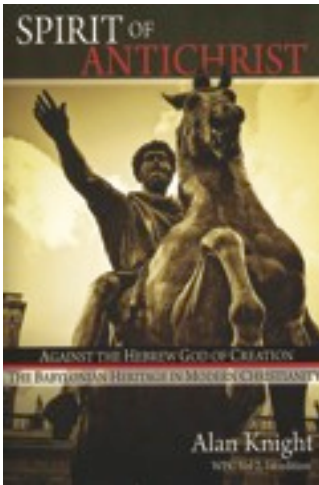
When the Christians refused to comply, stating that they must continue worshipping, the police arrested Pastor Sompong and two other church leaders identified only as Kai and Phuphet.

Officials then released the five on condition that they would cease holding worship meetings. They ordered them to seek permission from village authorities if they wanted to continue meeting together.

Compass sources also reported that officials on July 27 detained a family of Hmong Christians in northern Luang Prabang province.

More arrests were reported, but details have yet to be confirmed.

Notices and Advertisements

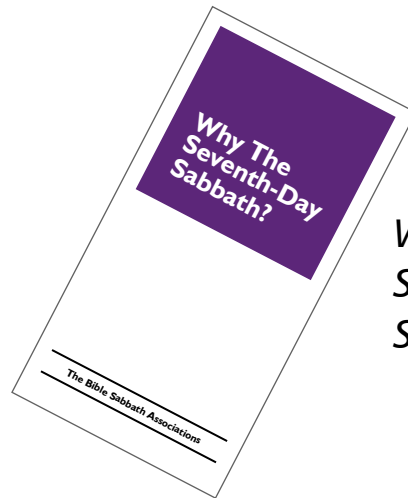


The long awaited sequel to author Alan Knight's very popular *Primitive Christianity in Crisis* is here. *Spirit of Antichrist* pulls back the curtain on Revelation chapter 17 in which the apostle John presents a view of religious apostasy in his day that he connects with ancient Babylon. Scholars debate whether this should be understood as symbolic or literal. From the

groundbreaking research that underlies this book, author and historian, Alan Knight, presents evidence that, in addition to the symbolism, much of it was surprisingly literal. John's description of a harlot "with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication," is a reference to an exotic yet literal religious ritual performed in the ancient Near East.

This historical background provides a dramatic new understanding of the prophecies of the book of Revelation, including the precise identity and significance of the mysterious eighth king described in chapter 17 as "was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven."

This book is available from the BSA for \$17 (nonmembers add \$3 for S&H). If you would like both *Spirit of Antichrist* and *Primitive Christianity in Crisis*, send \$30 for both volumes (nonmembers add \$4 for S&H).



Why the Seventh-day Sabbath?

This attractive booklet lists six reasons why keeping the Sabbath is important for today. The back cover is formatted so as to be suitable for stamping the address of your local congregation.

Order code number P205 to purchase this booklet. They can be purchased for only \$17 per 100 copies. This is an inexpensive and effective way to teach others about God's precious gift of His Sabbath.

Tax-deductible Contributions to the BSA

The BSA has been serving you and other Sabbath-keeping believers for over 50 years. We would like to continue for another 50, but we need your help to do so. When you donate to the BSA, you are helping us keep alive the knowledge of God's beautiful Sabbath, and remember, all donations to the BSA are tax-deductible.

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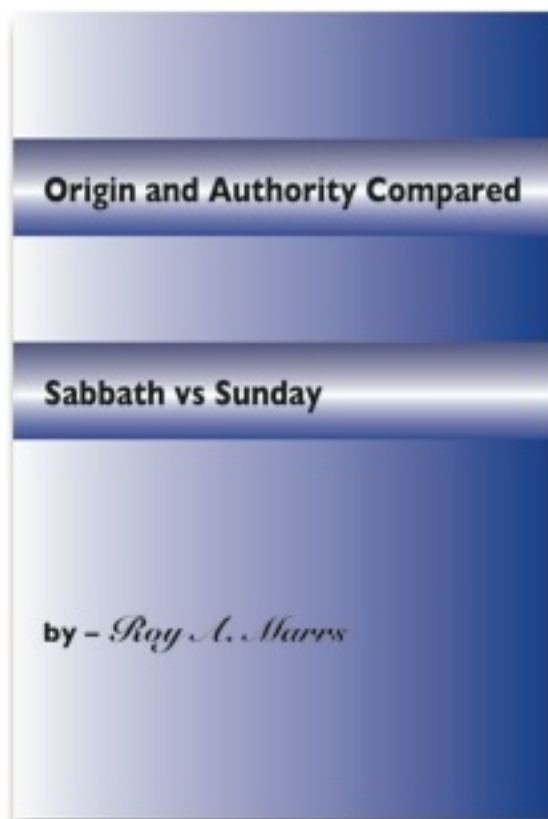
A Bi-monthly Publication of

The Bible Sabbath Association

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This book, **Origin and Authority Compared, Sabbath vs Sunday**, by Roy A. Marrs, is 339 pages. It is printed in easy to read type size.

Marr's book traces the origin and authority of both celebrations, but shows the amazing contrast between God's way of initiating celebrations such as the Sabbath and Feast days, and man's way of initiating celebrations with never a hint of them in the Bible—no commands from God, no instructions on how, and even giving pagan names to them in violation of God's specific command not even to mention such names!

It also contrasts the Catholic method of justifying Sunday rather than Sabbath observance with the Protestant effort to justify keeping Sunday by claiming the Ten Commandments were abolished and that the Apostles observed the First Day of the week.

This book is not just a rehash of the usual presentations of the subjects treated. It delves into the question whether the "Early Church Fathers" deserve serious attention as authoritative sources on the subject of the origins of "Lord's Day Observance," and illustrates their divisive confusion of the matter.

B258, \$10.00 (\$2 s&h non members)