

THE Sabbath Sentinel

November-December
2001



BSA – The Bible Sabbath Association
“The Sabbath was made for man...” – Jesus, the Christ

The Sabbath Sentinel

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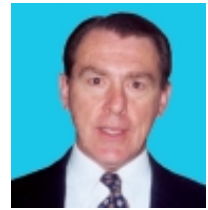
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Is God Punishing America?



Right now many Christians are asking that question. Was the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon the result of God's judgment against the United States of America?

Two days after the attack a fierce debate erupted among Christians over public remarks made by evangelist and broadcaster Pat Robertson and Pastor Jerry Falwell on Robertson's popular TV program, *The 700 Club*. Dr. Falwell stated that the American Civil Liberties Union, abortion providers, gay-rights proponents, and federal courts that banned school prayer and legalized abortion, lifted divine protection from America and led to this grisly terrorist attack that killed more than 5,000 people. "I point the finger in their face and say, 'You helped this happen,' God continues to lift the curtain and allow the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve."

Pat Robertson, agreeing with Falwell's remarks, said the terror attacks occurred because Americans have insulted God and lost the protection of heaven. Later Robertson issued a written statement defending remarks made by him and Dr. Falwell, stating: "We have imagined ourselves invulnerable and have been consumed by the pursuit of health, wealth, material pleasures and sexuality. It [terrorism] is happening because God Almighty is lifting his protection from us. We must come back to God as a people. We have a court that has essentially stuck its finger in God's eye," Robertson wrote. "We have insulted God at the highest level of our government. Then, we say, 'Why does this happen?'"

Immediately after the remarks were made by Falwell and Robertson, high profile religious and secular personalities began issuing public statements decrying the "horrible" and "fanatical" remarks. Some even stated that the hatred inherent in the remarks of these two preachers was worse than that of the terrorists who had just killed over 5000 Americans.

As easy as it would be to slough off the remarks of these two popular American preachers, in my private conversations with Christian friends, almost all agree that God is very displeased with our nation for abandoning the Christian principles on which our nation was founded, and that we, the self-seeking and self-indulgent people, were in some degree to blame for angering God to the point that He refused shield our land from these terrorists.

One thing is for sure: The terrorist attack of American civilians has forced Christians throughout this land to wrestle with issues of much greater importance than the petty doctrinal differences that often keep us at each other's throats. We were forced to come face-to-face with

the real life-and-death issues of our faith when we sat in front of our televisions, stunned by our own vulnerability and the fragility of life itself.

Has the Judge of all nations brought His judgment on America? Does the divine Ruler of the Universe still bring affliction on nations? The record of the Hebrew Scriptures is very clear that nations of the past were judged and punished by God in their time of existence. There is no afterlife judgment for nations as there is for individuals. Israel of old and America of today are merely temporary, worldly social structures for specific times in history that serve as a stage for God and His people. When such social structures bring shame to the name of God, He punishes them and then abolishes them if their people en masse do not repent. Rome is no more. Spartan Greece is no more, and the Ming Dynasty has ceased to exist. It is people – not nation states – that God seeks to save, and nations are judged and punished by God when by the overflowing of their sins they interfere with the will of God to bring salvation to the earth – at the same time, bringing discredit to His name. Often, tragedy is allowed to serve as a warning for the people of a nation to repent and change their wicked ways.

What galls modernists most in our post-Christian culture is the thought that any of us might be guilty of anything, for guilt is seen as the "sin" that Christianity has foisted on society, and Christianity is viewed as the mother of the worst of all sins, "intolerance," the unwillingness to accept that other religions are just as "valid" as Christianity. To the priests of our newly liberated humanist society (the psychiatrists, psychologists, and liberal theologians) there is nothing for Americans to repent of except the guilt they feel because of the lingering influence of Christian morality.

I believe Pastors Falwell and Robertson were right in telling Americans that we the people of this nation must repent of our sins because our sins are an offense to God Almighty. There was a time in the history of our nation when our presidents and other national and religious leaders routinely called on the nation to repent before God. Read George Washington's Thanksgiving Day proclamation a few pages over from this editorial. President Washington called on Americans to seek God's forgiveness as did many other presidents throughout our history. The real aberration in our history is now, when we believe we have nothing to repent of — that it is more important to avoid offending the sensibilities of pagans and the enemies of Christ than it is to seek God's favor and blessing through repentance. We have truly put ourselves and our children in mortal danger.

—Kenneth Ryland

Primer on Covenants

by Calvin Burrell



The topic I've chosen relates to all who love the Lord and remember His Sabbath. Every growing Christian needs a grasp of the covenants of Scripture. Lacking this understanding, a Bible reader may assume, incorrectly, that what he or she reads in Leviticus is as important as what's written in Matthew, Ephesians, or I Peter.

The purpose here is not to delve into the deeper aspects of the several biblical covenants, but to simply introduce the theme and its importance to all believers. "Covenant" speaks of an agreement or relationship God establishes with His people. Though there are several mentioned in Scripture, two covenants dominate the biblical landscape.

First, there is the Old Covenant God made through Moses with the nation of Israel on their way from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan. The fearful scenes in which this covenant was announced and ratified at Mt. Sinai are described in Exodus 19-24. From that time until Christ came, the Hebrew people related with God under the terms of this "Mosaic" or "Sinaitic" covenant with its Levitical Priesthood. Because the Old Covenant gave prominence to God's written commandments and statutes, it is often called "the law."

Second, there is the New Covenant that God made through Jesus Christ, as recorded in the four gospels. The awesome events of His death at Mt. Calvary and His resurrection on the third day launched a new people of God who are en route to a promised land, His Kingdom. From now until Christ's return, Christians relate to God under the terms of this New Covenant with its cross and empty tomb. Because this New Covenant gives prominence to God's grace to forgive and the gift of eternal life, it is often called "the gospel."

It is true that the Old Covenant is contained in the Old Testament, but these two terms are not synonymous. Nor does New Covenant mean precisely the same as New Testament. Both the Old and New Covenants have their roots, in fact, in God's relationship with Abraham, found in the Bible's first book, Genesis.

This is one of many ways that these two covenants are linked, both being contained in the same Bible and established by the same God, beginning with the same man, Abraham.

What is the relationship between the Old and New Covenants? Are they in series, with one replacing the

other in time? Or in parallel, so that we choose between them anytime?

Bible-believing folks hold various views about these questions. I believe we must avoid two extremes:

On one hand are those who see the connection between the covenants is that of full continuity. For them law is the primary category by which God works with His people. Israel is the true olive tree, and all who would please God must submit to the Hebrew regimen. All 613 laws found in Moses are to be observed in some manner, by both Jewish and Gentile believers. While Yahshua the Messiah may be the best sacrifice for sin, His major role is that of an example. In this system of thought, the integrity of the Sinaitic revelation is un-phased by the gospel, with the net effect that the Old Covenant remains dominant. The Sabbatarian community has a few groups who espouse this species of legalism.

On the other hand, some segments of orthodox Christianity have long leaned to the opposite extreme. For them, the gospel of Jesus Christ means that God's law has become an obsolete category, and the relation between the Old and New Covenants is one of total discontinuity. The Church is a new creation, and owes nothing to Israel. If anything is commanded for Christians, that is only because the New Testament epistles say so — never because it was written in stone or the book of the law. Jesus' example and teaching receive short shrift in this system, but His death emphatically repealed all the Old Testament laws. Much of this thinking infiltrates Sabbath-observing churches from time to time, most recently under the rubric of "New Testament Theology."

Both of these are extreme positions, in my view. As a follower of Christ, I believe that the Old Testament is God's Word and that the New Testament is His final Word. There is illumination in both, but the light emanating from each is not equal. Jesus is the truest and brightest light! The gospel, not the law, is our assurance of an eternal "yes" from a holy God.

The Bible teaches neither a full identity of the Old Covenant with the New, nor a total disconnect between them. Because they were both instituted by the same God who never changes (His eternal attributes), we may expect to find several elements of similarity between the Old and New Covenants, and we do:

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The Absolute Necessity of Repentance

by Daniel Botkin



Since the terrorist attack on September 11, there has been a great deal of talk about prayer. Even on secular radio and TV, people are being urged to pray for America, and many people have been gathering to pray. Since Tuesday morning I have heard and read the words pray and prayer more times than I can count. The thing that concerns me, though, is that I have not heard or read anything about the need for national repentance. Except for one brief reference by Billy Graham (“God promises to bless us if we repent”), I have not heard the words repent or repentance.

I do not belittle the power of prayer, but without nation-wide repentance, nation-wide prayer is useless. Let me explain. After the children of Israel came into the Promised Land and saw the walls of Jericho fall down for them, they felt invincible (much like America did before September 11, 2001). Therefore, they were stunned and bewildered when they suffered an unexpected defeat at the next city, a small town called Ai (much like America was stunned and bewildered after September 11, 2001).

The hearts of the people melted and became like water. Joshua and the elders of Israel tore their garments, fell on their faces before God, put dust on their heads, and prayed to the Lord.

God’s response to all this prayer was: “Get thee up; wherefore liest thou upon thy face? Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled [deceived] also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow: for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you” (Josh. 7:10-13).

Prayer was ineffective for the children of Israel until the sin was dealt with and the accursed things removed from the nation.

Like all Americans, I am deeply grieved by what happened in our nation. But what do you expect, America? When a nation turns its back on God, He turns His back on them. “If ye forsake Him, He will forsake you” (2 Chron. 15:2). A nation forfeits Divine protection when it sins as grievously as we have.

I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s. Sin existed in America in the 1950s, of course. But at least sin was still considered sinful and shameful then. People didn’t “have affairs”; they

committed adultery. Unmarried couples didn’t “live together”; they were fornicators living in sin. There were no “single moms”; there were unwed mothers. There were no “single-mother-children”; there were bastards. There were no “gays”; there were homosexuals, sodomites, queers. These sins existed, but at least they were kept in the darkness where they belonged. These sins were not constantly flaunted before the public, demanding acceptance.

In the early 1960s, America tried to kick God out of public schools by declaring school-sponsored prayer unconstitutional. All the filthy sexual perversion started coming out of the closet demanding acceptance. In the early 1970s, abortion was legalized, and now America has the blood of millions of aborted babies on its hands. “So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are,” God warned, “for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it” (Num. 35:33).

If there is not nation-wide repentance – no deep, genuine remorse for our nation’s sins – then God will not hear the prayers of our nation, regardless of how many prayers we make. “And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil” (Isa. 1:15ff).

Repentance must be deep enough to make us change our ways. A quick “please-comfort-us” prayer, followed by a surge of patriotism, flag-waving, and the singing of patriotic hymns, will not get the job done. These activities may unite the nation, but they do not guarantee God’s blessing and victory. If America goes to war without first getting right with God, she runs the risk of defeat. The oft-quoted passage of 2 Chronicles 7:14 declares God’s promise to heal the land of His backslidden people, but this promise is conditional. One of the necessary conditions is that His people “turn from their wicked ways.”

When God’s judgment was announced by Jonah to the people of Nineveh, the king of Nineveh ordered all his people to put on sackcloth, to fast, to cry mightily unto God, and to turn from their evil ways. Even the domestic animals were forced to fast and wear sackcloth. God saw their works and spared them.

President Bush proclaimed last Friday a Day of Prayer and Remembrance. Let us pray that he will go a step further and call for a national Day of Prayer and Repentance. □

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*Daniel Botkin is a member of the board of directors of the Bible Sabbath Association and publisher of **Gates of Eden** (<http://www.gatesofeden.org/>).*

The Great Thanksgiving Day Disappearing Act

by
Kenneth Ryland

For the last several years the last week of November has been a time of sadness for me. I lament the loss of Thanksgiving from our national calendar. To be sure, the day is still listed in the month of November every year, but its importance as a national day of recognition of the blessings and protection of Almighty God over our nation and over our personal lives is all but gone. We still get together as families; the family is the last bastion of “thanksgiving” to God in our great country. However, in the malls and public squares, there is not even a shadow of remembrance of our need of gratitude for the Lord’s giving us such favor among nations. Will it be different this year since we suffered to terrorist attack of September 11?

I recently came across a copy of George Washington’s Thanksgiving Proclamation of 1789. Read through our first president’s words, and you will see a very different idea of what he thought America was and was destined to become. He relates it all to the Almighty’s purpose in making our people the caretakers of His divine largesse in the newly independent united States of America (yes, that’s an uncapitalized “united” States — another indication of how he and the other founders viewed the government in our nation’s capital).

I would like to draw your attention particularly to the paragraph near the bottom that begins, “And also that ...” The champions of modern secularism would cringe at the words of many of our early presidents if they were ever to give them serious attention (by ignoring them, they pretend that such ideas were never in the minds of our national forebears).

For example, President Washington proclaimed that our new nation was to undertake the following: “... to protect and guide all sovereigns and nations (especially such as have shown kindness to us), and to bless them with good governments, peace, and concord; ...”

Yes, our people were to become the missionaries of this new type of government — the representative republic. And, our national mission included the need “to promote the knowledge and practice of

true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us; and, generally to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best.”

Well, there you have it. One integral part of our national mission was to promote “the practice of true religion and virtue,” which to the people of Washington’s day was Christianity. And, in that national Christian atmosphere, to promote “science,” which included not just science as we know it, but learning in general, which has always been the route to freedom and prosperity.

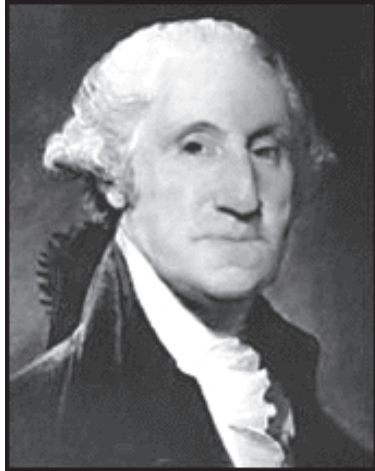
I hope you enjoy the enlightening words of our first president, who truly has earned the title of “Father of our Nation.” □

The First Thanksgiving

This is the way the feast was described in a first-hand account presumably by a leader of the colony, Edward Winslow, as it appears in Mourt’s Relation:

“Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors. They four in one day killed as much fowl as, with a little help beside, served the company almost a week. At which time, amongst other recreations, we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and among the rest their greatest King Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five deer, which they brought to the plantation and bestowed on our governor, and upon the captain and others. And although it be not always so plentiful as it was this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want that we often wish you partakers of our plenty.”

—Excerpted from www.pilgrims.net.



Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor; and Whereas both Houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me “to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness:”

Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation; for the signal and manifold mercies and the favorable interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war; for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty which we have since enjoyed; for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one now lately instituted’ for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed, and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and, in general, for all the great and various favors which He has been pleased to confer upon us.

And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions; to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually; to render our National Government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed; to protect and guide all sovereigns and nations (especially such as have shown kindness to us), and to bless them with good governments, peace, and concord; to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us; and, generally to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best.

Given under my hand, at the city of New York, the 3d day of October, A.D. 1789.

(signed) G. Washington

Be Fruitful and Multiply

by

David Kidd

One of the most disturbing things for Christians is that we live in an era described as the “post-Christian era.” One writer decrying this fact writes:

“Post-Christian” means that the day of the biblical world view — seeing and understanding God and the world through a Judeo-Christian frame of reference — is over. The average person no longer takes for granted that we live in a three-tiered universe: heaven, earth, and under the earth. For the first time we have cultivated a whole generation that is biblically illiterate. Gone is the “churched culture” in which the church enjoyed the respect and appreciation of society. In fact, in the post-Christian era, the church is either irrelevant or, at best, one among many options.” (1)

Sadly, the statistics in Australia and other Western cultures bear out this description, and reveal a dramatic shift against faith in God. This shift is occurring at an alarming rate. For example, the 1996 Australian census showed that between 1991 and 1996 there was a 35.5% increase in the number of those claiming to have no religion. The statistics also show that the young are most heavily represented among the group claiming to have “no religion.”

Christianity’s Opportunity

However, a tremendous opportunity has arisen for today’s church to stem the tide and even fight back strongly. Ironically, this opportunity arises because forces opposing traditional Christian family values have left themselves wide open. Radical feminist ideology, for one, has browbeaten women into fanatically pursuing their careers ahead of their children, leading them to have fewer, and in some cases no children at all. Feminism has also promoted rampant abortion and, less directly, lesbianism and an acceptance of homosexuality in general. Also, the hedonistic world view of personal pleasure ahead of all other considerations has led to children being viewed more as a burden that only tie one down, rather than as a blessing from God.

The overall result of our societal secularization has been that fertility levels have never been so low in Australia (1.8 in 1998) and they are predicted to fall even lower. Western Europe has even lower fertility levels with Italy’s being as low as 1.2! (2) This is startling for the non-contraceptive Pope’s own country. Australia’s levels are even lower than in the time of greatest economic hardship, the Great Depression, when women of child-bearing age only had an average of 2.1 babies.

By contrast, in 1900 the rate was 3.5 births. In 1961 it was 3.6 and in 1966 it had fallen to 2.9. (3) Prevailing low fertility creates an opportunity for Christianity because of our natural advantage.

Christianity’s Advantage

A very interesting feature of the fertility statistics is that people claiming Christian beliefs still tend to have higher fertility levels. For example, Rachel Meyer in her article “Which Australians are Having Three or More Children?” (4) states that men who consider religion to be important in their lives are three times more likely than other men to have three or more children. She also found that women with larger families are more likely to have traditional values, such as being Catholic.

Clearly, Christians still have higher fertility rates than non-Christians, but they are certainly being affected by the low-fertility culture. Since Christians have higher fertility levels already, this provides us with an advantage in increasing the proportion of youth in the next generation with a Christian upbringing.

Internal Growth

In light of this and what seems to be a given in the quote below, I am surprised that I could find nothing in the extensive church growth literature stressing the importance of internal growth. As one writer puts it:

“Mainline churches have long been dependent on their own offspring for future growth [and as] long as they produced large families the church kept growing. The mainline still depend on internal growth. Our culture’s seismic shift in family patterns (delayed marriage, later child bearing and fewer children) has had a devastating effect on this historic source of growth.” (5)

Perhaps the neglect of this issue is because no one wants to be seen as putting pressure on couples to have large families (very politically incorrect in the Western world). Nor do I, but when I contemplate the enormous potential of greater Christian child bearing and wiser child nurturing, especially in today’s climate, I can’t help but draw it to the attention of the churches and to married couples looking for a good way to serve the Lord.

No direct command exists for the New Testament church to increase through procreation, but I believe the depressed Christian climate in some Western countries, such as Australia, cries out again for God’s people

to be fruitful and multiply. When this command was given in the Old Testament to the animals (Genesis 1:22), to Adam and Eve (v. 28), to Noah's family (8:17; 9:1,7), and to Jacob's family, it was given during times of beginning, when great multiplication to a position of strength in the earth was envisaged. When the command was given to Jacob (Israel), interestingly he already had 12 children, but the command was given for the growth of Israel, God's people, so that they would be mighty in the Earth. With the current disturbing trends, the church today needs to begin to rebound to a position of strength.

Growth by procreation is a simple but sure idea. Just compare the Shakers with the Mormons and Catholics. The Shakers of eighteenth century England and America were a Christian sect in which members refrained from sexual intercourse. All new members came through adult conversion. According to World Book Encyclopedia (1998 edition), "No one was born to the Shaker faith. At their peak in about 1830 they may have numbered 6000 people. Today fewer than a dozen Shakers remain." By contrast, the fast growing Mormons and Catholics are known for their large families.(6)

Also, most of us know the proven track record of many Christian parents around us whose children, or a good percentage of them, have become Christians. Do a quick survey of your congregation or other congregations and consider just how significant the presence or absence of families is. Consider also the percentage of those in the congregations who have had Christian upbringings. For most congregations the percentage is likely to be substantial. We also probably know small congregations that have only survived because of one or two or three families within them. If these families had not been there, the congregation would have dissolved. On the other hand, if new families come in, there is great potential for the congregation to thrive.

Biblical Encouragement

Internal growth is a surer source of growth than most other forms because we have more opportunity to share Christ with our children than anyone, and we also have biblical encouragement that such efforts are good and will be fruitful. For example, Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." 1 Timothy 2:15 also says "[n]evertheless she [women] will be saved in child-bearing if they continue in faith, love and holiness with self-control."

Aging Churches

Apart from the Catholic church, which is the only mainstream denomination aging slower than the overall population, (in fact, it had a 5.3% decrease in the proportion of its affiliates aged 70 or more between 1991-1996) and the Adventists and Pentecostals who

are aging at about the same rate as the overall population, the rest of mainstream Christianity are aging faster than the overall population.(7) Anglican, Presbyterian, and Uniting Church affiliates according to census figures together make up 33% of the Australian population. In each of these groups the proportion aged 70 or more grew by at least 15% between 1991-1996, a rate that is substantially greater than the 10.6% for the overall population. Even higher increases in the proportion over 70 were recorded for the Churches of Christ, Orthodox, and Lutherans (about 25%) (8)

There are, therefore, many congregations who are aging fast and who (if trends continue as they are) will die out, unless they can integrate young families or go against the trend and find converts from elsewhere. Given this and given the alarming youth statistics mentioned earlier, I believe it is not only a good thing that Christian fertility be increased, but one might be excused for claiming that it is an imperative for the church.

Societal Change Possible

Apart from the enormous benefits to the church, there is also good potential for societal change for the better if the fertility of the devoutly religious is increased. Consider this illustrative mathematical example. Say out of 100 childbearing couples, just ten are churched. If the ten Christian couples have an average of four children each, and the remaining 90 reproduce at the rate of 1.6 children each, then 40 children would be brought up by Christians and 144 by others. Assuming all the Christian kids kept the faith and married Christians, we would then have 20 new Christian couples and only 72 non-believing couples. Using the same fertility rates for the next generation, Christians would then have 80 children and the non-Christians 115.

The assumptions behind this example are overly generous to Christians, but it illustrates the vast potential if we press our natural advantage in this area. Prevailing low and decreasing fertility could aid the Christian cause if we keep our levels up — even increase them — and bring up our children as Christians more wisely and diligently.

Conclusion

Christianity has a wonderful opportunity to be strengthened through internal growth. Our local churches also have the opportunity to benefit from it. I also believe that there is a sure opportunity through internal growth for generational and societal change for the better. There are no laws yet in our country limiting the amount of children we have or prohibiting us from raising our children as Christians. Therefore, the church should stop ignoring what has been for many churches their main source of growth. This message needs to be proclaimed for the sake of the survival of many churches. For that reason I will proclaim it despite the objections some might raise.

No one should be forced to have families if they do not really want them. I believe, however, that, if encouraged to do so, many couples would willingly and happily serve the Church and Jesus Christ through committing themselves to the wise parenting of the next generation, and those without children in the congregations could give their wholehearted support to the couples who make the big commitment to nurturing large families.

While many would agree (but perhaps not all) that there is no absolute guarantee that children brought up well will become Christians, we can all probably accept the fact that a great proportion of the people in most congregations have had Christian upbringings and that to ignore this would be folly. Leaders must recognize this and tactfully inspire and encourage. Married couples, consider the thoughts in this article, and see whether the Lord inspires you to commit to the difficult and rewarding life of nurturing a large family. Congregations and others, give your support in greater ways to all those in the Church who have children, whether they have one or fifteen. This is one way for the Church to prosper until Jesus comes. The ball is truly in our court.

End Notes

- (1) Whaid Rose, President of the Church of God Seventh Day
- (2) Peter McDonald, "Contemporary Fertility Patterns in Australia: First Data from the 1996 Census," **People and Place** Vol. 6(1) p1, p2
- (3) These statistics come from census data.
- (4) **People and Place** Vol. 7(3) p31, p36
- (5) **Christian Century** Vol. 113, p1077
- (6) Roger Thompson in his book 'The Mormon Church' (1993) writes of Mormon growth: "...the religion continues to grow at a phenomenal rate. In the United States the membership has more than doubled every twenty years since 1950, making it the sixth largest religious denomination with more than four million members in 1990. Worldwide the growth has been even more spectacular, passing eight million in 1991 and expected to at least double in the next ten years. If the current growth rate continues, within the next century Mormon church membership will exceed 250 million, making it as one non-Mormon sociologist noted, the first major faith to appear on the earth 'since the prophet Mohammed rode out of the desert'."
- (7) Gary Bouma and Philip Hughes, "Religion and Age in Australia," **People and Place** Vol. 6(1) p1, pp18-19
- (8) *ibid*

David Kidd is a member of the Church of God 7th Day Adelaide, Australia

Sabbath vs. Sunday Debate Heats up with \$1,000,000 on the Line

Seventh-Day Adventist pastor A. Jan Marcussen of Illinois is offering \$1 million to anyone who can produce "a verse from the Holy Bible showing that God commands us to keep holy the first day of the week instead of the seventh day as is commanded in the Bible." In an article that appeared on **WorldNetDaily** (<http://www.worldnetdaily.com/>) on October 13, 2001, the reward will start at \$50,000 and "will increase in \$25,000 increments each week for 40 consecutive weeks if no one sends him such a verse, with a final cap at \$1 million."

The purpose of Pastor Marcussen's challenge is to get people to wake up and read their Bibles, and there is nothing like money to whet the appetite. Joe Kovacs, writer of the **WorldNetDaily** article quotes Marcussen: "Millions of people believe and have confidence in their clergy that what they're being taught is true. They'll find out that the clergy is not teaching from the Bible."

Although most people will not recognize Pastor Marcussen's name, millions have seen one of his books, *National Sunday Law*, which spotlights the debate over which day is the Christian Sabbath.

According to Kovacs: "Experts on biblical scripture tell **WorldNetDaily** that Marcussen has little need to worry about paying out the money. 'I am afraid that you are not going to find an exact Bible verse to counter the good pastor's challenge and collect,' says James Efird, professor of biblical interpretation at Duke University Divinity School in North Carolina. 'As far as I know, there is no verse which specifies that Sunday is the day for Christians to observe the Sabbath.'"

Marcussen believes that many pastors are not encouraging their paritioners to look into the Sabbath-vs.-Sunday question because their are afraid — afraid that they will lose many members if they encourage people to look into what the Bible says about this question.

"It is the greatest hoax of all time," according to Marcussen. Sunday worship is the mark of the Papacy's authority."

Even though it should be clear to all readers of *The Sabbath Sentinel* that Pastor Marcussen has no cause to worry about losing his money, it will be interesting to watch the debate surrounding his challenge and the renewed interesting in studying the Bible.

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A new audio tape series, entitled, "Teaching The Law," covers Genesis through Deuteronomy. The tapes each have two 45-minute lessons, and feature Mordakhai Joseph teaching Bible Law.

Mordakhai Joseph was born to a strictly biblically oriented orthodox family in Aden, Yemen. From ages four through nineteen, he was raised in Israel. After that, he lived a few years in Paris, France and then moved to New York. In 1969 he became a Christian and a member of the Worldwide Church of God. From 1970 through 1975 he served on the faculty of Ambassador College. He presently attends with the Orange County Fellowship of God.

Dale Stogner, Orange County Fellowship leader and co-sponsor of this series, says, "By 'the Law', we mean to explain what the Law is and why there is a need to study it in a systematic way. For example, it is not possible to understand the New Testament if you do not understand the Old Testament. Many of the controversies surrounding the books of Galatians and Romans, etc. could be avoided if people had the proper background... [W]e will attempt to point out the difference and the errors made between legalists trusting in obedience for salvation and those who have a false idea of what grace is to the point where they believe there is no Law today. And, we believe that the Jewish traditions, while perhaps containing some wisdom, are not scripture and scriptural teaching has precedence over any man or group of men's teachings. This effort will not reference the Worldwide Church of God, nor any of its offshoots. This will hopefully make the lessons timeless and usable by any group that sees value in them."

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How China Almost Became a Sabbath-keeping Nation!

(Part 2)

by
Leon J. Lyell

In southern China in the late 1840's, a unique brand of Christianity emerged — the Taiping Movement. Millions accepted its leadership, but foreign "Christian" missionaries rejected it.

The Taipings revered the Torah and adopted the seventh-day Sabbath! This is the story of one man's search for God. It is the corruption of that search by the counsel of politically motivated associates. It is also the story of an attempt to bring a better life to the people of China and how that quest was thwarted.

In Part 1 we examined the history of the Taiping Movement. In Part 2 we will review some of the major beliefs of the Taiping Christians.

There is no doubt that the Taipings sought to create a theocracy. Their constitution insisted on high moral standards, church attendance, and compassion towards the needy. For example, opium smoking, the use of tobacco and wine, prostitution, foot binding, the sale of slaves, gambling and polygamy were all forbidden. Hong tried to model his government on the precepts of the Books of Moses to the extent that he understood these.

But what exactly was Hong's message? Do we have enough evidence to make our own judgement about whether his form of religion was biblical? Where his beliefs differ from ours, how much of that is due to difference of culture and how much is about a substantial difference of understanding of the Word of God?

Remember that in the West we often assume that many customs are biblical when in fact investigation proves this to be false. Remember too that in Hong's village the Bible as a single volume was simply not available. The other problem for Hong was that there were no reliable translations. One thing is certain, Hong did his best to adapt his life to the biblical precepts which he had. Most of his religious concepts came from his own reading of the Bible.

So, how did Hong obtain his beliefs and what exactly were they?

The prime source for Hong was the material he received on his earliest visits to Canton. Equally significant was the Bible translated by Gutzlaff. One observer of the day, Thomas Meadows, remarked that "The Bible is his highest standard" amongst the Taipings. Tradi-

tional scholarship in China looked to the "Four books and the Five Classics," and these formed the basis of the civil service exams. Hong did not abandon the best scholarship of the past, but he believed that if these books differed from the Bible in some way it was either because the Chinese classics had been misunderstood or because the classics themselves were wrong.

In Hong's kingdom, the civil service exam was based on the Bible!

In response to the accusation that he was simply following foreign ways, Hong replied that:

"[Those who accuse us of this] do not know that in the ancient world monarchs and subjects alike all worshipped the Great God. As for the great Way or worshipping the Great God, from the very beginning, when the Great god created in six days heaven and earth, mountains and seas, man and things, both China and the barbarian countries of the west have continuously walked in the great Way. China also walked in the great Way, but within the most recent one or two thousand years, China has erroneously followed the devil's path..." [Michael II, p 113 – 114]

Major Beliefs

It must be stated at the outset that as with all religious groups, it would be wrong to paint a picture of static beliefs. Understandings developed and one of the sad matters to contemplate is to consider where the Taiping belief system might have ended up if it been allowed to flourish. The other fact to consider is that once the movement became a political force, it is clear

that some Taiping leaders used their religious positions to control the political direction of their followers, many of whom were not interested in becoming “God-worshippers.” The directions of Hong’s earlier period would seem to be the purer and form the background to Hong’s adoption of the seventh-day Sabbath.

God

The Taipings emphasised monotheism. There was only one God and his name was Shangdi, a term going back to the most ancient times in Chinese history. The phrase “Jehovah” seems not to have been used in Taiping literature, however this may be because of a misunderstanding of a phrase ShenyeHuohua in a translation of the Bible by Morrison. Hong analysed the name to mean Shenye – “God-Father” and Huohua, which Hong took to be God’s given name. Hong objected to the Protestant missionaries’ emphasis on God as being formless and emphasised that man was made in God’s image.

Much of Taiping teaching about God came from the Pentateuch, which along with the book of Joshua is apparently all that they published of the Old Testament. Their understanding of history from the creation to the giving of the law was therefore excellent as was their acceptance of the lessons from that part of the Bible.

One of Hong’s innovations was to see God as a family! Here the strong emphasis on family life in Chinese culture can be seen as influential along with Hong’s dislike of the argument of Christian missions that God was not anthropomorphic and the Chinese educated elite that the Great God was a non-personal “ultimate principle.”

Hong saw God as the Father, Jesus was the first son, but Hong himself was a younger brother of Jesus. Both Hong as a son of heaven had a wife and this pattern was seen as repeated in heaven where God the Father had a wife also.

Before we condemn this latter notion as absurd, think for a moment about the difficulty on conceptualising the notion of the trinity, which Hong decried as meaningless. Above all Hong searched for a way of understanding God. He insisted that God could be understood and sought to understand Him in simple terms.

Sin

The Ten Commandments were the standard by which the whole community was expected to live. The Taipings quoted from them extensively and wrote commentaries on them which adding references from Chinese proverbs and other writings.

For example a commentary on the Ten Commandments has these comments:

“The Ten Heavenly Commandments were established by the Great God.

“The First heavenly Commandment: Thou shall honour and worship the Great God.

“The great God is the Universal Father of all nations of the world. All men are given birth and nourished by him, all men are protected by him and all men ought, therefore to worship him respectfully morning and evening, and to acknowledge his grace. There is a common saying, “Produced by Heaven, nourished by Heaven, and Protected by Heaven...” [Michael II, 119-120]

The seventh Commandment was expanded to; “Thou shall not commit adultery or be licentious.” The Commentary makes it clear that the commandment includes “the casting of amorous glances...,” which is consistent with the commentary of Christ himself on the subject.

Sin was thus breaking of the Law of Heaven, but while the Chinese classics often spoke of “Heaven” as an impersonal principle, the Taipings recognised that Heaven was worthy of worship. From the beginning God had sought to rescue humanity from its sin. God sent Israel the Ten Commandments and when mankind later “fell into misery,” Heaven sent:

“[The] first born son, the Heavenly elder brother, Jesus down into the world to save mankind and to suffer extreme misery and grief in order to redeem mankind’s sins... If men did but know the basis of their redemption, consisting in the sacrifice of his life for the salvation of the world, they would be able to estimate how worthy of all honour our Heavenly Elder Brother is; still more would they feel that our Heavenly Father ought constantly to be regarded with pious reverence.” [Michael II, 239-240]

Not only had God commissioned ancient Israel and His Son, in these latter times he had commissioned Hong:

“From whose coming the true doctrine began to be clearly manifest.

“Wisdom and intelligence endowed by Heaven far exceeded the common order;

“His disposition is benevolent and preserving the correct. He upholds Heaven’s command;

“With rewards and punishments clearly distinguished, Heaven’s law is manifest.” [Michael II, p 243]

Heaven’s law was concretely manifest in the initial Taiping conquests in establishing the “heavenly capital” in Nanjing.

Dealing with sin involved a strong measure of putting out sin and replacing sin with obedience to the Law. In promoting good character, Hong promoted rectitude and morality, which had been emphasised in the Chinese classics. The “God-worshippers” had to practice righteousness.

Because of this emphasis some had discounted the Taiping movement as non-Christian because they be-

lied in “original goodness” instead of the traditional view of “original sin.” To some extent this is a false argument as it represents a difference of emphasis.

Religious Observances

There is much that we do not know about the Taiping Movement and a number of contradictions in what we do “know.” In a large movement involving millions of people, which came into being and rose to prominence in a short period of time, this should not be a surprise.

Baptism was probably the most important ceremony, and was used to picture freedom from sin. Candidates came to a table on which were placed two lamps and three cups of tea. A previously written confession of sins was burned. Candidates then had to agree orally not to worship demons or commit acts of evil. They pledged to follow the Laws of Heaven. Then water was poured over their head and they said, “My sin is washed away. I have put aside the old man and am now made new.” They then rose and went to the river where they were immersed, calling on God to forgive them.

Taipings Observe the Seventh-day Sabbath

The seventh-day Sabbath was carefully observed. On Fridays a large flag was displayed, signalling the approach of the Sabbath. Its observance began at sunset on Friday. The service was one of worship, celebrated in traditional Chinese mode with cakes and fruit, and exposition of the Bible, and was held at midnight.

Sacrifices of animals, delicacies, tea and rice were offered in a tradition somewhat reminiscent of the Old Testament. These were not intended to “gain merit” as was often the case in Chinese religious practice, as it was followed by a phrase acknowledging that it was through the “merits of our Saviour and Heavenly Elder brother Jesus, who redeemed us from sin.” From this it seems clear that the Taiping sought to become perfect, there was no sense of earning salvation.

The Taiping Ceremonial Regulations required the following:

“Within [the court] and without, all the various officials and people must go every Sabbath to hear the expounding of the Holy Bible, reverently and offer their sacrifices and worship and praise the Heavenly Father, the Supreme Lord and Great God. On every seventh seven, the forty-ninth day, the Sabbath, the colonel, captains and lieutenants shall go in turn to the churches in which reside the sergeants under their commend and expound the Holy books, instruct the people, examine whether they obey the commandments...” [Michael II, p 320]

The custom of a special Sabbath every seven Sabbaths is an interesting one. Could this idea be derived in some way from a poor translation of Leviticus 23:15-

16? Further research could uncover the answer. The King James translation of these verses read;

“And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven Sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall ye number fifty days...”

And just in case there was any doubt about when the seventh-day Sabbath was observed, in response to a question on this, the Hong Renkan’s response was:

“The Sabbath is observed by assembling at midnight for prayer and praise. When peace is restored, the Sabbath is to be strictly observed. It is kept on Saturday.” [Clarke and Gregory p 242]

As far as can be ascertained, while the traditional round of annual ceremonies of the Chinese calendar were not observed, there is no evidence that they observed any annual “Christian” celebrations such as Christmas or Easter. Although they had a vigorous knowledge of the first five books at this stage I have found no clear evidence that they considered the place of the annual holy days of Leviticus 23.

Weaknesses of Taiping Christianity

There were, of course, a number of “weaknesses” with Taiping Christianity, and it is incorrect to claim that Taiping Christianity was simply a Chinese variant of the Church of God, which was flourishing in America. Their Bible was incomplete and the enthusiastic adoption of a political role allowed Hong’s egotism to blur his original spiritual purity.

For example, while Hong was clearly convinced that God was one, he regarded Christ as a step below, in a sense, as a created being. Hong himself was simply a younger brother of Jesus – a younger son of God. In time, however, this understanding was translated by political advisors into a belief in Hong’s divinity, eventually claiming that he was none other than Melchizedek. Such divine ancestry was clearly designed more to fortify his position of influence as a political force in China. It is not surprising that rival “kings” within the Taiping movement also began to claim special revelations from God. And again, the context of these claims is that literally tens of millions of people in China were looking to Hong to reform the nation. Many believed that the dynasties would change and wanted to be sure they were well secured within the new government.

Hong himself was not a good administrator and towards his latter years was given some support from within by Hong Rengan, who appears to have been more widely read in Christian literature and wished to introduce other useful Western ideas such as trains, clocks, steamships, and the like. But his intervention was too late to save the movement.

Many of the weaknesses of Taiping Christianity were the result of the poor influence of the Western mission-

aries. Basic terms were not explained and there was almost no understanding of the background from which Chinese audience would receive such concepts. Experienced teachers and a mature understanding of the scriptures were lacking.

Some missionaries were convinced that the movement was in effect preparing the Chinese soil for a widespread turning to the real gospel. In this context some missionaries did attempt to influence Hong. But again many of these efforts were hampered by personality differences; cultural misunderstanding and the fact that most missionaries first wanted to “correct” some notions. Many of the supposed errors of the Taipings were concepts that are difficult to support biblically. For example, the trinity doctrine and in particular the personality of the Holy Spirit were not accepted by the Taiping and for that reason it was often the first subject raised by Western missionaries. In many ways had there been appropriately trained representatives of those from the Sabbatarian traditions, there may have been a better chance that Taiping Christianity would have developed. Instead, distrust and misunderstanding lead to a breakdown in real communication.

What Might Have Happened?

This is an intriguing question. If we think of the progress which the Taipings made in their understanding of the God of the Bible and His ways in a short space of time, with an incomplete and poorly translated Bible, we can only wonder. The religious core of the early movement was, it seems, searching for the God who is ever willing to reveal himself those who diligently seek Him [Hebrews 11:6]. Who are we to judge whether they served the true God, who truly knows his own? For all of us our knowledge is partial – incomplete – the important thing is to follow up on what we know.

There are two sad lessons, of course, in the story. The first is that having set out with such vigour to draw near to God and to improve the lot of their country, the Taiping leadership appears to have been caught up in the politics of the world, which for some then became an end in itself. The potential for power may have meant that the quest for truth came second. The other sad lesson is that those “Christian” nations and their religious establishments in objecting to Taiping Christianity cut off all help to a movement which if successful would have seen an entirely new form of Christianity. Had it been permitted to follow the patterns of the past with regard to the changing of dynasties, China would today be a Sabbath-keeping nation. And after one hundred years of Sabbath-keeping, where might that nation be today in its knowledge the Great God?

References and Reading

Clarke, P & Gregory, J Western Reports of the Taiping (Australian National University Press, 1982)

Lindley, A F, Ti Ping Tien-Kwoh (London 1866, New York 1970)

Michael, F The Taiping Rebellion in Historical Documents University of Washington Press, 1960), Volumes I, II, III.

Of interest is Hoeh, H L “The Dramatic Story of Chinese Sabbath Keepers” The Good News December 1955, pp 5-7.

A great young people’s story on the Taiping movement is Rebels Of The Heavenly Kingdom by renowned children’s author Katherine Paterson.

Further Research

Many further lines of further investigation are obvious. I should be grateful if any readers could help with any of the following:

- Did any of the “God-Worshippers” survive in China after the Manchu victory?
- What of the history of Sabbath-keepers in China at earlier periods?
- What is the story of Sabbath-keepers in China today?

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Bones of Contention

The triceratops skeleton in the Smithsonian Institution was constructed from the bones of 14 different animals. The skeleton’s head is too small for its body, and the feet are actually the bones of a duck-billed dinosaur. Scientists are in the process of fixing the mistakes.

—*National Geographic*



Comparisons, similarities connections between covenants:

- Both recorded in the same Bible, and profitable for correction and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16, 17)
- Both introduced to the same man, Abraham, who is the father of both Jewish and Gentile believers (Gen. 12-25)
- Both teach the forgiveness of sins through shedding of blood
- Both provide for God's moral law to be observed (Heb. 8:8-12)
- Both express this relationship: "I will be our God, and you shall be My people"
- Both trust in a gracious God who loves and redeems His people despite their sins and failures.

We also read of sharp contrasts between the covenants, most of them in 2 Corinthians 3, Galatians 4, and in Hebrews.

Contrasts, differences, disconnects between covenants:

- The first writes God's laws on stone; the second, on our hearts
- The first operates according to the flesh and the letter; the second, according to the Spirit (2 Cor. 3)
- The first had the diminishing glory of a temporary priesthood; the second, an ever-increasing glory of an everlasting Priest (2 Cor. 3; Heb.)
- The first covenant tends to bondage; the second gives freedom (Gal. 4:21-31)
- The first provides daily sacrifice for sin that made nothing perfect; the second, a final Sacrifice once-and-for-all that perfected forever those who are being saved (Heb. 7 – 10).
- The first was good; the second was better in every way (Heb.)
- The first covenant gave us God's written law; the second covenant gives us the gospel of God's Kingdom and His Son.

I have two major points to draw from this brief introduction. First, the close relation between Covenants in Scripture helps refute any teaching that would discard God's law and forget His Sabbath. And second, the superiority of the New Covenant through Jesus Christ steers us far from the error of making the Sabbath a false gospel.

The grace of God in Christ is our only hope for eternal salvation, and the commandments of God continue as one way He teaches us vital truth about ourselves and about life. Trust! and obey!

Calvin Burrell is a vice-president of the Bible Sabbath Association

Question on Military Service

Dear Sir,

I have a question, perhaps you can venture a response, or pass this email along to someone who can. Thanks!

I am a Sabbath-keeper, have been my entire life and steadfastly believe in it (the seventh day) as a day of rest. I am struggling with a question of interpretation regarding work on the Sabbath.

I certainly believe that Sabbath keepers should cease working on the Sabbath; however, there are certain occupations where it is accepted to work on Sabbath; physicians, nurses, and other medical careers are an example. As a teacher at a Seventh-day Adventist boarding academy I am often called upon to supervise weekend activities on campus, which inevitably include Sabbath. Here is my dilemma.

In light of the events of Sept. 11, and in the event that our country goes to war, I would feel compelled to join the military. At first I thought I would join active (and would have asked for Sabbath off). Then on thinking it through a little more I felt that it would be more desirable to keep my teaching job and considered joining the reserves where I could be called up if needed. As you probably know, the reserves train once a month on weekends, which would obviously require Sabbath work/training. I would apply for a commission as an intelligence officer – nothing remotely close to being within the current SDA comfort level for acceptable Sabbath work.

Thus my struggle, and the dilemma; Is the work of a soldier, endeavoring to protect our nation and other soldiers, as acceptable in God's eyes as that of a physician on the Sabbath? I am inclined to believe that it is and I have even found some Biblical evidence of God commanding soldiers to work on the Sabbath – and this evidence implies that soldiers ALWAYS work on the Sabbath (II Kings 11:5-9). Furthermore, I have spoken with a pastor, whom I now cannot find any contact info, who believed that in ancient Judaic law there were two occupations that were allowed to work on Sabbath: Rabbis and soldiers.

I am not asking you for an answer, and not necessarily advice, just looking for someone else's thoughts on this topic.

I am especially concerned because my church has a history of raising up soldiers who refused to work or fight on Sabbath - a high and noble ideal, but one I'm not sure I always agree with. While most people fight to get the Sabbath off and will perhaps lose their job because of refusing to work on that day, I will perhaps lose my job because I feel compelled to work on that day.

Thus the second dilemma; If I am wrong and my interpretation is the product of misguided logic, my students and the children of my colleagues may look to my actions and either 1) question them to their parents and be forced to conclude that I am a bad person, or 2) agree with them and thereby forcing their parents to believe that I am a bad person.

Any helpful texts, especially texts, or thoughts, websites, etc., would be very much appreciated.

Yours,
Kris Erskine

Reply

Dear Kris,

It may interest you to know that I am a military man serving in the United States Navy. As a Seventh-day Adventist Sabbatarian I am empathetic with the concerns and considerations you make with regard to “working” on the Sabbath as it relates to military service. The question is, “Is being a Sabbath-keeping Christian inconsistent with military service?” Or “Is being a Sabbath-keeping Christian incompatible with patriotism?” It is a question that I have not only have to answer for myself, but also in counseling others like myself who serve in the military (or other “service” related work).

I have often thought it amusing how after a snowstorm, brethren in my church would thank God for traveling mercies coming to church. We don’t thank God for the salt truck drivers or the snow plowers for working on the Sabbath so we can come to church to keep the Sabbath. We don’t thank God for the operators of water plants or electrical plants who work on the Sabbath so we can flush the toilet or turn on the lights on the Sabbath.

I have told my shipmates that we have to “fight the ship” on the Sabbath (i.e. working to keep the ship afloat) or we would not have a ship to keep the Sabbath on. Of course if we were halachally orthodox Jews, we might not do any of these things, but even in the State of Israel where Sab-

bath observance is the law of the land, even there they must have water and lights on the Sabbath. If the state of Israel were to observe “Yom Kippur” the holiest day of the year according to halachah, there would likely not be a state of Israel today. Their greatest military victory was fought on the Day of Atonement. Jewish halachah allows fighting from a posture of defense or when attacked.

I took an oath to defend the constitution of the United States. As long as this document serves to protect my religious rights to worship God according to the dictates of my conscience I do not see service to my country inconsistent with my conscientious convictions as a Sabbath-keeper for other Sabbath-keepers. The day may come when our constitution may not always serve the interests of such freedoms when this country by repudiating its constitution will “speak as a dragon.” But until such time I serve God and my country with a clear conscience.

The Scripture says in Isaiah 58:13 “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words.”

The Jewish midrash explains that “thy pleasure” refers to working solely for pecuniary interests that relate to business or working for the sake of profit, or indulging in worldly recreations and amusements, which may be lawfully indulged on another day.

It further explains that to “call the sabbath a delight, the holy of God, and honourable” means to take delight and pleasure in the service of it; in all the duties of religion, private and public, to be observed on that day. The U.S Military upholds the religious rights of service members including Sabbath-keepers (see <<http://www.doctrine.quantico.usmc.mil/ministry/reflist.htm#A1>> and <http://www.religioustolerance.org/mili_rel.htm>).

God created the world in seven days, but the sun still shines, the riv-

ers still run, and the heavenly bodies continue in their motions. In other words God’s creation does not stop its “working” on Sabbath. God also made man and as such working to serve the needs of mankind as the rest of the creation works to serve man on the Sabbath must needs be just as much a part the continuing work of creation. Thus Jesus said in John 5:17 “My Father worketh hitherto (on the Sabbath), and I work.” Halachally “work” involves “creating.”

These are some of the considerations that I take into account when it comes to what it means to keep the Sabbath. Such considerations should be carefully weighed before making a decision to join the military. In the final analysis it all comes to a matter of conscience and personal conviction. Unfortunately though, individual conscience and personal convictions with respect to how one keeps the Sabbath are not always acceptable to all Sabbath-keepers and to that I say “Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.” (Romans 14:4)

Sincerely,
Sidney L. Davis, Jr., president

On the Love of God

“You asked for a loving God: you have one. The great spirit you so lightly invoked, the ‘lord of terrible aspect,’ is present: not a senile benevolence that drowsily wished you to be happy in your own way, not the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate, nor the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his guests, but the consuming fire Himself, the Love that made the worlds, persistent as the artist’s love for his work and despotic as a man’s love for a dog, provident and venerable as a father’s love for a child, jealous, inexorable, exacting as love between the sexes.”

—C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

The Church in the World

PAKISTAN—The Sierra Times reports that on Oct. 28, Islamic gunmen assaulted a church in Bahawalpur, Pakistan, sprayed the congregation with bullets, killing at least 16 people, including the clergyman and several children. Attacks such as this one have been ordered by the Taliban in Afghanistan in retaliation for Muslims death due to war with America. To this date not one Muslim country or organization has issued a denunciation of this heinous act. Because the United States is viewed as a Christian nation by the rest of the world, Christians in many Muslim countries have become targets of Islamic terrorists. (Source: sierratimes.com/)

CHINA—For 20 years, the only national Christian publication in China has been Tian Feng (Heavenly Wind), published by the government-controlled Three Self Patriotic Movement and the China Christian Council. It dutifully reflects the Communist Party policy on religion, while ignoring all reports of persecution. Yet over the past year, Chinese house church Christians have secretly produced three issues of their new magazine, The Way (Daolu). Twenty thousand copies of each issue have been distributed free across China to house church leaders. The Way promises to be an authentic voice of the church in China. (Source: opendoorsusa.org/)

MALI—The opportunity for evangelism in this West African country is beginning to close as the influence of Islam increases, Christian leaders say. The church now finds it difficult to rent meeting places and organize missions. Previously, Muslims were happy to rent their houses and buildings to Christians because they knew they would be paid and because Christians could be trusted to care for the property. Today, Muslims who own property are afraid to rent to Christians, fearing criticism from Muslim religious leaders influenced

by a growing fundamentalism. (Source: opendoorsusa.org/)

AFGHANISTAN—Two American women, Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer, are among eight arrested Aug. 3 for allegedly sharing their faith. Their trial in Afghanistan has been postponed indefinitely, leaving their families and supporters wondering what will happen next.

“We just have to wait and see,” Danny Mulkey of Antioch Community Church, Waco, Texas, said in an interview from Pakistan on Oct. 24, a day after Reuters News Service reported the delay. “It’s crazy. Nobody knows what happens next.”

Both women have been through ups and downs, Mulkey said they aren’t upset about the latest delay. “They’re saying, ‘Lord, it’s up to you,’ That’s the same thing we’re saying here. You hit a little brick wall of disappointment now and then, but then you go to the Lord, express disappointment and realize it’s in His hands.

The women are still reported to be safe amid the bombing. Mulkey said he hadn’t received any further information since a week earlier, when he learned the nearest bombing targets were approximately 2.5 miles from the jail where the women are being held.

Mulkey is asking for prayer for encouragement for the detainees as well as their parents and family members. When they experience a “bump in the road, discouragement can set in,” he said.

Commenting on the irony of people worrying about their safety in Asia while anthrax attacks are spreading fear in this country, Mulkey said Americans tend to be ethnocentric and think the world revolves around them. “The perception is usually that things are crazy in that other part of the world, wherever that is.”

“My prayer is that this is a wake-up call to Christians, and to nominal

Christians. You can’t put your faith in a country or a social system, because it’s got cracks. Your faith must be in God.” (Source: barnabasfund.org.)

NIGERIA—200 are killed as anti-US Protestors turn on local Christians in Muslim/Christian riots in Kano, northern Nigeria, on 12 to 14 October.

The widespread fears of Christian minorities in Muslim-majority areas of the world that they would be targeted in reprisal for American attacks on Afghanistan were horribly justified on 12 October as anti-US protestors turned on Kano’s Christian minority during demonstrations. The protest began peacefully after Friday prayers. However, soon Muslim youths were throwing stones at police, shouting, “God is Great” and setting fire to cars and churches. The citizens of the majority-Christian suburb of Sabon Gari erected barricades of burning tyres in a desperate attempt to keep the rioters out.

The death toll is probably much higher than the reported figure of 100 – 200. Houses, shops, vehicles, businesses and at least four churches and four mosques were all gutted by flames. One reliable witness described how Islamic extremists, dressed in military and police uniforms, joined in the slaughter of Christians. Over 16,000 have been made homeless.

Tensions between Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria have been particularly high since 1999 when the first of a dozen Muslim-majority states in the North announced plans to implement full Islamic Shari’ah law. Christians have begun to see the gradual erosion of their rights as they are being forced to comply with Islamic law. In February and May last year over 1,200 were killed in Kaduna as tensions led to savage riots. Another 500 were killed in further bloody clashes in Jos last month. Now with many Muslims opposing American raids on Afghanistan, and extremists identifying local Christians with the West, the situation is more fragile, and Christian minorities more vulnerable, than ever. (Source: barnabasfund.org) □



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Standing Firm

Hello. Just wanted to drop a quick note and tell June Narber Harrison how much I enjoyed her article in the July-August 2001 issue of *The Sabbath Sentinel*. It was right on target.

Thanks!

Kenny James, Paris, TN

Torah keeping

Mr. Davis,

Shalom on the eve of the HaSuccot!

I'm not quite sure how your group received my email address but I'm glad to know that there are others who are proclaiming the message of the Torah. I read the Feast of Succoth message sent to me on Monday, Oct. 1, and I can't help but inquire about a few things. The first thing is that it seems that your group's goal is to promote Sabbath keeping. If this is the case, then are you not concentrating on promoting TORAH keeping??? Keeping the Sabbath is "one point – in the law". If you offend in one point, you offend in all - correct? Why not promote the TRUTH?

Ecclesiastes 12:13 "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

The Messiah Yahshua tells us that all the laws hang on Loving Your Neighbor, not Sabbath keeping. Don't get me wrong; Sabbath keeping is a crucial point in the Law. It serves as a sign between Our Creator and His people (all those who keep the commandments and hold the testimony of Yahshua). It serves as a regulator between man and God's creation. It has many critical applications for both man and the earth. Unfortunately, most people don't realize that Sabbath-keeping is what balances nature with man. Yes, I could go on and on about the benefits of Sabbath keeping. I could go on and on about all the Commandments. The Command-

ments are what govern the entire universe. Every living thing, every element in the earth, adheres to the commandments of God - except man!! All the 613 laws play a vital part of the existence of this earth and man's existence and destiny. They are DIRECTLY RELATED!!

As followers of the True and Living God – YHWH we must recognize the need to bring the TRUE GOSPEL to Fear YHWH and keep His commandments. Remember: THIS IS THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN.

Shalom

(The writer identifies himself only by his e-mail handle "daniidonna." A note on e-mail etiquette: ALL CAPS in e-mail is considered SHOUTING.—Editor)

Greetings and Shalom,

The Bible Sabbath Association (BSA) is non-denominational. We are not a church and hence do not promote any particular doctrine except what is common to all Sabbatharians, i.e., the Sabbath. While it is important that we all follow all of God's commandments, statutes and judgments, we believe that with respect to the "Ten Words," the Sabbath is the very heart of Torah. The Jewish midrash says that the Sabbath is equal in importance to the whole Torah. "The Holy One Blessed be He said to Israel, 'If you merit keeping the Sabbath, I will consider it as if you kept all the mitzvot of the Torah; and if you desecrate it, I will consider it as if you desecrated all the mitzvot'" (Shemot Rabbah 25:15). This is not to downplay the rest of Torah, but to emphasize the place of the Sabbath in it.

There are many organizations and individual members from various Sabbath-keeping groups who espouse various doctrinal views, the BSA does not promote any particular group or their views.

*There are many members who hold similar convictions as yours. From time to time we publish articles in **The Sabbath Sentinel (TSS)** that reflect those views. We do this in the interest of our readership so that they can be cognizant of the various Sabbath-keeping convictions and traditions that exist among Sabbatharians.*

The BSA also publishes a directory of over 400 Sabbath-keeping organizations that gives a brief description of their organization and the doctrines they teach.

One of the aims and goals of the BSA is to promote fellowship, understanding and cooperation between Sabbath-keepers of various groups. In the previous edition of TSS I addressed the difficulty and the obstacles this presents to most Sabbatharians. The subscription to TSS is free; we only ask for a donation to help to defray the costs of mailing.

Thank you for your interest in the BSA. Sidney L. Davis, Jr., president, BSA

From BSA Nigeria

The Nigeria Bible Sabbath Association (NIBSA) wishes to express her heartfelt sympathy and prayers to all those who have directly or indirectly been affected in the dastardly act of terrorism on the American people Tuesday, 11th September, 2001. The escalating wave of brutality of this magnitude in recent years serves as a reminder to the world that time is fast running out on this world of sin wickedness.

May the Almighty provide speedy recovery and succour to the affected and the people of America in general.

Bassey Akpan
National Coordinator
Nigeria Bible Sabbath Association
(NIBSA)

Classified Ads . . .

Mid-South Sabbatarians

News, Events, and Directory. On the Web at <http://www.sabbatarians.net>.

(Dec 01)

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(Dec 01)

Classified ads (20% discount for second time, 30% thereafter) are available at the rate of \$1.00 per word (including each word and each group of numbers in the address - telephone numbers count as one word) for each issue in which the ad is published.

Display ads are available at \$150 per quarter page for each issue the ad is published. Where possible your camera-ready copy will be utilized, or we will design your display ad for you. Send copy for all ads and payment to *The Bible Sabbath Association*, 3316 Alberta Drive, Gillette, WY 82718.

Discounts- Advertise in the TSS Classified Ads section for more than one issue and receive discounts: \$1.00 per word 1st issue, then 20% off for 2nd issue and 30% off for subsequent times.

Ad copy without payment will not be accepted for publication. Deadline is two months prior to publication (i.e. if you want your ad to appear in the September/October issue we must receive it before July). BSA reserves the right to reject or edit any ad copy. Publication does not necessarily imply endorsement by *The Bible Sabbath Association* or *The Sabbath Sentinel*.

Press Release

Third Annual BSA Scholarship Contest

The Bible Sabbath Association wishes to announce the 2002 BSA Essay Scholarship Contest. The contest is open to all students in their junior year in high school (or home schooled students that are one year away from being college-bound (approximately ages 16-17), **and** to all college-age students up to the age of 25. Application deadline is April 1, 2002. Each applicant must accept a free subscription to *The Sabbath Sentinel* for one year along with his or her application entry. The four winners of the essay contest will be awarded prizes as follows: first place \$750; second place \$500, and third and fourth place with an award of \$250 each. Scholarship money will be paid directly to the trade school/college or university the student has been accepted at for the fall 2002 school year. The contest is open to U.S. and international students. It is open to any Sabbath-keeping Christian regardless of church or organizational affiliation.

Former BSA essay scholarship winners may NOT enter the contest this year. This is to allow others the opportunity for the prize money.

The three essay questions for this year's contest are as follows:

- (1) The lessons I have learned from keeping the Sabbath in my life;
- (2) How I explain the Sabbath to others (teachers, employers, friends, etc.); and
- (3) Challenges facing Sabbath keepers and/or Sabbath keeping churches in the years to come.

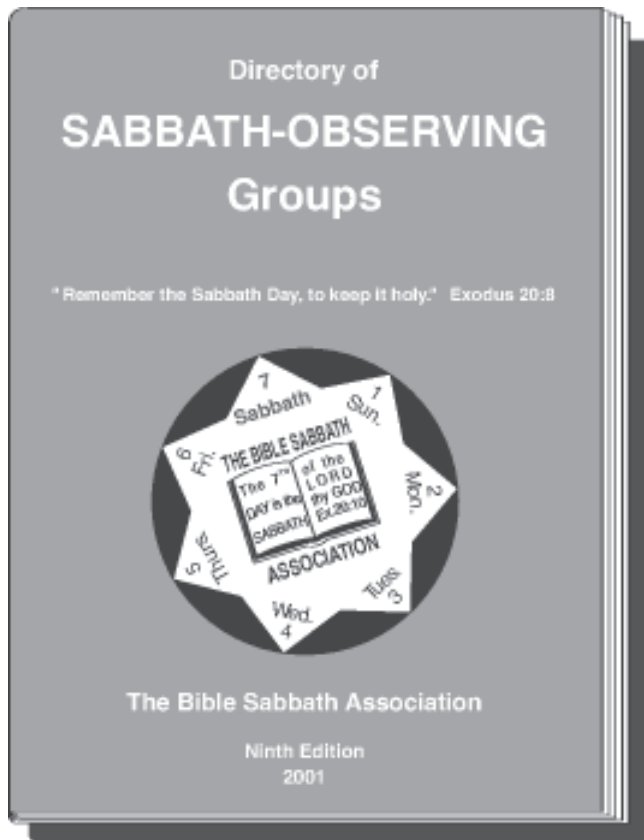
Applications must be filled out completely. Essay questions must be hand written by the applicant with a typed copy attached for easy reading by the judges.

For Scholarship Applications, call toll free 1-888-687-5191 or write:

Attention: Scholarship Contest c/o The BSA, 3316 Alberta Drive, Gillette, Wyoming 82718 or June Narber at jnarber@hercurian.com, or write her at 6325-9 Falls of Neuse Road #193, Raleigh NC 27615. Forms are also available on the BSA Website, www.biblesabbath.org. Donations for next year's Scholarship gladly accepted. We need donations to insure that we can continue the scholarship program.

Please send any donations to:

The Bible Sabbath Association,
3316 Alberta Drive, Gillette, WY 82718



Place your Order Now!

The 246-page ninth edition of The Bible Sabbath Association's comprehensive catalog of Seventh-day Sabbath-Observing Groups has gone to press! The *Directory of Sabbath-Observing Groups* will ship in late September or early October.

The 2001 *Directory* lists over 400 Sabbatarian groups, and over 1600 congregations. This is the ninth update of the *Directory*, originally published in 1957, and the largest compilation of Sabbatarian Groups in the BSA's history. There are many International congregations listed.

The *Directory of Sabbath-Observing Groups* is available for \$15, postpaid, or 10 copies for \$95 postpaid, from:

The Bible Sabbath Association
3316 Alberta Drive
Gillette, WY 82718.

You may also order by credit card by calling 307-686-5191, or e-mail at info@biblesabbath.org.

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