

The Sabbath Sentinel

March–April 2008



These are the future. Have we prepared them well?

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

The Sabbath Sentinel

March-April 2008 Volume 59, No. 2 Issue 530

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Our Cover:

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The future of the Church depends on how well we prepare the next generation of mothers and fathers (see Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

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Two Healings and a Kingdom



After Jesus finished teaching his disciples the basics of the Christian life in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 through 7), he and his disciples journeyed north to Galilee. Everywhere Jesus went, he did great miracles and healings, announcing all the while that the kingdom of God* had come to the people. Chapters 8 and 9 of Matthew are marvelous testimonies to the ministry of Jesus and to the power of his kingdom. Jesus was giving the people and his disciples a "foretaste of glory divine" as the hymn says. (*As a note of clarification, the term "kingdom of heaven" is used exclusively in Matthew's gospel. "Kingdom of God" is used in Mark, Luke, and John. The meaning of the two terms is identical. Heaven's kingdom and God's kingdom are one and the same. In fact, Matthew uses the terms interchangeably in 19:23, 24.)

In all this Jesus was beginning to prepare his disciples for their own ministries after his death and resurrection. The many healings that occurred during this phase of his ministry were as much a witness to his disciples as they were to the poor and downtrodden citizens of the land. The twelve were eyewitnesses to the confirming power that would be available to them as they began to take the gospel of the kingdom of God to the four corners of the earth after the death of Christ.

But, I'm getting ahead of myself. I would like to look at a passage in the middle of this section of Scripture that tells the story of Jairus' daughter (Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56). And, lodged in the middle of this story is another story of healing that will give us some additional insight into the power of God's kingdom.

This story begins with Jesus in "his own town," Nazareth (see Matthew 9:1). The crowds were following him everywhere, and as he went, he taught his disciples. As they walked along the road, one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus, approached Jesus and pleaded with him to accompany him to his house because his twelve-year-old daughter who had been very sick had just died. This news of his daughter's death evidently reached Jairus as he approached Jesus to ask him to come and heal her. Jesus gave Jairus a comforting response in the midst of his grief: "Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole"

(Luke 8:50). Jairus believed Jesus and accompanied him to his house.

When Jesus arrived at Jairus' house, the mourners were already wailing and the funeral arrangements were being made, but Jesus said to them, "Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth." The Scripture then says, "And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead."

Jesus took no note of their scoffing and ordered everyone outside except for Jairus, his wife, and Peter, James, and John. Jesus then went in to the girl, took her by the hand and said to her, "Maid, arise." The girl rose from her bed immediately, and Jesus commanded that she be given something to eat.

This is a beautiful story of faith that yielded results in the "real," physical world. However, before we give more attention to the story of Jairus and his daughter, let's look at another story tucked into the middle of the account of Jairus.

Mark's account gives more details about the healing of the woman with an issue of blood than either Matthew or Luke. Starting with Mark 5:24, we see that Jesus was thronged as he traveled through Galilee. The crowds pressed against him on all sides.

In the midst of the crowd lurked a nameless woman who had suffered from an "issue of blood" for twelve years. She had gone to every physician and exhausted all her resources in search of a cure. All her money was gone, yet she was not healed. Her condition only grew worse. As the woman drew near to Jesus, she hatched a plan. She had seen Jesus heal others with nothing more than a word or the touch of his hand. She believed that if she pressed through the crowd and got close enough to Jesus to touch the hem of his cloak, she would feel his healing power without his even noticing her presence.

Evidently she had a good plan because she was healed immediately upon touching the Lord's garment: "And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague" (Mark 5:29). The amazing thing about this story was that Jesus immediately

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The Prophecy Pit

Part 2



by Kenneth Westby

In Part One we surveyed the crowded graveyard of failed prophecies. Since the Christian church began, sincere preachers and parishioners have speculated on various fulfillments of prophecy, sometimes picking specific dates for fulfillments, and have watched their predictions come to naught. In some cases apocalyptic movements became frenzied and in the wake of their failure many people were left hurt, disillusioned, and confused. Biblical prophecy is not what most people think it is. Prophecy is not a religious crossword puzzle to be mastered, a numeric code to be cracked, nor a hidden key to understanding “the end,” nor is it a religious mystery that only some blessed and clever ministries understand. Just what is God’s purpose behind his various prophetic utterances, and how are we to understand them?

The first and probably most important prophecy in all Scripture was given by God in the Garden of Eden. He didn’t put it in the mouth of a prophet; he delivered it personally. To whom did he address it? There were three beings present, but he spoke to just one of them. To the serpent he said,

“I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he [Eve’s offspring, Christ] will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” Genesis 3:15).

The source of evil and sin, Satan the serpentine Adversary, would ultimately have his head crushed—be “killed.” The Adversary would bite the dust (v. 14) and the promised seed of the woman would be victorious over him and victorious over the sin and death he introduced into God’s good creation.

The Devil would poisonously strike at the promised son of Eve but could not crush his head. He could only strike the son’s heel which was a serious but temporary wound soon healed by God through resurrection. The mighty heel of the Son of Man will soon descend upon the serpent’s head with life crushing force. Thus ends the long saga of sin and the reign of the evil one.

This seminal prophecy has been and is now being fulfilled, its ultimate completion awaiting the coming Kingdom of God. It is a prophecy of great hope in the face of what at times seems to be never-ending evil. There is coming a joyful conclusion—the end of evil—when evil’s author is crushed and Eve’s offspring reigns victorious. One could say that the entire Bible

is but the story of how that God-given prophecy proceeds to its sure fulfillment.

Jesus took the title Son of Man, for he knew that he was the promised seed that would deliver the human race from the bondage of sin. He knew he must confront the originator of sin and the persistent adversary of God. The apostle Paul called Jesus the Second Adam, for Jesus replaces Adam becoming the “father” of a newborn family of sons and daughters made in the spiritual image of God.

Note the Creator’s use of symbolism in this first prophecy: serpent, eating dirt, crushed head, a snake-bitten heel. From this point forward to the last book in the Bible prophecies are usually laced with symbols, be they numbers (7x70, 666, 1000, 42, 1260, etc.), animals (lamb, lion, bear, eagle, etc.), strange beasts (sea dragon, multi-headed, multi-horned creatures, leviathan, etc.), images (statues, thrones, winepress, trumpets, etc.), or things commonly observed in creation (sun, moon, mountains, rivers, vineyards, bread, oil, trees, etc.).

Symbols are useful, for they evoke pictures and emotions and can vividly transport information, warnings, and hope in ways that symbol-less plain speech cannot. Jesus frequently employed parabolic speech, a symbolic style of presentation using stories, metaphors, similes, and other figurative speech. The culture of learning was oral. Even those things written were intended to be delivered to the audience in oral fashion with inflections and tones not easily con-

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The Leaven of Apathy

Dr. Daniel Botkin

The month in which Passover occurs is the beginning of the biblical year (Ex. 12:11). In preparation for Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread this year, I suggested a spring-time "New Year's Resolution" for our congregation: "Purge Out the Leaven in 2007." For several weeks before Passover, my teaching each Sabbath revolved around leaven and its Biblical symbolism. I focused especially on what I call The Leaven of Apathy.

Apathy is defined as indifference. If a person is apathetic toward something, he has little or no concern about it. He is detached and unemotional. He is without feeling or passion. (Note the negating *a-* prefix and *-pathos*, the root of the word.)

It's okay to be apathetic about some things. For example, I am totally apathetic about sports. I don't even know for sure what the "Super Bowl" is. (I do know that it has something to do with a football game, which is more than my sister knew. She thought it was a basketball game.) There are many subjects which disciples of Yeshua can safely be apathetic about. Indeed, there are some things that we *should* be apathetic about. Soap operas and celebrity gossip come to mind. But one thing that we must not be apathetic about is the Kingdom of God and our personal relationship with the Lord.

Apathy about spiritual matters is like leaven. It is a creeping cancer in the soul. It is a silent, stealthy intruder that seeps into the soul unnoticed, and slowly but steadily spreads its tentacles throughout the soul until the whole is leavened. The reason apathy is so dangerous is because by the time you realize it's there, guess what? You don't care! Because apathy is an attitude of indifference, an apathetic person does not care about the fact that he is apathetic.

The word *apathy* does not appear in the Bible, at least not in the King James Version.

Esau

Esau is perhaps the most glaring Biblical example of an apathetic individual. Esau was the firstborn of

"The reason apathy is so dangerous is because by the time you realize it's there, guess what? You don't care."

Isaac, who was the beloved son and heir of Abraham, the friend of God. Esau was born to a very privileged position. He stood to inherit the blessing of God that was passed on from Abraham to Isaac. Yet Esau's apathy earned him the curse of God. The last thing that God says about Esau is,

"I hated Esau" (Malachi 1:3).

Why did God hate Esau? Because of his apathy toward spiritual things. Esau sold his birthright to his brother Jacob for a bowl of lentils and a piece of bread. In doing so, Esau "despised his birthright" the Bible says (Gen. 25:23ff).

Jacob had his flaws too, but apathy toward spiritual things was not one of them. Jacob understood the surpassing value of spiritual blessings over temporal, physical blessings. Even though Jacob was a manipulative individual in his quest to obtain the spiritual blessings, he at least understood the value of the spiritual. Esau, on the other hand, cared very little about the spiritual. Esau's first priority was his belly. Satisfying his fleshly appetite was more important to him than the birthright.

If Esau had not sold his birthright, Yahweh might have been referred to as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Esau" throughout all generations. But because of Esau's apathy, Yahweh is now forever known as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Our apathy, if it is not purged out, can bring the curse of God upon us as it did for Esau, and it can have eternal consequences, as it did for Esau.

The Israelite conquerers of Canaan

Another biblical example of apathy can be seen in the first chapter of Judges. Joshua led the children of Israel into the Promised Land, and each tribe was assigned its territory and told to conquer the enemy and dispossess the Land. The Israelites racked up enough victories to establish themselves in the Land, but they stopped short of finishing the job. The first chapter of Judges is an account of one incomplete victory after another:

"And Yahweh was with Judah; and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountain, but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron ... And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites ... Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean ... Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer ... Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron ... Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho ... Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Bethshemesh ... and the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain."

The Angel of Yahweh came and rebuked the Israelites for their apathy. He told them that He was not going to drive out the Canaanites, but was going to leave them to be thorns in their sides, "to prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of Yahweh to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not." (See Judges chapter 2.) For roughly 300 years the Israelites suffered at the hands of one heathen nation after another, with only occasional temporary relief when a Judge was raised up as the result of the Israelites' repentance. Then after the Judge was dead, the Israelites fell back into sin again, and God let another enemy afflict them.

Apathy brought the Israelites a lot of long-term misery, and apathy can bring a lot of long-term misery into our lives, too. Don't be apathetic about the territory God has assigned you. Don't be satisfied with incomplete victories over sin and temptation.

Haggai's Generation

After the period of the Judges and the Kings, the Jews were conquered and carried off to Babylon because of their sins. After 70 years they were allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. They laid the foundation for the Temple with a lot of fanfare and rejoicing. Then some of the Jews' enemies objected to the rebuilding of the Temple and made them stop. So they stopped.

As the years went by, the Jews grew apathetic about the rebuilding of God's house. They became a people who were content with just the foundation. The work had stopped for approximately 15 years when Haggai appeared and addressed the apathy of the Jews:

"Thus speaketh Yahweh of hosts, saying, This people say, 'The time is not come, the time that Yahweh's house should be built.' Then came the word of Yahweh by Haggai the prophet, saying, 'is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?' " (Haggai 1:2-4).

The people were apathetic about God's house. They were more concerned about their own private homes. "Consider your ways," Haggai told them. "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes" (1:6).

The people's lack of prosperity and blessing was due to their apathy about the work which God had assigned them to do as a community. Some believers get so wrapped up in their personal lives that they grow apathetic about the world-wide Body of Messiah. Some people are so self-absorbed that they are apathetic even about their own local body. This sort of selfishness will result in the same kind of disappointment and frustration that the apathetic, self-absorbed people of Haggai's generation suffered.

Malachi's Generation

The Jews of Haggai's generation heeded the words of the prophet, repented of their apathy, and finished rebuilding the Temple. But some years later, in Malachi's time, apathy had set in once again. The Temple was rebuilt and the priesthood was functioning; however, the priests and the people were worshipping with an apathetic, half-hearted attitude. The priests' attitude toward the altar was: "The table of Yahweh is contemptible ... Behold, what a weariness it is!" (Malachi 1:7,13). For offerings, the people were bringing animals that were lame, blind, sick, and torn. Instead of offering Yahweh the best of their flocks and herds, they were offering Him that which was inferior. They were giving God their garbage and their leftovers.

The leaven of apathy in an individual's soul can make the table of the Lord seem contemptible. Apathy takes the sweetness out of fellowship with the Lord. Apathy can cause a man to say of his prayer time, "Behold, what a weariness it is!" He may not say these words aloud, but this is how he feels inside when it's time to pray.

The leaven of apathy also causes people to give God their leftovers. If a person spends five hours a day watching trashy television and then gives only five minutes of prayer to the Lord before he drops off to sleep, it is obvious that the leaven of apathy has done its work.

The apathetic worshippers in Malachi's day offered God that which was *lame, blind, sick, and torn*. Apathetic worshippers today do the same thing. They

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Making a Covenant with your Eyes

By Terril D. Littrell, Ph.D.

It is no mystery how sexual temptations start. For men, sexual temptation comes through the eyes. In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus delivered an unforgettable warning about guarding our sight: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away. It is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell" (Matthew 5:27-29).

Jesus doesn't intend for us to literally pluck out our eyes, but Jesus does mean that we should take radical measures to cut off any source of temptation. We must get rid of anything in our lives that is sexually suggestive or explicit. Burn the dirty magazine. Ban the indecent videos. Cancel the carnal cable channels. Avoid the daily soap operas. This will be a big help. The more we allow adulterous scenes to come into our minds, the more likely we will have adulterous thoughts and inclinations.

Job's Godly Example

Christian men need to follow the example of godly Job and make a covenant to guard our eyes from impurity: "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I look upon a virgin?" (Job 31:1). Pornography is attacking and destroying more people than you think. According to *U.S. News & World Report*, February 10, 1997: "In 1996, Americans spent more than \$8 billion on pornography: hardcore videos, peep shows, adult cable programming, computer pornography, and sex magazines. In 1996, Americans rented 665 million hard-core videos."

According to an ACB news report in 2007, America spends \$10 billion on pornography every year—the same amount is spent on foreign aid, more than it spends on all professional sports combined.

God's priorities include the salvation, wholeness, and health of persons and the strength of marriages and families. But, pornography is anti-children, anti-women, anti-marriage, anti-family, and anti-God. God cares about people, but pornography destroys people. And it is filling the homes of America and the nations of the world. It opposes everything God cherishes. Allowing your-

self to view pornography is fatal to your marriage and your eternal wellbeing.

What does pornography do to a man? It robs him of the capacity to be a man. The essence of manhood consists in readiness to deny oneself for the good of a beloved. This is why St. Paul reminds husbands in his letter to the Ephesians that their love must be like that of Christ who allowed himself to be crucified for the sake of his beloved, the Church (Ephesians 5:21-33). Pornography defeats this calling. Instead of denying himself for the good of the woman, a man through the use of pornography denies the woman her dignity in order to satisfy his lust. In essence pornography is a rejection of our calling to love as God loves. Is it no wonder that those who use it are never satisfied? Only love satisfies.

Pornography gradually cripples a man's ability to love. It is impossible to love a fantasy, but living in a world of fantasy allows a guy to escape from reality and evade the demands of authentic love. Simply put, pornography is the renunciation of love. For the person who indulges in pornography, the purpose of sex becomes the satisfaction of the erotic "needs," not the communication of life and love.

Protecting Yourself so You Can Protect your Children

Parents should be extremely cautious of both programs and advertising that are sexually suggestive or explicit. Forty years ago, if someone exposed children to what is shown routinely on prime-time television today, they would have been thrown in jail. Our sensitivities to immoral programming have been thoroughly shattered in just a generation. Don't allow your family to participate in television's moral freefall.

Some of the strongest condemnations in the New Testament come from Jesus against those who scandalize children. "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world for the temptations to sin? For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the man by whom the temptation comes!" (Matthew

18:5-7). These instructions of Jesus could not be more clear.

Please consider pasting this verse on your television set: "I will walk with integrity of heart within my house; I will not set before my eyes anything that is base" (Psalm 101:2-3).

Self-Protection Too

Fathers have a strong motivation to protect their children. However, before fathers can protect their children, they need to protect themselves. If an airplane loses cabin pressure, parents are instructed to place the oxygen mask on themselves first and then place one on the child. Otherwise, while attempting to save his child, a well-meaning parent could pass out for lack of oxygen and cause both to become helpless.

Fathers need to include themselves in their protective instincts. Our hope for the future rests upon

protecting our children's generation. However, as we protect our children from things that corrupt their childhood innocence, we constantly need to remember to lead by example and protect ourselves.

In a world desensitized by casual and perverted promiscuity, it is important that men realize the attack that is being made upon themselves and their children by means of the visual images of the electronic media. Because of the effects of pornography are so severe, godly men have the obligation to rid their own lives of it. Making a covenant with one's eyes is a solid answer to the sexual revolution.

Reprinted from RESTORE Magazine, June 2007. Dr. Terril 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.

Sabbath Morning Companion

A Matter of Perspective

Alexander Solzhenitsyn's fictional *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* chronicles just one day in the life of an inmate of a Siberian Gulag. At the end of the day, as the central character prepares for his rest, he reflects on all the day had brought.

"Shukov went to sleep, and he was very happy. He'd had a lot of luck today. They hadn't put him in the cooler. The gang hadn't been chased out to work in the Socialist Community Development. He'd finagled an extra bowl of mush at noon. The boss had gotten them good rates for their work. He'd felt good making that wall. They hadn't found that piece of steel in the frisk. Caesar had paid him off in the evening. He'd bought some tobacco. And he'd gotten over that sickness.

"Nothing had spoiled the day and it had almost been happy."

Curious, is it not, how one's perspective of a good day is shaped by one's expectations. My expectations of a good day are vastly different from those of Shukov's, for they are shaped by my accustomed to comforts and blessings.

A man named Paul once sat in a Roman prison and wrote a remarkable letter. In spite of his circumstances, and in spite of a possible death sentence, Paul's message to the Philippians was one of rejoicing.

"With joy in my prayer for you all," he said (1:4). "Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice" (1:18). "Make my joy complete" (2:2). "I rejoice and share

my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me" (2:17-18). "Rejoice in the Lord" (3:1). "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice" (4:4).

Again and again Paul tells the Philippians to rejoice. What kind of man was this whose life was full of joy in spite of circumstances? Paul's mind was focused on things eternal rather than temporal, and it gave him great cause for joy, for we are robbed of joy by the loss of hope.

Most of us are not to the place where we could rejoice in a prison cell. Rejoicing can be hard in the best of circumstances. But Paul had learned a secret. "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need" (4:11-12).

And that secret is this: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (v 13).

Take all your worries and put them in a box. And put that box on the altar of God. Jesus once said to take his yoke upon us, and the picture of that is a profound one. A yoke was placed on two oxen and not one. As we take on the yoke of Jesus, he will be next to us as our yoke fellow, bearing the burden with us. And that gives us cause to rejoice.

—Lenny Cacchio

Law and Order in Genesis: The Trial of Sodom and Gomorrah



by Dr. Doug Ward

One of the most popular genres of fiction, in both visual and print media, is the courtroom drama. A good story of this type keeps us on the edges of our seats.

Excitement builds as the witnesses are questioned and the evidence is presented. With the jury, we try to decide whether the defendant is innocent or guilty of the charges, and, in the latter case, what the appropriate sentence should be.

Besides being entertaining, courtroom dramas can raise serious questions about justice, so they are not necessarily a waste of time. The administration of justice is an important subject; consider, for instance, the amount of space that the Bible devotes to it. From the time when the blood of Abel, the first murder victim, "cried out" to God (Gen. 4:10), justice has been a major concern for human society.

The book of Genesis, the very first book of the Bible, describes a series of events that could rightfully be termed a courtroom drama. God, the "Judge of all the earth" (Gen. 18:25), is the main character in this drama. The patriarch Abraham also plays a significant role, as does Abraham's nephew Lot. On trial are the now infamous ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

You may not have previously thought about the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah as a courtroom drama. Nonetheless, a detailed study of Gen. 18-19 carried out by biblical scholar James K. Bruckner [1] demonstrates that a "juridical" approach to the interpretation of these chapters is both appropriate and helpful. To see what insights result from such an approach, let's take a fresh look at this familiar episode from the life of Abraham.

Abraham Goes to Law School

"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers," instructs Hebrews 13:2, "for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." In this verse, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews undoubtedly had in mind the examples of Abraham and Lot recorded in Gen. 18-19.

The eighteenth chapter of Genesis begins with Abraham showing generous hospitality to three strangers who are passing through (18:1-8). These strangers turn out to be special messengers from God. They bring the message that Abraham and his wife Sarah will soon be parents of a son (18:9-15), as God had promised years earlier (15:4-5).

The strangers also have another, less pleasant, task to carry out. God decides that Abraham should be informed about it too:

"And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (18:17-19).

God had established a special relationship with Abraham. Through Abraham and his descendants, God would bless the entire human race (Gen. 12:1-3). One aspect of that blessing involved Abraham's teaching "the way of the Lord" to his family. So God intended the trial of Sodom and Gomorrah to be a learning experience for Abraham. Abraham would learn something essential about "the way of the Lord" from these events and would then pass that knowledge on to his children. As a result, his children would be equipped to "do justice and judgment."

The Hebrew phrase translated "keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment" in verse 19 can refer to general obedience to God. However, this phrase can also have a more specific technical meaning in certain biblical contexts [1, pp. 89-91]. In particular, when rulers are said to "do justice and judgment," the phrase often refers to the administration of proper legal procedures. Here are some examples:

"... because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice (1 Kings 10:9).

"And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people" (2 Sam 8:15).

"The king's strength also loveth judgment; thou dost establish equity, thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob" (Ps. 99:4).

"The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed" (Ps. 103:6).

"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth" (Jer. 23:5).

Although Abraham was not a head of state like David or Solomon, the context suggests that doing "justice and judgment" has a similar judicial connotation in Gen. 18:19. What God intends Abraham to learn from the investigation of the cities of the plain specifically involves the proper administration of justice. Indeed, notice that Abraham's discussion with God in verses 23-32 deals with questions of due process of law.

A Public Trial

God, as magistrate, begins the pre-trial proceedings with an announcement that serious charges against Sodom and Gomorrah have been filed:

"And the LORD said, 'Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know'" (Genesis 18:20-21).

Here God states that a "cry" against Sodom and Gomorrah has reached him. Bruckner explains that the Hebrew words for "cry" in verses 20-21 are "technical terms of legal complaint, requesting deliverance" [1, pp. 91-92]. He adds, "These terms are typically used to present the outcry of a maltreated marginalized individual within a community as evidence in legal cases" (p. 143). When these words are used in the Hebrew Scriptures, they often describe complaints that are directed to God as the supreme judge (Gen. 4:10; Exod. 3:7; Exod. 22:23; Isa. 19:20). In this case, the gravity of the complaint leads God to make an indictment and authorize a formal fact-finding process.

Recognizing Gen. 18-19 as a courtroom drama can help us answer a question that has puzzled many readers of Gen. 18:21: Why would an omniscient God need to "go down" to determine the truth of the charges? In considering this question, let us keep in mind that God is using the trial of Sodom and Gomorrah as a vehicle for teaching Abraham and his descendants about proper judicial procedures. So God is not carrying out his investigation because he lacks knowledge. Instead, he wants to illustrate how a trial should be conducted, for the purpose of educating Abraham and those who will come after him. As we read further, we will see that God designs the trial of Sodom and Gomorrah so that it will include these important characteristics:

- It is conducted in public.
- The verdict will be based on eyewitness testimony rather than hearsay.
- It includes the testimony of more than one eyewitness.

Bruckner points out that traditional Jewish exegesis of these verses has recognized God's role as Teacher. One midrashic source comments, "This teaches that a judge must scrupulously examine a case before pronouncing judgment" (Genesis Rabbah 49.6, quoted in [1, p.145]).

Christian tradition sees an additional detail that shows the extent of God's commitment to carry out a fair judicial process. The text of Gen. 18-19 seems to indicate that two of Abraham's special visitors are angels who go on to investigate matters in Sodom (18:22; 19:1-2), while the third one, referred to in Gen. 18:22 as "the Lord," stays behind to hear Abraham's concerns. It could be, then, that one of Abraham's visitors was a Christophany—*i.e.*, a temporary, pre-incarnate appearance in human form of the One who later became Jesus Christ[1]. If so, God may be emphasizing the importance of basing legal judgments on firsthand evidence. The New Testament states that Jesus' experiences on earth prepared him in a special way to be our Intercessor and High Priest (Hebrews. 2:18; 4:15). Similarly, the best guarantee of a fair trial for Sodom and Gomorrah would be for the judge to ascertain, through direct sensory experience, what was going on there.

Abraham for the Defense

God's public announcement of the indictment against Sodom and Gomorrah invites concerned parties to get involved in the proceedings. Abraham quickly takes advantage of this opportunity. His nephew Lot lives in Sodom, and he is apparently at least somewhat familiar with the nature of the charges, since he does not ask God what "grievous sin" has allegedly been committed. And so Abraham "came near," as Genesis 18:23 tells us. Again, the Hebrew phrase for "came near" has a technical judicial meaning [1, p. 96]. Today we would say that Abraham "approached the bench" (p. 147) as an advocate for the defense.

Abraham asks God, "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" Bruckner [1, pp. 96-98] notes that in this legal context, a better translation would be, "Will you destroy the innocent with the guilty?" Abraham, in other words, is not concerned with the question of whether anyone in Sodom and Gomorrah is sinless. Instead, he is wondering about the fate of those who are innocent of the charges in question.

In any case, Abraham is making an assumption that may strike many readers as unusual. Although nothing explicit has been said about what sentence will be imposed if the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah are found guilty, Abraham assumes that the sentence would involve the total destruction of those cities (18:24). It should also be noted that God says nothing to contradict that assumption. We will return to the question of the possible meaning of Abraham's assumption later in this article.

Abraham is concerned that the facts of the case be thoroughly investigated, and in particular, that the number of innocent people in Sodom and Gomorrah be determined. God, who must be pleased with Abraham's vigorous and persuasive advocacy, agrees that the cities will be spared if at least ten innocent people are found in them. With these pretrial discussions complete, it is time for the trial to begin.

The Trial and its Aftermath

Genesis 19 opens with two angels arriving in Sodom to gather evidence firsthand. The presence of more than one witness is consistent with the principle later codified in Deut. 19:15: “One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.”

As Bruckner observes [1, p. 150-152], Gen. 19 presents the evidence to the reader without editorial comment, as in a courtroom. Like jurors in a courtroom, we can listen to the testimony and draw our own conclusions.

First we observe the behavior of Lot, who meets the angels at the gates of the city (19:1). Like his uncle Abraham, Lot is a gracious host. He invites the travelers into his home for a meal and a good night's sleep (vv. 2-3).

However, what starts out as a quiet evening is interrupted by a riot in the streets of Sodom. An angry mob surrounds Lot's house and demands that he release his guests to them (vv. 4-5). Verse 4 emphasizes that this mob includes the entire population of the city, everyone except for those who are inside the house.

Lot then steps outside and attempts to reason with the crowd at his door. He begs them to change their minds and abandon their plan to violently assault and abuse the strangers (vv. 6-7). But the Sodomites derisively dismiss Lot's pleas. Who is he, a relative newcomer to their city, to stand in judgment of them? They mock Lot for calling their behavior “wicked” and threaten to treat him even more wickedly (v.9).

These threats of the crowd essentially constitute a confession of guilt. The whole population of the area stands in defiance of God; there are not even ten innocent men to be found. The angels immobilize the mob with blindness and pull Lot back inside the house (vv. 10-11). Sufficient evidence has been presented, and the verdict is clear. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah assert that no one has the right to judge them, but like everyone else, they are subject to the judgment of their Creator.

As Abraham had assumed, Sodom and Gomorrah were sentenced to utter destruction. The few who were innocent were given an opportunity to flee the area and escape to the nearby village of Zoar. Then the sentence was carried out (vv. 12-25).

Lessons from the Trial

As we have seen, God intended the trial of Sodom and Gomorrah to be a learning experience for Abraham and, ultimately, for the whole human race. At the conclusion of this courtroom drama, we should then consider the lessons we have learned. Here I will highlight three sets of lessons.

One set of lessons is about justice and proper legal procedure. Just legal decisions are based on direct testimony from multiple witnesses, presented at a public trial. Every effort should be made to determine the truth and avoid the possibility that the innocent are falsely convicted.

A second set of lessons is about the source and content of the law upon which just legal decisions are based.

The people of Sodom believed that “might makes right” and asserted that no one could dictate morality to them. But right and wrong are not determined by the force of a mob or by popular opinion. Instead, they come to us from the God of Abraham, the Creator and Judge of all.

The cataclysmic sentence of Sodom and Gomorrah seems to imply that God's basic principles of morality are somehow hardwired into his creation. The offense of these evil towns was so great that creation itself was affected. As the Promised Land would later “spue out” the Canaanites for their great sins (Lev. 18:28), the cities of the plain had to be incinerated in order for creation's equilibrium to be restored. When Lot's wife was turned to salt (Gen. 19:26), she was not being punished for a quick, curious backward glance; instead, she had lingered too close to the site of a cataclysm that was inevitable and unstoppable.

Finally, there are lessons about the character of God, upon which his law is based. When helpless victims cry out for justice, God hears and comes to their defense. He brings justice but does not delight in punishment. (The trial of Sodom and Gomorrah was a final opportunity for repentance as well as a model for fair legal procedure.) His desire is for us to heed his loving instruction and pass it along to future generations.

Reference:

1. James K. Bruckner, *Implied Law in the Abraham Narrative: A Literary and Theological Analysis*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 335, Sheffield Academic Press, London, 2001.

<http://graceandknowledge.faithweb.com/gen18.html>

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offer to walk with God, but it is a *lame* walk that they offer, because they still have one foot in the world and one foot in the Kingdom. They offer *blind* prayers and praise, because their minds are somewhere else even as they speak. They offer their hearts to God, but it is *sick* hearts that they offer because their apathy has caused them to fill their minds with spiritual junk food. They offer their souls to the Lord, but it is *torn* souls that they offer because they are torn between a desire for God on the one hand and a desire for the things of the world on the other hand.

“Thus ye brought an offering. Should I accept this of your hand?’ saith Yahweh” (Malachi. 1:13). The answer should be obvious. He did not want offerings that were lame, blind, sick, and torn in Malachi’s day, and He does not want offerings that are lame, blind, sick, and torn today.

What Yahweh Threatens to Do to Apathetic Worshipers

Malachi tells us what Yahweh threatens to do to apathetic worshippers. It’s not very nice, and it’s rather graphic. If any readers are offended by this imagery, please remember that this imagery is taken from the Holy Scriptures, which were penned by a holy prophet who was moved by the Holy Spirit to write these holy words. This is what the Lord threatens to do to apathetic worshippers: “Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts” (Malachi 2:3).

Half-hearted worship, caused by the leaven of apathy, stinks like dung in the nostrils of the Almighty. If your religious observance and solemn feast observance is full of it, then “it” is going to come out. Your apathy will be exposed like dung on the floor, and God will rub your nose in it and smear it all over your face. He has done it to famous big-shot televangelists, and He can do it to you.

If your soul is totally infected with the leaven of apathy, you will not be concerned about any of the warnings presented in this article. If, on the other hand, this article has helped you to wake up and start purging out the leaven of apathy, then there is hope for you. May we all continue to Purge Out the Leaven in 2008 — and in every year following, too!

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Be Wholly on the Lord’s Side

by Donald Mansell

"Decide today whom you will obey. Will it be the gods of your ancestors beyond the Euphrates or the gods of the Amorites here in this land? But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15, T.L.B.).

In the light of eternity Joshua made the right decision, though it may not have been an easy or popular one to make.

There was a newspaper story some time ago about a real estate agent who was electrocuted when he touched a high-tension wire while showing a client some property. But have you ever seen a bird perch on a power line and receive no harm? What makes the difference? Simply this: the bird is touching nothing but a single wire. Were he simultaneously to touch the ground or another, oppositely charged, wire, he too would be electrocuted.

In the internment camp where our family spent 37 months during World War II, I came to know a couple who were part Caucasian and part Filipino. This couple owned considerable real estate in Mountain Province, and they were determined to hold onto it, regardless of who won the war. They devised a plan that appeared to be foolproof-almost. Joe made it quite evident that he was pro-American; Frances, a very attractive woman, made it quite plain that her sympathies lay with the Japanese. One of the first benefits they reaped from this arrangement was Frances’ release from camp. Joe, of course, remained a prisoner.

The plan seemed to work perfectly until the tide of war turned against the Japanese, and Frances tried to change sides. A fatal hitch developed in their plan when the Japanese army was forced to evacuate Baguio, and Frances, pleading illness, tried to remain behind and take her chances with the incoming Americans. The problem was that the Japanese refused to leave her and the other collaborators behind, explaining that they would be shot if they were captured by the Americans. So, willy-nilly, Frances and her fellow collaborators were obliged to accompany the Japanese into the mountains of northern Luzon.

Exactly what happened next no one seems to know, but apparently the Japanese got wind that the collaborators were not as loyal to their cause as they had pretended to be. At any rate, all of them, including Frances, were herded into a gold mine and shot.

Being wholly on the Lord’s side pays, perhaps not always in this life, but always in the long run. Those who try to hold onto this present world, while trying to grasp the world to come, will ultimately lose both worlds. Jesus put it this way: “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

Donald Mansell, New Every Morning, page 114. Review & Herald Publishing Association. 1981.

Global Warning

by Earl Lewis

The ways of the Lord are strange at times. After choosing the title for this article, I found I was not the only one of God's children to use this play on words. Tim LaHaye has a book by that name. It was unknown to me until today. How appropriate, though, that God would reveal an end-time message to more than just one person. No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation (see 1 Peter 1:20). The Scriptures are given for the benefit of all, and in these last days we must realize that things are going to happen just as God has revealed them, and they are going to happen fast! A good thing that, for we know "except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." This refers to the last generations of this corrupted age. Some say things are as they have always been, but if you are over 40 years of age, you know that is not true.

In the Olivet prophecies found in Matthew 24, Jesus told us some of the things that would occur before His second coming. In that passage we find events getting worse and worse until the end (of this age). Surely we have seen wars abounding in this past century, with ever more deadly weapons coming upon the scene. We know of famines in Africa, India, Bangladesh, and other places; we know of pestilences, defined as any epidemic disease with a high death rate (i.e. AIDS; cancer; heart disease; influenza; and some predict a coming pandemic which will not be assuaged by antibiotics). Yet another definition of "pestilence" is a pernicious (deadly) evil influence (three such influences come quickly to mind: television, movies, and the Internet). Our children are learning the ways of the world and not the ways of God!

Jesus also said that we as Christians would be hated of all people, that we would even hate one another and betray one another. We would be led astray by false prophets who come in the name of Jesus Christ. And lastly, Jesus said that because sin would be so prevalent, some would fall away. He admonished us to endure until the end. That means walking with the Lord every day, one step after another in the right path. He who endures unto the end shall be saved! Perhaps that is the reason God sees the death of His saints as precious (Ps. 116:15). Can't you imagine the Lord's joy when one of His children falls asleep? I can almost see a "high-five" between Father and Son! "Look, Dad, he made it to the end; he never went back to his old ways; and he was still learning when he died ... Awesome!"

Of course, we can hear the scoffers now, "Where is the promise of His coming? People have been predicting Christ's return for about 2000 years. He's not here yet!" Unfortunately, modern man has persuaded himself that God did not create him, but that man created God to fill some spiritual vacuum in his soul. Everyone who believes this lie is doomed, unless they repent and acknowledge God as their Creator, and Jesus Christ as their Savior. If we acknowledge Christ in our lives, it will change us. We will repent of sin and walk in the newness of life. Sin will not drag us down into the pits. Christ gives VICTORY over sin. He does not leave us in the filth of sin. He clothes us with righteousness. And anyone who proclaims Christ and teaches that you can sin and still serve God is a liar and the truth is not in him. Will we make mistakes and occasionally fall? Yes, but we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. The apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:5 "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

Listen people, times are going to worsen, and the "woes" of this earth are going to be multiplied in strength and come rapidly upon us. It is time for each of us to understand and sound this warning. We must repent of any sin on our part and teach repentance as the only valid way to please God. If this sounds legalistic, just read Revelation 21:8: "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." Also read Matthew 7:21-23: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Sin is still sin, and the wages of sin is death as stated in Romans 6:23. By and large, people have dismissed sin as an antiquated term. Today, people practice situational ethics—what is right for me, may not be right for you (or as Ms. Clinton put it recently, "My truth may not be your truth"). This is not really a new problem, for the people before the flood knew enough to be saved, but disregarded God's laws. (Where there is no law there is no transgression of

the law ... or no sin, [see Rom. 4:15].) As surely as the flood swept the sinners away, so will the coming of Christ be swift, and the wicked shall be destroyed by the brightness of His coming.

But I digress. The Lord in His gracious love and mercy IS sounding a Global Warning for His people to come out of the confusion which He calls Babylon. He is calling us to stand fast and adhere to the truth which He has given His chosen people through His Word. Luke 10:21 states, "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight" And still, God reveals His will to the simple who walk by faith and not by sight. As one old preacher said recently, "It seems some of our highly schooled brethren have studied themselves out of the things they were once sure of."

So what are the warning signs of the end of this age? Wars, increasing in number and violence; famine, diseases without remedy; men seeking death, but not allowed to die (because of modern medical devices); great fires burning which cannot be quenched; earthquakes; volcanoes; strange weather patterns; waters unfit to drink because of pollutants; and the sun burning flesh as never before. These warnings are in no particular order, but you can find them in the book of Revelation.

Man, in his pride and self-sufficiency, takes the blame for the greenhouse effect on the earth and falsely believes that it is by his own efforts that this earth shall be renewed to its former "green grandeur." Yes, mankind has polluted the earth and exercising care over its resources is an admirable goal, but many

of the people who are behind the "green" initiatives are supporting them because they worship creation rather than the creator. We frequently hear adoration of Mother Nature, or Mother Earth. We even heard someone on a news report crediting evolution with the gift of wisdom in its selection of species.

And so, we urge all who read these words to ask themselves if they are truly walking in the path God has chosen for them or are they following the world? Those whom God has called will worship in Spirit and in Truth, and will obey the commandments of God—not to be saved, but rather because we are saved and are living in obedience to Christ. Because Jesus died to take away our sins, we are not to live any longer in them.

And finally, could this global awareness of man's mutilation of the planet be a red herring? We are sure that there will be no common government which unites the people of earth (until Christ comes), and we know that there will be no one religion which will unite Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, etc. (that just ain't happenin'!). However, the peaceful purpose of ecological brotherhood which cares not whether you are in Peking, Budapest, Moscow, or Joplin, Missouri, just may be a baby step on the way to their desired One World Government.

We respectfully urge ecological responsibility, but we are also stating plainly that Al Gore is not the one to look to in this time of trial. Lift up your heads; redemption draweth nigh! Jesus' coming is nearer than ever. Let's be ready!

Reprinted from "The Sowers' Report," January 2008, the newsletter of S.E.E.D. Missionary Aid Association. Earl Lewis is a member of the BSA board and directory of S.E.E.D. Missionary Aid Association.

In the News

Nehemiah's Wall Uncovered

I can't remember how many sermons I delivered on the Book of Nehemiah – many I'm sure. It was always one of my favorite biblical books for illustrating many spiritual lessons. Nehemiah was a wine steward cum wall-builder. In 52 intense days, he and his support crew built a wall around ancient Jerusalem. Even in those ancient times the Arabs opposed the project (Nehemiah 2:19 ff.).

Now, Nehemiah's hastily constructed wall, built under divine blessing, has been found. "The section of the 2500-year-old Nehemiah wall, located just outside the Dung Gate and the Old City walls facing the Mount of Olives was dated by pottery found dur-

ing a recent dig at the site..." (Source: *Jerusalem Post*, November 28, 2007).

Dr. Eilat Mazar says of the find, "This find opens a new chapter in the history of Jerusalem. Until now, we have never had such a wealth of finds from Nehemiah's period." Dr. Mazar is also credited with excavating much of the old City of David at the south end of Jerusalem, and with finding portions of the king's palace.

She has also found an ancient tower located on the wall at the site. The dig has been underway for about three years now and it promises to yield yet more treasures from this early period in Israel's history.

—Brian Knowles

Basketball Champs Refuse to Play on Sabbath

WorldNetDaily

League winners skip tournament, say "Experiencing Christ" better than to "Take state"

(Thursday, February 21, 2008) The mission statement for Champion Academy, a Seventh-day Adventist Church school in Colorado, is painted on the outside of the gymnasium, "Experiencing Christ in a Learning Environment." It isn't, "Take State."

So there have been virtually no serious complaints when the school's basketball team, winning the Northern Front Range League title in Class 2A basketball competition with a 13-1 record this year, again will not be participating in the Colorado High School Activities Association's state competition.

The team, the league champion for the fourth year, instead, is playing at a tournament for Seventh-day Adventist schools in Nebraska, according to a report in the Denver Post.

The academy's athletic director and basketball coach, Troy Beans, said he knew starting out the school was "academic-oriented."

"Sports aren't at the top of the list by any means," he told the newspaper.

The 101-year-old academy teaches strict adherence to the Ten Commandments, including the 4th, which is "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy." It defines the Sabbath as the traditional Jewish day from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday.

The result? No games on Friday night or Saturday.

The state association had agreed to work with the school, and allow the Cougars to continue to compete as long as their opponents were flexible on the scheduling of games.

But the members of Champion's faculty voted against moving forward.

Beans disagrees, respectfully, with that decision, as do some players.

"I think it would be a good opportunity for our team to show who we really are, and be a good ministry for our school and our religion," starting center Nathan Lorenz told the newspaper.

Michael Beans, the coach's son, is a senior guard and scores 16 points per game.

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Kenya – Historic Coalition

(Editor's Note: Many of us have been very concerned about the violence in Kenya because we know pastors, missionaries, and church members in Kenya.)

From Open Doors USA (Friday, February 29, 2008)

SANTA ANA, CA (ANS) -- After two months of intense negotiations over disputed presidential polls on December 27, politicians signed an historic power sharing agreement on Thursday, February 28.

Reuters quoted mediator Kofi Annan as saying, "We have a deal. Compromise was necessary for the survival of this country ... they kept the future of Kenya always in their sights and reached a common position for the good of the nation."

Under the agreement, a new prime minister's position will be created for Raila Odinga who has sought that role since he first helped elect Mwai Kibaki in 2002. He says that the president did not honor an agreement they had in this regard.

The peace agreement will grant cabinet positions based on each party's strength in parliament and create two deputy prime ministers' jobs – one for each side of the coalition. Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) has the largest number of seats. There are also plans to review the constitution to make an end to the nearly unchecked authority the current document offers the president.

Although the church was not left untouched by the violence, it was clear from the beginning that the crisis in Kenya was political and not religious. In one incident a church was burned with 30 people taking refuge inside. In another incident a Catholic priest was killed as he traveled alone in the Rift Valley.

Although there are some limitations on the church in the Muslim dominated northeastern areas of Kenya, the country has in general always been an example of stability. Many humanitarian efforts to East African countries in crisis have been based in Kenya. The impact that continued violence potentially had on the work of Open Doors and other NGOs in the region did cause some concern.

In his reaction to the political breakthrough, Open Doors' Field Operations Director for Sub-Saharan Africa said, "The announcement of a political breakthrough in the ongoing Kenyan power struggle came as an answer to the continued prayers of Christians worldwide. We want to acknowledge the faithfulness of God almighty and thank Him for the political breakthrough. Indeed, He is the One who has the hearts of kings and rulers in His hands. It is He who invites us in Philippians 4:6 to come to Him with our requests... 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.' "

veyed on paper. Jesus never wrote a thing that we know of (he did write something in the dirt on one occasion), but he spoke much.

Jesus' parable of the prodigal son etches a mental picture of a young man, head hung low, treading home in shame only to be welcomed by an exuberant and forgiving father ready to call for a grand celebration. Jesus could have just said "Don't waste your life, but if you do screw up, God will forgive you when you humbly repent." True, but the parable says that in a more moving and memorable fashion. I doubt much of the teaching of Jesus would be so effectively remembered if not given in these vivid and sometimes symbolic images. So too is the presentation of prophecy wrapped with its symbols that are at once startling, dramatic, unforgettable, and mysterious.

What Is Prophecy?

Prophecy forms the heart of how Yahweh has chosen to reveal His Plan. The writing of the prophets should not be ignored. Of the Bible's 31,124 verses, 8,352 contain predictive material, or 27 per cent of the whole—a major part of God's Torah for man. Even fulfilled prophecy establishes patterns of how God deals with his people. It is a factual track record of the human and divine dynamic with powerful application to our present world. Prophecy is not preserved in Holy Writ to function as an esoteric parlor game for religious experts, or religious nuts. It is part of God's communication to man and must be respectfully and carefully approached with a humble appeal to God for understanding.

Biblical prophecy is preeminently historical, revealed by God to the consciousness of the prophet, mediated through an ancient Near Eastern culture, and spoken in terms of its day and with the forms and purposes that were suited to actual on-the-ground situations. Prophecies that pertained to future ages (example: The Messianic Age) were also written and/or spoken in the same ancient forms as those prophecies that have been long since fulfilled. This means that future prophecies need to be understood in the terms of their original ancient setting, a step neglected by many expositors.

The prophet was a specially "called" person commissioned to be a "proclaimer," or "spokesman" for God. Besides the familiar prophets like Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Amos, there are others that Scripture labels prophets of God; men like Moses (who had his own prophet, his brother Aaron; see Exodus 7:1-2), David, John the Baptist and Jesus. What distinguished them was not external behavior or frenzied dervish-like acts associated with pagan prophets, but their being filled with the Spirit of God. The mouth

of the prophet is "a sharp sword." He is "a polished arrow" taken out of the quiver of God (Isaiah 49:2).

Prophecy's Purpose

God is at work in time and in the affairs of this world. He is working toward an end which is the glorious Kingdom of God. Prophecy is but a manifestation of God's hands-on dealing with his people and all nations. It can have many purposes. When Joshua spoke out in faith and foretold the miracle of the cutting off of the waters of the Jordan (Joshua 3:13), he assured his people, "Hereby you shall know that the living God is among you" (v. 10). The prediction itself contributed, as did the subsequent miracle, to magnify Joshua in the eyes of Israel (4:14) just as Yahweh had foretold it would (3:7).

Most commonly, prophecy serves to draw God's people to himself. Its purpose is expressed by God himself: "Obey my voice and I will be your God and you shall be my people; and walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you" (Jer 7:23). Prophecy is not some parallel universe to God's Grand Plan; it is part of the plan and its purpose is to effect that plan—to bring the human race into God's Image and into eternal fellowship with him. Prophecy's aim and function are to move mankind Godward whether by instruction, warning, judgment, punishment, wrath, or by those things closest to the heart of God, love, mercy and forgiveness.

The words of the prophet may be stern, sour, stinging. But behind his austerity he reflects God's love and compassion for mankind. Ezekiel sets forth what all other prophets imply: "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" (Ezekiel 18:23).

The prominent theme of prophecy is exhortation, not mere prediction. Most predictions contain dire warning given with the hope that they won't need to be fulfilled because people will heed the exhortative warning, repent and avoid punishment. Prophecies of this sort are conditional; their fulfillment is not required but is dependant upon how the recipients of the prophecy respond.

At its root, prophecy is a tender and loving communication from God to his people to encourage, to impart hope, to warn, to chastise, to appeal for repentance, and to provide guidance. Any student of prophecy has surely noticed how even the most dreadful warnings with predictions of fire-and-brimstone disaster are often followed by the most encouraging and beautiful pictures of God's forgiveness, restoration and even of his glorious Age to Come.

Frequently when people hear the word "prophecy" they think of the terrible "wrath" of God. Wrath is

real for sure, but it is a mistake to associate wrath with the nature of God. The common depiction of the God of Israel or the God of the Old Testament as a God of wrath and judgment is to misrepresent the prophetic word and distort the revelation of God. A reason that many Christians over the centuries have avoided the Old Testament is due to this misrepresentation. This error has led to a misreading of the New Testament as a revelational corrective of the Old Testament view of God; sweet and soft Jesus replaces the wrathful God of the Old Testament.

The God of the prophets is not a God of judgment and wrath, but a God of justice and righteousness. The confusion of these two—judgment and justice—is part of the problem. The reality of judgment cannot be denied, but it is momentary, transient, occasional, and situational. Wrath is the outworking of judgment which is a product of God's sense of justice. Judgment and wrath are not divine attributes; justice is. Justice as a mode of being and acting belongs to the very character of God and is experienced in all sorts of ways, including, but not limited to, judgment. Justice is equity, fairness, and righteousness as measured by God's holy and just law, itself a manifestation of God's internal nature. The world cries out for true justice, but must wait yet a little time for the righteous Judge to establish justice in the earth.

The point is sharply made in Jeremiah when the Lord says that properly to "understand and know me" is to understand and know that "I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight" (Jeremiah 9:24). These character traits of God are the identical attributes man is told to seek. They are mentioned in the great summary scriptures of Micah 6:8, Zechariah 7:9, and by Jesus in Matthew 23:23.

We must see both aspects of God's corrective judgments. The judgment against one party may be the vehicle for the justice of God to be enacted in behalf of another party, as witnessed by God's judgments upon Egypt and the release from slavery of his people; one judgment both punished and gave saving deliverance. Divine judgment, often including wrathful anger, is an effecting of divine justice and righteousness.

God's judgments teach as illustrated by Isaiah (See 26:7-10):

"My soul yearns for you at night; yea, with my spirit within I seek you longingly. For as your judgments are wrought on the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness."

The purpose of God's judgment is to teach righteousness and to draw people to himself so he can be their God and Savior. The prophet is called to intercede in behalf of the people and that intercession works precisely because it is grounded in the charac-

ter of God who is bent toward mercy and compassion, not toward anger and punishment. God's wrathful judgment is always a last resort with God, but once necessary, it is exceedingly dreadful.

The oldest and most common confession of ancient Israel comes from Moses as he beholds the Mighty Yahweh:

"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished..." (Exodus 34:6-7).

We must understand prophecy in the context of its Giver, not by notions in popular culture or denominational interpretations, but as coming forth from the very heart of God.

What is Apocalyptic?

Apocalyptic is specific type or genre of literature that became popular centuries before Christ and is the style used in the books of Daniel and Revelation. Apocalyptic means "revelation" and is not to be confused with Apocrypha which literally means, "hidden things." Apocalyptic is a style of writing and a genre of literature not easily understood by Western minds. Much of the Dead Sea Scroll literature was in apocalyptic format. The thought world is not linear as in typical Greek or Western style thinking, but Hebraic, more concerned with pictures than precision, creative scenes as in a stage production, symbols that evoke imagination, or creatures and images that can strike fear or provide reassurance. The apocalyptic form of literature was perfectly suited to both the Hebrew thought world and to the conveyance of prophetic information.

We daily deal with various modern genres of literature, and we have learned to read them discretely in their particular format. Your newspaper contains a variety of types. When you read birth and death dates with brief biographies, you know you are reading obituaries. You expect them to deliver certain facts. It is a type or genre of writing. Editorials differ from news reports; one offering opinion and the other factual reporting. Comics differ from advertisements, classified ads from headlines and legal announcements, etc.

The Bible contains a host of literary genres which must be read and understood within the typical use of that particular genre. Poetry can be powerfully theological, but must be read differently from how one would read narrative history. The Bible has a very large amount of poetry and song (Psalms is Scripture's largest book). It has narrative, dialogue, law-

suit, genealogy, proverbs, history, lament, preaching, law, etc., and of course, prophecy with apocalyptic being a particular symbol-laden subset.

All these factors should be wisely evaluated in the practice of proper biblical hermeneutics (the study of the rules and principles of interpretation: “hearing” what the ancient text is truly saying). This is just common sense, but many unskilled interpreters of prophecy ignore literary context and end up, for instance, taking things literally that are clearly symbolic. These prophecy “experts” cherry-pick verses, attach a literal meaning, conjure a scenario informed from current Internet or cable news and construct their interpretation like a kid creating something out of tinker toys. And if these (false?) prophecy purveyors add a noisy dogmatism, many souls feel led to follow them. These are the folks that end up in the “prophecy pit,” and my previous article listed but a few of the thousands of examples that could be offered.

Standard principles of interpretation apply to understanding prophecy. We must ask: To whom was the prophecy given? Why was it given? What were the circumstances? Was it conditional upon the reaction of those to whom it was addressed? How did those receiving it understand it? What is the historical evidence from prophecy to fulfillment? Has the prophecy already been fulfilled (perhaps 80% of biblical prophecy is in this category)? What part of a particular prophecy, if any, awaits a yet future fulfillment?

These are the primary steps and only after becoming clear on the answers to those questions can we move to the secondary questions: What message/lesson can we learn from the prophecy? Can the message/lesson be applied to how we live before God today? In what way? What biblical or historical evidence might allow any part of the prophecy to be applied to current or future events? How can the prophecy be understood in order to edify the church? What lessons can we learn from both fulfilled and future prophecy?

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Next Time: In Part 3 we will look at numbers and how they are used in prophecy. We will also look at the “certainty” of prophecy. For example, if God uses prophecy to tell us the future, why did he suspend his prophetic judgments in certain cases? Does the foretelling of the future mean that our free will is really an illusion? How can God prophesy events and bring them about without abridging the freedom of either men or angels? What is the prime purpose of prophecy and the two-word answer to how it all finally ends?

The Bible and the Life We’re Supposed to Live

By Brian Knowles

In our time, it’s becoming ever more difficult to know how to be an authentic, Bible-advised, Christian. Just about every aspect of the Christian faith is under attack by someone. Satan is launching broadside after broadside against the Church. As the Church continues to take hits, parts of it are crumbling.

As a Christian writer, it’s hard to know what to write about anything. Virtually every word penned is controversial to someone. For example, some will take exception to the idea I presented in the first paragraph above: that Satan is launching broadsides against the Church. Many Christians no longer believe that Satan is a literal being. To them, he is just “the personification of evil”—or a literary symbol or figure of speech.

Writing about Israel is another minefield. Hatred for Israel, or Jews, seems a near-universal phenomenon, even within parts of the Church. To write anything supportive of Israel instantly brings the anti-Semites and Israel-haters out of the woodwork.

“Fundamentalism” is under attack. Charismatic Christianity is under attack. Christian sexual morality is under attack. Christianity, the Bible, and even church buildings are under attack. The Christ (Anointed One) himself is under attack. According to Christianity Today, some 171,000 Christians per year are being murdered worldwide for their faith (2006 figures). Some estimate that as many as 70 million Christians have been martyred since the time of Christ – and most of those murders have occurred in the 20th and 21st centuries. The “spirit of antichrist” is running rampant in the earth. And you’re welcome to call me a “fundamentalist nut” for saying so. I don’t apologize for it.

Writing about Bible prophecy is, in some circles, another dead letter. Anything written on that subject is controversial. Taking the Bible literally is under attack. Not taking it literally is also under attack.

The study of the Hebrew roots of the Bible and the Church is under attack. And just about every mainstream, traditional, or fundamental Christian doctrine is under attack.

To raise one's head in print these days is to be instantly caught in a withering crossfire of contrary opinion. It's open season on Bible interpretation. Everyone's an amateur theologian these days. We all have our pet ideas and doctrines – I included.

What it all comes down to for me is this: What did Jesus teach? What did it mean in its original context? How do I appropriately apply it today? A corollary is: What did his original rabbinic students (talmidim) believe, practice and teach? If I can sort out those things, then I'll know what it means to be an authentic follower of Jesus the Anointed One. Of course I'll have to seek God's counsel on how to adapt those teachings to the issues of modern life.

Can we trust the New Testament?

The only way we're going to gain access to the teachings and practices of the original Christian community is through the New Testament. Its documents are the only significant record we have of what the first Christians believed, lived, and taught.

Of course it's true that we have no original autographs of any biblical documents. It's also true that the Catholic Church created the New Testament "canon." It's true that from the time of their writing, to the time of their final redactions, changes were made in these documents. These facts alone do not mean that we have no authentic record. We do. We can know what Jesus taught.

The late Prof. David Flusser, of Hebrew University, writes: "The early Christian accounts about Jesus are not as untrustworthy as people today often think. The first three Gospels are not only a reasonably faithful picture of Jesus as a Jew of his own time, but they even consistently retain his way of speaking about the Savior in the third person...The Jesus portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels is, therefore, the historical Jesus, not the "kerygmatic Christ," *Jesus* by David Flusser, p. 20). The "Synoptic" Gospels are Matthew, Mark and Luke. The word synoptic comes from the Greek *synoptikos* meaning "a seeing together." The first three gospels draw from common sources.

The term "kerygmatic Christ" used by Flusser is a reference to the portrait of Christ that emerges from the preaching of the early apostles as distinct from the "historical Jesus" portrayed in the Synoptics. The word "kerygmatic" comes from the Greek *kerygma* meaning "proclamation."

Put simply, when we examine the synoptic Gospels, an accurate portrait of the historical Jesus emerges. We can know what he taught, how he

lived, and his place in Second Temple Judaism simply by studying closely these documents. The other documents in the New Covenant collection fill in the blanks. John interprets the story of Jesus theologically, not historically. Acts tells us of the beginnings of the apostolic community within Judaism—the "sect of the Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5)—and of the spread of the Gospel into the gentile world. It chronicles the journeys of the Apostle Paul. Other documents in the collection are letters circulated and copied among early believers. Some of them are apostolic in origin. In some instances, we have no idea who wrote them—Hebrews being a case in point. Together, these documents constitute a reliable picture of original or "primitive" Christianity.

The challenge for exegetes (those who critically interpret and explain the meaning of Scripture) is to bring those teachings forward to our time in appropriate ways for use and application in the believing community. This can be a daunting task.

Politicizing Exegesis

Like everything else in life, the interpretation and application of Scripture is politicized. In other words,

What it all comes down to for me is this: What did Jesus teach? What did it mean in its original context? How do I appropriately apply it today?

the process is filtered through the lenses of "interests." It either is, or it is not, in the interests of denominations to interpret given passages one way or another. A good example of this is the issue of tithing.

Within Scripture, there are a finite number of passages that relate to the subject of tithing (tenting). How these are interpreted and applied depends on whether or not leaders wish their members to tithe.

Those of us who consume the output of scholars must be aware of denominational bias. Not all scholars are purely objective any more than all scientists are. For my money, the most helpful scholars who are good at popularizing their work for lay consumption are those associated with the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research in Jerusalem. A partial listing of some of their written works is found in the Hebrew Roots section of ACD Web site (see below).

At a time when all things Christian are under relentless attack by the enemy, it behooves us to remember who we are, what we believe, and above all, how Jesus expected us to live.

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

knew that someone had touched his garment and that healing power (“virtue”) had gone out of him. After finding out who it was that touched him, Jesus said to the woman, “Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague” (Mark 5:34).

Now that we have looked at these two stories of healing, it’s time to make some observations about these healings and about Jesus’ ministry at that time.

I’ll start with a question. How did Jesus know that “virtue had gone out of him?” I think I know the answer, but I’ll leave the question unanswered for the moment.

I am going to make the assertion that Jesus and Jairus knew each other for many years. Since Jesus grew up in Nazareth and Jairus was one of the rulers of the synagogue in Nazareth where Jesus had attended for many years, their mutual acquaintance, and even friendship, was likely. In fact, they were probably good friends and somewhere near the same age, with Jairus perhaps being a few years older. His only daughter was twelve years of age. Although there may have been other children, only the twelve-year-old is mentioned in the Scripture.

Although many of the Jewish leaders felt threatened by Jesus’ message and power, Jairus showed great admiration and respect for Jesus. He recognized something in Jesus that drew him to seek out the Lord in his time of great need. Whether he recognized Jesus as the Messiah, the Scripture does not say, but by his faith in Jesus we can see that, at the very least, he looked upon Jesus as a prophet of great godly power, “...there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live” (Matthew 9:18).

With Jairus familiarity had not bred contempt for Jesus. Because he had known Jesus for many years, he already knew what kind of man he was. Jairus did not allow the prejudices of the Pharisees and other scoffers to diminish his appreciation of Jesus the man and Jesus the great healer and prophet of God.

I have another question for you. How do the twelve years fit into these two stories? I’m not sure I know. Is it just a coincidence that both of these stories involve twelve years? Jairus’ daughter was twelve years of age. The woman with the flow of blood had been suffering this affliction for twelve years. Is this just a coincidence? Are there really any coincidences in the Word of God? Did the woman’s flow of blood begin at the birth of Jairus’ daughter? You who have a pre-occupation with numerology will have to answer these questions. I cannot.

In chapter 8, verses 16 and 17, Matthew tells us that Jesus’ healings and his expulsion of demons were for the purpose of fulfilling the words of the prophet Isaiah in 53:4, “He took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses.” Some may wonder why the poor woman had to wait twelve years for Jesus to heal her. She lived in the area where Jesus grew up. Could he not have healed her sooner? To understand this question, we need to look at the context of Jesus’ ministry as a whole.

From Matthew’s gospel account we see that there was a point in our Lord’s life where his ministry began. It did not start at his birth, when he was 12 years of age, or when he was 18. These were years of preparation for his ministry. God brought forth the ministries of both John the Baptist and Jesus at their proper time in history. It was at this point that the power of the kingdom of God and the power Jesus’ person as Lord and Savior came into full view of the world. In Matthew 3, starting with verse 1, John the Baptist announces the coming of the Messiah and his kingdom: “In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.’ ” (vv. 1-3).

In Matthew 4 Jesus uses John the Baptist’s words to announce the beginning of his own ministry: “‘The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned.’ From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’ ” (vv. 16, 17). At this point Jesus began to call his disciples and prepare them to carry the gospel to the entire world after his death.

So, although it may not give much comfort on a personal level to think that this woman had to wait many years for her healing, Jesus was not ready to give it, and she was not ready to seek it. It is clear from the gospels that Jesus healed those who sought him out. He did not go around healing people willy nilly in an attempt to get them to believe in him. People had to make an effort to hear his message, believe it, and accept the fact that he could indeed heal them. From the account of this woman’s healing it is clear that she believed that he could heal her. She had heard of him and believed in him.

There is something symbolic in the inclusion of these two healings appearing in the same gospel account. The flow of blood stopped because Jesus was willing to bleed and die for that woman. His blood substituted for hers. Her flow stopped because as

part of Jesus' ministry, in the end, his own blood would flow. The twelve-year-old girl was brought back to life because Jesus would die and come back to life. As he said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6). Jesus had eternal life in himself, but he first had to lay down his earthly life before he could take up his eternal life. By the healing of the woman and the healing and resurrection of the young girl, Jesus was revealing his inherent power and nature and that his kingdom was an extension of that same power to those who would believe in him.

I asked earlier how Jesus knew that "virtue had gone out of him" when the woman touched his garment. Have you been able to answer that question? I will tell you what I believe is the answer. You can decide for yourself whether you think I am right.

By saying that "virtue had gone out of him," the Scripture is not saying that Jesus was in some way diminished in power by this woman's touch. He was not being weakened like Superman in the presence of green kryptonite. Rather, he was made immediately aware of the connection between the woman's faith and his healing power. Her faith drew her to the Lord. When she touched his hem of his garment, her faith was like a charge of spiritual electricity connecting to its source.

When Jesus said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," this is taken as an academic statement. We have been taught (falsely) that even though Jesus and the kingdom of God are closely connected, they are two separate things. In our effort to draw a distinction between what we see as the future kingdom of God on earth and the earthly ministry of Christ, we have created an unnecessary separation between Jesus and his kingdom.

I see no distinction in the gospels between Jesus and his kingdom. Our Lord was the embodiment of everything we think of as the kingdom of God. God's eternal kingdom has no existence apart from him. As the apostle Paul said, "...in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9). The kingdom of God that will come to earth will be the full manifestation of everything that God and Christ are. The peace, the love, the joy, the healing, the power—the very traits of God that will create the environment in which all saved humanity will live forever—are the umbrella under which we will all live.

One of the problems with understanding what Jesus meant occurs because of the King James Version's translation of Luke 17:20, 21. The passage reads, "And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with ob-

servation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." However, if we read the same passage in the Revised Standard Version, it properly says, "... behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." The kingdom of God was in the midst of them because Jesus was in their midst. Jesus was not saying that the kingdom of God was inside the Pharisees. Rather, he was saying to them, "When you see me, you are looking at the kingdom of God."

As Jesus extends his life into each of us, we are drawn into his kingdom. Being "in Christ" means being in his kingdom. That's when we become citizens of his kingdom and foreigners on this earth. We begin to look for a better country, a place where we will live forever with Christ and the Father, a place where lions will lie down with lambs, and a little child will lead them. Our future is "in Christ," or it is not at all.

As physical, mortal human beings, we cannot yet experience the fullness of God as we will in the resurrection. As the apostle Paul says, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). The apostle John amplifies on this theme in 1 John 3:2, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is."

The story of Jairus' daughter and the healing of the woman who suffered the flow of blood show us a great deal about who Jesus was and is, and where he desires to take us. By understanding the beginning of his ministry—his preaching of repentance and the good news of his kingdom—we can understand where it all ends. It truly ends in good for us who believe and for all mankind, those who have lived and those who have yet to live. Christ's life in us shapes our thoughts and actions now, but we have yet to see the complete renewal of ourselves as well as the entire universe that exists around us. Ultimately, all things will be transformed to conform to his nature. That transformation will continue until "all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).

"If 'Thou shalt not covet' and 'Thou shalt not steal' were not commandments of Heaven, they must be made inviolable precepts in every society before it can be civilized or made free."
—John Adams

The Church in the World

Adventists told, “If you meet again you'll be imprisoned.”

By Felix Corley, Forum 18 News Service

(Azerbaijan) Neighbourhood police officer Elhan Sokhbetov, who took part in an 8 December raid on a Baku Adventist congregation's worship service, denied that it was a raid. “It was just a check-up,” he insisted to Forum 18 News Service. Asked why 13 police officers had raided the service, why eight church members had been held for five hours, insulted, threatened and fined he responded: “No-one was threatened. It was just a check-up.” Pastor Rasim Bakhshiyev told Forum 18 he was warned they would be imprisoned if they meet again for worship. “They tried to make us sign statements that we had been led astray in coming to services and that we were renouncing our faith,” he added. “This was a crude violation of the law,” another Adventist leader told Forum 18. “All our documents are in order, and they have no reason to raid the congregation or to fine our members.” No official of the State Committee for Work with Religious Organisations was available to tell Forum 18 why the service had been raided. Officials have told the Adventists they are “too busy” to receive them.

Police who raided a worship service of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the capital Baku on Saturday, 8 December told the congregation's leaders that they will be imprisoned if they meet again, Pastor Rasim Bakhshiyev told Forum 18 News Service from the city on 10 December. “They told us verbally they will check up to make sure we don't meet.” He and seven other congregation members were held for five hours at the local police station and fined. However, reached by Forum 18 on 8 December shortly after the group had been fined and released, the duty officer at the Nizami district 25th police department denied that any raid had taken place or that any Adventists had been held.

Reached again on 10 December, the duty officer at the 25th police department was also unable to explain why the Adventist congregation had been raided. “Why?” he asked Forum 18, laughing, but failed to answer the question. He referred all enquiries to the station head, but his telephone went unanswered on 10 December.

Adventist leaders in Baku told Forum 18 that they had telephoned the State Committee on 10 December to try to arrange an urgent meeting to discuss the raid, but officials told them they were “too busy” to receive them. “They said perhaps they might be free on 25 December, so we should ring them on 24 December to find out,” one Adventist told Forum 18 on 10 December. “They just want to avoid talking with us about it.” He declined to speculate whether 25 December had been chosen specially, given that this is the day Adventists in Azerbaijan celebrate Christmas.



This was a crude violation of the law,” the Adventist added. “All our documents are in order and they have no reason to raid the congregation or to fine our members.”

Bakhshiyev told Forum 18 that at 11.30 am on 8 December, some 13 police officers arrived as he was leading about 20 people in the congregation's worship service (the Adventists' holy day is Saturday). He said the group – half of whom were in uniform and half in civilian clothes – were from the 25th police department.

They surrounded us and wrote down all our names,” Bakhshiyev told Forum 18. “They insulted us, asking why we had no books about [the Muslim prophet] Muhammad and why we preach Jesus without informing them. I calmly told them that we preach Jesus Christ and that our faith commands us to be peaceable in our preaching. They said we shouldn't preach Jesus Christ.”

Bakhshiyev said the detained Adventists were taken to separate rooms, where officers tried to force them to write statements. “They tried to make us sign statements that we had been led astray in coming to services and that we were renouncing our faith,” he told Forum 18. “They accused me of receiving money from Armenia, as though we support Armenia.”

Bakhshiyev said that he was fined 16.50 Manats (106 Norwegian Kroner, 13 Euros or 20 US Dollars). The other seven Adventists were each fined 11 Manats. He said police did not explain exactly which article of the Code of Administrative Offenses they had violated. He said one of the detained Adventists had been allowed out to collect together some money and they all paid the fines. But were told receipts for the money would only be given out on 10 December. All were freed after five hours' detention.

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However, our scholarship fund, which is kept entirely separate from our operating expenses funds, is empty.

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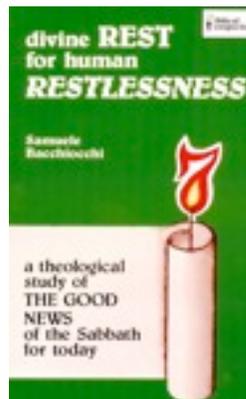
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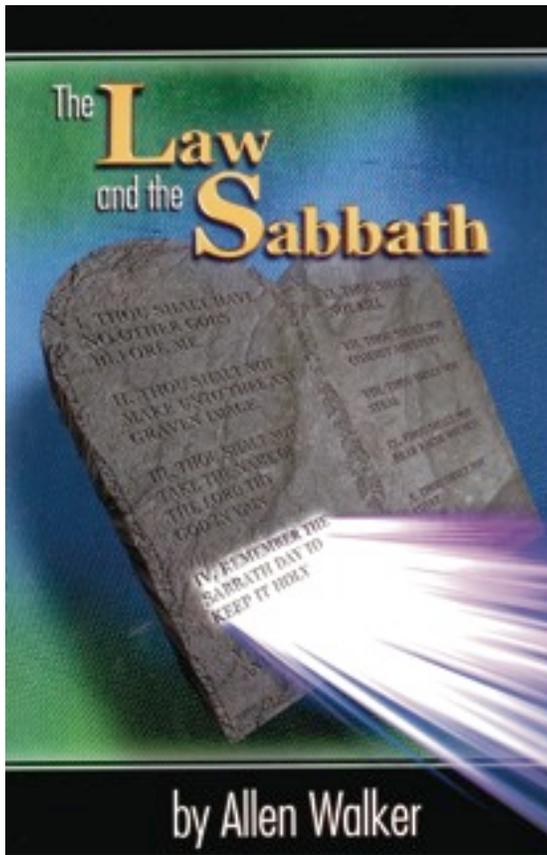
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