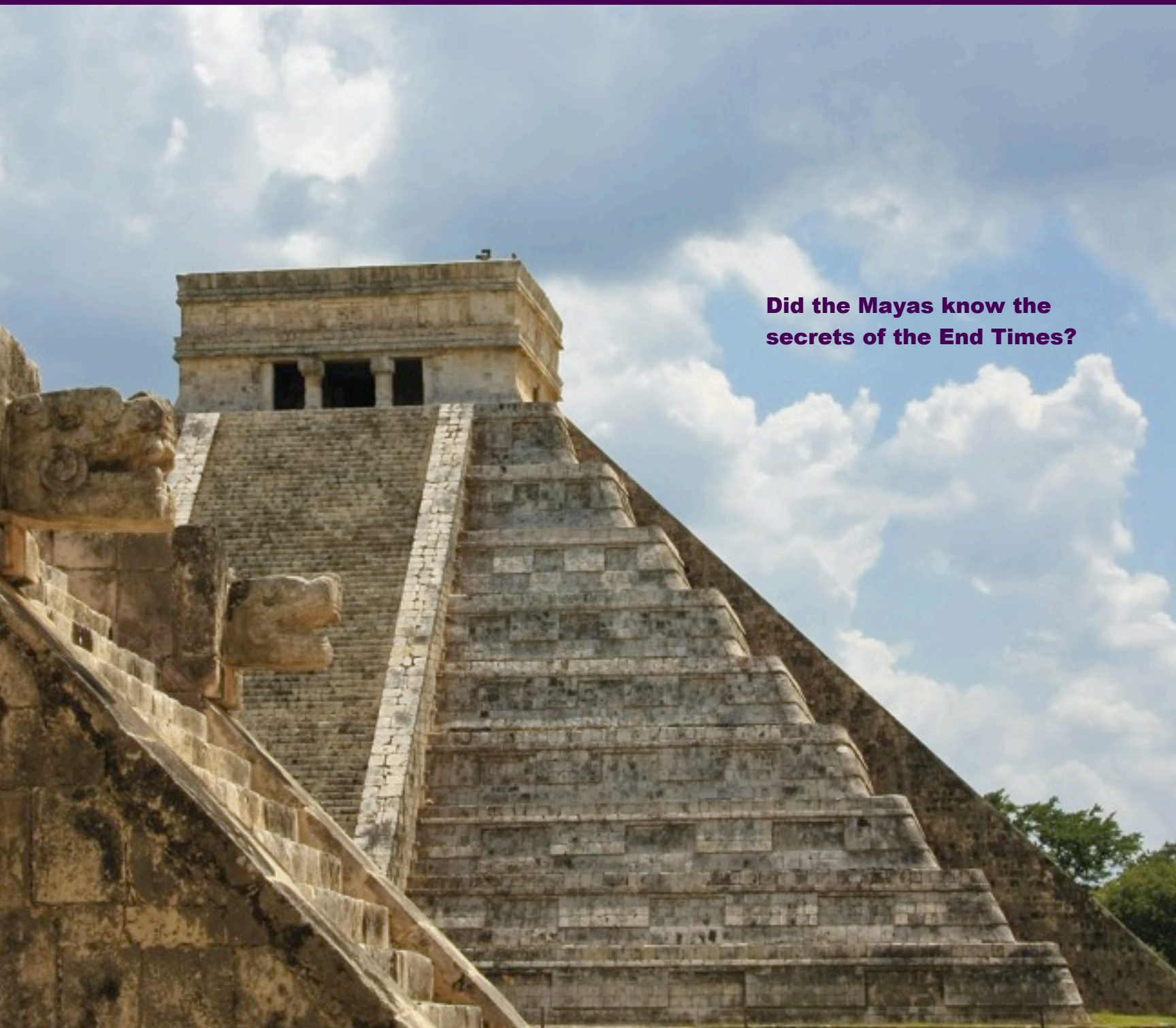


The Sabbath Sentinel

November–December 2009



Did the Mayas know the secrets of the End Times?

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

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

The Sabbath Sentinel

November–December 2009 Volume 61, No. 6 Issue 540

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Our Cover: Mayan Kukulcan pyramid and ruins under dramatic sky at Chichen Itza, Mexico. (See article on page 16.)

Photo by iStockPhoto

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Editor: Kenneth Ryland, tss_editor@mac.com.

Associate Editors: Julia Benson & Shirley Nickels

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BSA Worldwide Web Site: <http://www.biblesabbath.com>.

Correspondence and manuscript submissions: Address all inquiries to: Kenneth Ryland, c/o *The Sabbath Sentinel*, 802 N. W. 21st Ave., Battle Ground, WA 98604. Phone: (888) 687-5191, E-mail: tss_editor@mac.com.

International addresses:

Australia: Bible Sabbath Associates, Walter & Cindy Steensby, P.O. Box 4305, Hawker ACT 2614, Australia. E-mail: steensby@netspeed.com.au

Sierra Leone: The Bible Sabbath Association Sierra Leone, 326 Bai Bureh Road, Calabar, Town, P.O.BOX 289, Freetown, Sierra Leone

Philippines: Enrique M. Gabuyo, 398 Kinville Subdivision, Calamba Laguna 4027, Philippines, cogemg007@yahoo.com

Nigeria: Bassey Akpan, Nigeria BSA, P. O. Box 1277, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. E-mail: ycog1@yahoo.com

Address Service Requested

Our Mailing Address

Bible Sabbath Association
802 N.W. 21st Ave.
Battle Ground, WA 98604.

Ask for a FREE subscription to *The Sabbath Sentinel*

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God's Will

God's Way

God's Time

How many times have you thought, "I know this is God's will, but it's just not working out?" We all want to live in God's will, and each of us has some sense of what that means. But what is it that keeps God's will from working for us?

I would like to tell you there is a simple formula for making sure that we are always in the will of God, but that's the problem. It's not simple. I don't mean to say that it is complicated. It is not, but it is something that requires effort and attention to God's details.

Do you remember the story in the Bible (Exodus 2) of the time that Moses observed an Israelite being abused by an Egyptian overseer? What was Moses' response to that abuse? He looked one way and then the other to make sure that he was not being seen and then killed the Egyptian. Even though Moses knew that he was an Israelite, and had within him a heart to save his people from oppression, God was not going to allow Moses to save His people by murder.

He was raised in Pharaoh's court, but he knew his roots. Even before he met God at the burning bush, God had given him the heart of a deliverer. Moses' problem was that he could only see delivering Israel one way, by overthrowing the Egyptian oppressors. It probably crossed his mind that he could lead a rebellion against the Egyptian slave masters, but that was not the way God wanted to deal with the situation.

It took Moses 40 years in the wilderness to learn to handle the Israel's deliverance God's way. I don't mean to say that it was God's will from the beginning that Moses should spend 40 years in the wilderness learning a difficult lesson. But for the Exodus to work the way God wanted it to work, Moses needed a transformation in his thinking. The Lord's desire was not simply to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Egyptians. It was to free them in such a way as to exalt His name as the one and only true God. He needed Moses to play a role in that process. He did not need Moses to be the reason for Israel's deliverance.

God's will was to deliver Israel from the hand of the Egyptians. God's way involved exalting His name above the names of the gods of Egypt — frogs, lice, flies, and

livestock. God's time meant that he would deliver Israel according to the promise that he made to Abraham in chapter 15 of Genesis — after 400 years. It was important for Moses and all the Israelites to understand God's will, God's way, and God's time. Moses was in a hurry to get the job done according to his own schedule and in his own way, murdering an Egyptian taskmaster and possibly leading a rebellion against Israel's oppressors. Before Moses could lead Israel into the promised land, he had to understand God's will, God's way, and God's time.

As you can see from the example of Moses, one of the problems that we humans have with God's will is that we want it carried out when it's convenient for us and not when it's convenient for God.

How many times have we seen ministries start well and grow dramatically only to see them eventually fade and die away? Many people understand what God wants them to do but become too impatient to complete the task in God's way and according to His timetable. A great example of a ministry that understood God's calling and yet failed miserably is the Worldwide Church of God. In the beginning when they were small and needed God's guidance for everything, they were willing to wait upon Him to seek what He wanted them to do and how He wanted them to do it. In later years when the church became wealthy and arrogant, the leaders simply decided what they needed to do, how they needed to do it, and when it needed to be done. They thought that blessings from past obedience to God's will gave them an open invitation to conduct their business according to their own will. They did not wait on God to lead them. They assumed they already knew what God was going to say.

This presumption takes all sorts of forms. Take King Saul for example. Saul was very humble in the beginning, and God had great things planned for his life and for the nation of Israel under his direction. But as he grew accustomed to leading the people, he began to assume that he automatically knew what God wanted him to do. It was God's desire to establish Saul's line-

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The Most Undersold Superproduct of the Bible



“Do I have it together?” is a question we sometimes ask ourselves in those moments of deep, unguarded thought. Wholeness is that elusive condition of harmony between the physical and spiritual needs of life. Our body has its wants and pleasures and our soul its needs for meaning and purpose. Bringing into a natural whole the two lives we live — the temporal wants of the flesh and the transcendent needs of the soul — is rarely a spontaneous happening. Not surprisingly, the Bible offers a template to promote such an integrated, balanced wholeness to our lives.

By Kenneth Westby

What organized religion offers people and what the Bible offers are frequently quite different things. Churches market what they think people *need*, but perhaps more often, what they think people *want*. The “wants” are more attractive and easier to satisfy. Catering to people’s “wants” brings in members and grows the church—the bottom line for many religious organizations. Of course, Christian churches are full of good people with good intentions and the good they do cannot be denied. Yet, in the quest for growth and “relevance” churches advertise products that sell. They copycat the culture’s secular marketing style—with a thin spray of religion.

The Evangelical church has become big business with megachurches and ministries building empires with budgets in the tens of millions. Nothing is intrinsically evil about giant budgets, but the pressure to meet them and keep them growing means attracting more donors. Religious organizations have a product to package and sell and too often it is not a priceless gem from Scripture but a feel-good experience, soupy self-help advice, or pop wisdom with a religious flavor.

Mark Galli writes in *Christianity Today*¹ about the Evangelical dilemma, its preoccupation with sentimentality, its mimicking of cultural fads and trends. He reviews Warren Cole Smith’s book, *A lover’s Quarrel with the Evangelical Church* noting that in Smith’s chapter “The Triumph of Sentimentality,” “he shows how much many megachurches are taken with entertainment culture. He quotes one megachurch leader telling other pastors that the key to worship is ‘variety, variety, variety, variety’—because that is what unchurched people get everywhere else.

Galli continues: “In writing about what he calls ‘the Christian-industrial complex,’ Smith estimates that \$50 million a year is collected and distributed to copyright

holders of contemporary worship songs. He notes that whereas in the past, theologians and trained church musicians determined what songs would go into hymnbooks, now it’s ‘what gets played on Christian radio that gets promoted to church musicians and church leaders.’”

Churches sell their hip worship program, their friendliness, charismatic spirit, their music, children’s classes, nursery facilities, refreshments and social hour, potlucks, dynamic preachers, convenient parking, community good works, etc.—all good, but secondary to what a church should be dedicated to “sell.” Is not the purpose of the church to introduce people to the good things of God? It is the goodness of God that leads people to repentance.² Churches must become God-centered, not self-centered, and offer hungry humanity what God has furnished on his bountiful table.

The number one need for each and every human is to come to know God, to know what he is like, what he expects of us, and what he plans for us and our world. This critical core knowledge is embodied in what the Bible calls: the *Gospel of the Kingdom of God*. It’s a pity many modern churches seem woefully ignorant of that Good News (lit. *gospel*). To them “gospel” is a religious branding sticker that can be affixed to a bookstore, a band, a song, a choir, even to a video game.

The true Gospel proclaimed by both the Old and New Testaments promises to meet the temporal and eternal needs of the human family. God’s Word contains the golden keys toward fulfilling the needs and wants of the human soul. One of those keys can be described as “the most undersold superproduct of the Bible.”

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Rekindle the Flame

By Pastor David Guerrero

Speaker/Director Rekindle the Flame Ministries



As you read the first three chapters of the Bible, it is very clear that God has created us for relationship. The first relationship is with Him (divine), and then the second is the human relationship beginning with husband and wife. As evidenced in the book of beginnings (Genesis), Satan's objective from the beginning has been to destroy those relationships.

Satan's Objective

Satan's first objective is to get us to doubt God's word. As we examine Genesis, we discover that the first step in leading Eve to sever her relationship with God was to cause her to doubt and then confuse what God had said (Genesis 3:1-5). Doubting what God says confuses us and then leads to conflict in our relationship with Him and our relationship with others. I read a quote once that said, "a man at peace with God and his fellowman cannot be made miserable." While I see this to be true, I have come to learn that if we are at peace with God, then we will be a peace with our fellow man.

Our fellowship with God begins with His word (Romans 10:8-17). If we can't stand on what God says, we are then open to listening to other voices and following bad counsel. It happened to Eve, and it can happen to us today. We must remember that all of our relationships and how we carry them out must be rooted in the word of God. Examining Genesis, chapter 3, we discover that Satan worked on Eve's senses. As Eve listened (hearing) to Satan, this led her to see (eyes) that what he offered her was appealing. Eve then "took of the fruit" (touched) and ate of it (taste). The fruit must have smelled good too (remember, we are talking about the garden of Eden here).

The same is true today. Our relationship with God is damaged when we lose our spiritual senses as we fall prey to Satan's cunning and subtle devices. As we listen (hear) to advice not rooted in God's word, view (see) harmful programming/objects that damage our mind, partake (taste and touch) of ungodly activities or counsel, breathe in the aroma (smell) of wrong and, at times, sinful practices, our relationships, both human and divine, erode away leaving us empty. Emptiness is Satan's goal to get us to seek more of what he has to offer us. Often times those who are empty continue to seek bad habits in order to fill that



The Lord brings reconciliation and restoration.

Source: iStockPhoto

void in their heart. However, all that Satan has to offer us is nakedness with the only comfort being the temporary highs and eventual lows of this world's "fig leaves" (Genesis 3:7).

God Seeks to Rekindle our Flame

Thank God that the Genesis account of Adam and Eve (the fall of humanity) doesn't end there. Once Adam and Eve were lured into brokenness in their relationship with God and one another (Genesis 3:10-13), God sought to revive His relationship with them. The Bible says that God came to them; He sought them out (Genesis 3: 8). You see in the midst of our broken relationships God will seek us out and attempt to get our attention. His desire is to help us begin or renew our walk with Him.

God's Objective

God's has a plan for our relationships and that plan is reconciliation and restoration. He seeks to rekindle our flame by helping us see our need for His covering in our lives. He awakens us to our need for

Him as He walks in our direction. As we realize that our emptiness has come from our rejection of His presence and power in our lives, we are then open to receive His power to heal. The healing he offers us is the healing of our hearts and the restoring of our relationships (Genesis 3:14:21; Romans 5:1; Hebrews 8:10-12).

Our Flame Rekindled

In our relationships we CAN experience wellness, restoration, reconciliation and joy. This is what the Gospel is all about. How can this happen? The first thing we must do is **respond to God's presence**. As God comes to us (through whatever means He chooses), we must respond positively to His leading and take His advice.

The second thing you can do is to confess your sin(s). James puts it this way: **"Confess your sins to one another ... that you may be healed"** (5:16). Confessing your sin will bring healing. But you first must confess your sin to God and then one you have offended, which has resulted in a broken relationship.

The third thing you can do is pray **for those who are in relationship with you**. In the scripture texts just mentioned, James says we ought to **"pray for one another, that you may be healed."** Oh how different the outcome would have been if Eve had prayed to God when the tempter came; if Adam had prayed when Eve came to entice him to sin. Even so with us—our relationship with God and one another can have much more satisfying and rewarding outcomes if we maintain a spirit and attitude of prayer. Not only must we pray for those with whom we are in relationship. We must pray before an offense or rift takes place, but also during and after the process of restoration. Prayer and prayer alone can create and preserve reconciliation, restoration, and wellness.

Experience the Flame of the Spirit.

Jesus said that "I am come to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled" (Luke 12:49). The fire He was speaking of was the Holy Spirit's presence and power in our lives. Jesus longs to pour out His Spirit into our lives and into our relationships. It is with the Spirit's power and presence in our lives that our relationship with God, in our homes, with our families, friends, at the work place, and in our communities can reflect His love and defeat Satan's purpose of ruining humanity.

David Guerrero is a speaker and director of Rekindle the Flame Ministries. R.T.F.M holds regular retreats to help couples rebuild and strengthen their marriages. Cost is very affordable. If you would like information on retreats, call (715) 310-2196 or visit us at www.rekindletheflameministries.org.

Save Your Own Skin Religion

Early in the 20th century a gentleman who was worried about the state of things decided to study the geography of the world, find the safest place, and move there. In the end he discovered a south sea island and took residence at a little place called Guadalcanal.

I know of Christians today who, worried about the end times, have packed their belongings and are holed up somewhere out West. Others have attempted to leave the country. Many others, depending on their theological bent, eagerly await a Place of Safety or a rapture to save themselves from the wrath of the last days.

But the Bible I read tells me that God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7), and any way you cut it, the obsession with escape is a spirit of fear.

In fact, Jesus expects us to be engaged with the world around us. "I pray not that you should take them out of the world," he prayed, "but that you should keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15). Even though we are not of the world, we are still in it, and we are in the world for a reason. "You are the light of the world, a city that is set on the hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel but on a candlestick, and it gives light unto all that are in the house" (Matt. 5:15).

The world would indeed be a dark place without us. If we all disappeared into a cave with a 3½ year supply of freeze-dried food, our lights would not be shining to fill the whole room, and the world would lack the seasoning of our salt. A "save your own skin" religion deprives the world of the salt and light that we are commanded to be. Such theology is neurotic for it appeals to our worst fears rather than our fondest hopes.

Once an optimist and a pessimist sat down over a cup of coffee. The optimist pointed out that 95% of the things we worry about never happen, to which the pessimist replied, "I know. See how well it works?" Far better for us is the knowledge that fear won't add an inch to our stature.

—Lenny Cacchio (<http://morningcompanion.blogspot.com>)

Update on Guy and Jennifer Swenson's Common Ground Ministries and Camp Outreach

This past summer Guy and Jennifer Swenson's Camp Outreach sponsored a program to rehab a house in an Indianapolis neighborhood. Growing from that project has come a Sabbath morning neighborhood program. Guy posted, without much background, this update on his Facebook page:

We had 39 kids at our Sabbath time with “the neighborhood” kids. Two hours of Bible stories, cool crafts and “Moonrock” snacks. Thanks to Beth from Anna's House for her help. Add another 9 parents and adults and we had a pretty good group! We had 26 kids last time. Since our last outreach, one little girl had moved from the neighborhood - and her mom made a special trip to bring her back. Can't wait 'til next time.

Intrigued by this, I sent Guy a message asking for more background details, and he replied with this:

Hi Lenny, I don't know what to say — it is becoming a community effort. The food pantry (The Lord's Pantry at Anna's House) and families in the community have adopted us as much as we have adopted them. Beth Balazs volunteers at the Lord's Pantry and saw on Facebook that the flu had depleted our resources, so she came and brought her daughter. Eighth graders from St. Jude's parish (Catholic) volunteered at the pantry and created three big signs in English and Spanish that advertised our kid's camp and posted them at the pantry. (You can see pics of them taken by Beth on my Facebook.)

How cool is it that what we are doing is being promoted by other denominations? There are four things that seem to be bearing fruit:

1. We started by looking for existing ministries that we could help and earned a reputation for serving with them before we proposed anything ourselves. Showing



honor and respect for what others are doing was a good place for us to begin.

2. We are working in an area where we have identified real needs and taking concrete steps to meet those needs. Doing a Camp Outreach in the community really established a lot of credibility.

3. Focusing on meeting legitimate needs vs starting by preaching doctrinal distinctives is building community support. People know that we keep the Sabbath and that we went to the Feast. They also have a favorable impression of them because of the ministries we do in their community.

4. We're trying to follow the leading of God's Spirit. Following through and completing one project is opening up an opportunity to do another. It has taken time for us to rethink what our priorities are as a congregation and learn how to really connect with a community that has needs that we can meet.

We've focused on ministries that fit the gifts of people in our congregation. It is exciting to see how the community is responding to our ministries. We've chosen to leave behind the “us vs them” mentality and find ways to show honor and respect to people of different denominations. We're focusing on the common ground we share. We're also following the Natural Church Development outline for healthy congregations. It is helping us discover different ways of relating to the community and each other that work better than what I was taught. It feels like we are really at just the beginning. I don't know if this helps you, but we're having fun and learning a lot every time we minister with our friends in the neighborhood.

—Guy

Report from Lenny Cacchio

Did Television Kill Lot's Family? Is Sodom in Your Living Room?



Dusti Howell, Ph.D.

The Seeing and Hearing Box

2 Peter 2:7–8 (NKJV) "...and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)...."

Righteous Lot was tormented daily by what he saw and what he heard. Is there a device that torments righteous souls today by allowing them to see and hear unlawful deeds? Does watching and listening to television project us back into Sodom? Let's compare the fruits of television watching with the real sins of Sodom. Most assume that Sodom was destroyed because of sexual immorality. But what does the prophet Ezekiel identify as the main four iniquities of Sodom?

Ezekiel 16:49 (NKJV) "Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy."

The *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Bible Commentary* states that, "God, the heart-searcher, here specifies as Sodom's sin, not merely her notorious lusts [Ezekiel 16:50], but the secret spring of them, 'pride' flowing from 'fullness of bread,' caused by the fertility of the soil (Genesis 13:10), and producing 'idleness.'" This comment addresses the fact that it is easy to overlook the core problems that produce sin. The sexual sins of Sodom were the result of deeper problems. The *Geneva Study Bible* identifies these "four vices, pride, excess, idleness and contempt of the poor as four principal causes of such abomination, wherefore they were so horribly punished with fire and brimstone" (Genesis 19:24). Today these same four vices are emerging as byproducts of television—the box that allows viewers to see and hear lawless deeds.

I. **Pride or Arrogance** (Hebrew: *ga'own*)

The first iniquity Ezekiel lists is pride. Strong's Concordance translates this as "arrogancy." Is arrogance a problem in America today? Psychologist Jean Twenge (2006) completed the largest intergenerational study ever conducted, with data from 1.3 million respondents



Source: Dreamstime.com

spanning six decades. Professor Twenge found many differences between the generations over the last 60-year period. The title of her book, *Generation Me* is the label that emerged as the dominant indicator for the most current generation in her survey, those born in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Her research found that this recent generation is the most self-focused generation that has been studied to date. Pride in the form of self-reliance and confidence are dominant traits of young people today who are focused on themselves. Interestingly, this generation is also the first media saturated generation that has never known what it is like to live without television.

2. Excess, Fullness or Satiety of Food (Hebrew: *sib'ah*)

The fact that Sodom was abundantly fruitful is evident by Lot's observation that the area was "well watered, like the garden of the LORD" (Genesis 13:10). This blessing of abundance was abused. The second iniquity that Ezekiel attributed to Sodom was more than just having a little too much to eat. Strong's translates the Hebrew *sib'ah* as "satiety" which Merriam-Webster (m-w.com) defines as disgust caused by over-indulgence or being fed beyond capacity. The *New International Version* (NIV) translates this word as overfed. Basically, the people were getting fat off of the food of Sodom.

A similar problem is emerging in America today. Results from the 2003-2004 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), using measured heights and weights, indicated that an estimated 66 percent of U.S. adults are either overweight or obese (2006, April). That means that two-thirds of Americans fit into the category of being overfed. This has not always been a problem in America. What has changed to make this a problem now? A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that protracted television watching is a major contributor to obesity. This study revealed a relationship between television watching, physical activity, and body composition. Children who watched four or more hours of television per day had greater body fat than those who watched less than 2 hours per day (Andersen, Crespo, Bartlett, Cheskin, & Pratt, 1998). This study supported an earlier study that found a significant relationship between television watching and the prevalence of obesity in children (Dietz & Gortmaker, 1985). Jeffrey P. Koplan, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says "obesity is an epidemic and should be taken as seriously as any infectious disease epidemic. Obesity and overweight are linked to the nation's number one killer, heart disease, as well as diabetes and other chronic conditions" (1999, October 26).

3. Idleness, Laziness or having nothing meaningful to do with one's time (Hebrew: *shaqat*)

Abundance of idleness sounds like another way to say "couch potato." The third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES III) released in 1995 found 4.7 million children between the ages of 6-17 to be severely overweight—more than twice the rate during the 1960's. The main culprits were found to be inactivity, due to an average of over 22 hours of television viewing a week, and a high-calorie diet. Research published in the October 27, 1999, issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) show that a major contributor to obesity, physical inactivity, has not changed substantially between 1991 and 1998 (1999, October 26).

Tennessee researchers discovered that a child watching television expends even less energy than a child doing nothing at all (Klesges, R.C. *et al.*, 1993)! They found this by measuring energy expenditure by the children while they were lying down in a dark room and comparing that with energy expenditure while they were sitting up watching television. Children had much lower metabolic rates while watching television than they did while doing nothing at all. The Tennessee researchers suggested "Apparently, about all TV-watching kids do is lie there and get fat." Dr. William Dietz, an obesity expert at Tufts University School of Medicine says, "The easiest way to reduce inactivity is to turn off the TV set. Almost anything else uses more energy than watching TV" (Witmer, n.d.).

4. Contempt for those in need (Hebrew: *chazaq*)

"Neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy" is the fourth iniquity of Sodom. *Strong's Concordance* adds that the verb used here refers to a causative strengthening or a more active process of serving. In other words, those in Sodom didn't go out and cure, help, repair, and fortify the hand of the afflicted and needy. How does television impact our ability to serve those in need? Researchers at Berkeley (Dong, L., *et al.*, 2004) found that of all the activities Americans spend time doing, only sleep, driving a car and working took up more time than watching television and movies. In fact, in this nationwide study, it was found that Americans spend the vast majority of their leisure time watching television and movies. For children, after sleep, no other activity takes up more time than watching television (Postman, 1985). From age two until a child enters kindergarten, perhaps the most formative years of a child's life, American children will have spent more time watching television than they will later spend in class in four years of college. It also means that during the schooling years, from kindergarten through twelfth grade, students will spend more time in front of the television than they will spend in the classroom.

A recent headline from a research report—*Nielsen Media Research Reports Television's Popularity Is Still Growing*—reveals that the amount of television American's watch is growing (2006, September 21). In their review, Nielsen Media Research reported that average American television viewing continued to increase in spite of growing competition from new media platforms and devices such as video iPods, cell phones and streaming video. In fact, traditional in-home television viewing grew among both technology-savvy teenagers and children between two and eleven-years-old. Nielsen reported that during the 2005–2006 television year the average amount of television watched by each individual increased to four hours and 35 minutes per day!

While Americans spend this time watching television, it is conversely retarding their ability to interact socially. Social skills of children atrophy when they watch television instead of playing. An experiment carried out by researchers at the University of New Orleans measured the social skills of 128 first graders and then interviewed them to determine the amount of time each child spent watching television every day. After controlling for a range of other variables (including sleep, time spent with peers and family, parents' educational levels, etc.), the number one determinant of successful social skills was how little television the child watched (Kelemen, 2001). The bottom line of this is that Americans spend the vast amount of their free time passively watching television and not actively helping the poor and needy.

Broadcasting Globally

As we have seen, pride is as prevalent in our society today as television. Television has been found as a cause of obesity, which is certainly fullness of food. Television watching requires less energy than doing nothing at all which is an abundance of idleness. Finally, all this time spent in front of the television is impeding our ability and desire to actively help and serve the poor and needy. These revelations may lead us to a number of additional questions. Could television be Satan's greatest invention? As prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2), is Satan only broadcasting his way of life on a spiritual level or does he also transmit his attitudes to us through media? Does Television give Satan a tool to resurrect Sodom on a global level?

Over a decade ago, my wife and I traveled to Tibet, a remote region controlled by China. In our hotel room, we were surprised to find that the popular American television show "Baywatch" was available. At the time, we were living in Beijing, China, where this show was not allowed on broadcast television by the Chinese government. The hotel manager at our hotel informed us that the signal for this television show was being broadcast from the neighboring country of Nepal. More recently, in July of 2008, I traveled by bus in the mountains of central Laos. Laos is a communist country between China and Thailand that only recently opened its doors to western tourists. Traveling there is said to be like traveling back in time to Thailand 50 years ago. As I passed through small hill tribe villages, it was refreshing to see landscapes and scenery from a previous era. However, I was soon startled by the large number of satellite dishes and television antennas peppered in the hillside villages along the highway. In less than one hour I counted over 200 satellite dishes. What is surprising is that most of the hour was spent driving up and down the uninhabited areas of these mountains. Laos is a very poor agrarian country where the per capita income is measured in hundreds of dollars. Hill tribe people in the mountains of Laos make less money than the national average income, but somehow they are able to afford satellite television.



Source: Dreamstime.com

One indicator that television is having a global impact is that the *World Health Organization* (WHO) has found that obesity has reached epidemic proportions globally, with more than 1 billion adults overweight and at least 300 million of these people clinically obese. WHO states that this is a major contributor to the global burden of chronic disease and disability. Additionally, they've found that the obesity epidemic is not restricted to industrialized societies; this increase is often faster in developing countries than in the developed world (Obesity and overweight, n.d.).

But Wait, There's More

After more than a half century of research, it can clearly be stated that television has not had a positive impact in improving lives. But it goes much deeper than the simple fact that watching television makes us feel more passive, bored, irritable, sad and lonely (McKibben, 1993). There are other negative affects. Research shows that television causes violence. The American Academy Of Pediatrics, the Surgeon General, the Centers for Disease Control, American Medical Association, American Psychological Association and the National Institute of Health all conclude that there is a cause and effect relationship between violence on the screen and violence with kids (American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Public Education, 2001). For example, Professor Brandon Centerwall (1993) discovered that a decade after television arrives in a city, the homicide rate doubles and the rates of aggravated assault and rape increase dramatically. Violence on the screen has a dramatic impact on children, but these same children don't commit these types of adult crimes until they are much older. Therefore, it takes ten years for the impact of television to be fully felt in a community.

Studies also show that television makes you less intelligent. After assessing a million sixth and twelfth grade students, the California Department of Education found that there was a direct correlation between the amount

of television watched and test scores. California officials found that the more television students watched, the lower their scores were in each of the 3 R's (reading, writing and arithmetic). The results were so surprising that they ran the study again four years later and found that the results were the same. Even a half hour of television watching a day had a negative impact (California Assessment Program, 1980 and 1984).

Choosing where you pitch your tent

How much television do you watch everyday? Do you feel this is time well spent? Is television improving your life or is it robbing you of valuable time? Does it add value to your relationship with God or do some of your days end with a quick prayer to God from under the covers while you're dozing off to sleep? Does television improve your ability to love your neighbor as yourself or does it thwart much of the communication and interaction you could be having with your neighbor? Are you "making the best use of your time because the times are evil"? (Ephesians 5:16, ISV).

Lot chose (Genesis 13:11-13) to live in an environment that tormented his righteous soul because of what he saw and heard. At first Lot and his family pitched their tents near Sodom. A little later in the story we find Lot living in Sodom (Genesis 14:12). The end results of these choices proved to be disastrous for Lot's family who chose not to flee to safety (Genesis 19:14, 26). Today, television is playing a similar role by bringing the fruits of Sodom into our homes on a hourly basis. Where are you pitching your tent? What environment are you living in? Is television putting your family back into Sodom? Is Sodom in your living room?

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After graduating from Ambassador College (BA, 1987), Dusti earned a Ph.D. major in Educational Communications and Technology and a Ph.D. minor in Educational Psychology from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Currently, he is an Associate Professor of Instructional Design and Technology at Emporia State University in Kansas. Last year, while on sabbatical in northern Thailand, he taught Bible, study skills, and technology classes to hill-tribe students at Legacy Institute (a Sabbatarian school). Dusti is also a BSA board member.

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Editorial: "God's Will..." cont. from page 3.

age on the throne of Israel forever. As the Bible says in 1 Samuel 13:13, "...For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever." Saul's great sin was to presume that he already knew what God wanted him to do before he received any instructions from God. Because of his presumptuousness, Saul was rejected by God and his lineage did not continue in Israel. Rather, the lineage of King David sat upon the throne throughout the history of Israel and Judah in place of the descendants of Saul.

One of the things that becomes apparent in reading the accounts of God's people in the Bible is that very often the will of God does not get done. The will of God is an opportunity to perform a deed on God's behalf. As we saw in the case of King Saul, it was the will of God for Saul's descendants to rule Israel throughout history. But because of King Saul's impatience with God and his presumptuousness, God's will did not prevail. How many times in our own lives are we aware of what God wants us to do and simply too impatient to wait upon God to show us how and when to do it?

I remember a time when God's will worked out perfectly for me and my wife. Many years ago we lived in Denver, Colorado. There was a job opening in Wichita, Kansas, at an airplane manufacturing company that suited my background perfectly. I applied for the job and was immediately accepted. My wife and I then drove to Wichita, Kansas, to find a place to live. Within just a few days we found a place that we could afford and that was within an acceptable driving distance from my new job. We packed up and moved from Denver, Colorado, and everything went off like clockwork. This was one of those times in my life where it was God's will, God's plan, and God's time. Things worked out so quickly in the Wichita area that it seems like a blur in retrospect. God knew where he wanted us and what he wanted us to do. All we had to do was hang on and let God take us on a ride to our new destination.

There have been other times in my life when I knew what God wanted and tried to force the issue according to my own timetable. Try as I might, those times never worked out. However, when I backed off and allowed God to set things in place and put them in motion, His will eventually worked itself out — according to His timetable.

So, what is the moral of the story? When you know something is good and right and needs to be done, be patient enough to let God show you how it is to be done and when to do it. Patience is the hard part. Knowing God's will is often the easiest part.

—Kenneth Ryland

The Secret of Prevailing Prayer

by Donald Mansell

What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. Mark 11:24.

Would you like to have all your prayers answered? Our verse declares that this is possible. If so, why are they not all answered? The explanation is that true faith asks only that which is in harmony with God's will. Presumption, Satan's counterfeit of faith, asks "with wrong motives" (James 4:3, N.A.S.B.).

But is it possible so to conform our will to the divine will that God can answer our every prayer? Indeed it is, and here is an example of one who proved it.

George Muller, of Bristol, England, the founder of orphanages, declared in an interview near the close of his long life: "For nearly seventy years every need in connection with His [God's] work has been supplied No man can ever say I asked him for a penny All has come in answer to believing prayer."

What was Muller's secret of prevailing prayer? He tells us:

"I seek at the beginning to get my heart into such a state that it has no will of its own in regard to a given matter.... Having done this, I do not leave the result to feeling or simple impression. If I do so, I make myself liable to great delusions I seek the will of the Spirit of God through, or in connection with, the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone without the Word, I lay myself open to great delusions also. If the Holy Ghost guides us at all, He will do it according to the Scriptures, and never contrary to them

"Next, I take into account providential circumstances. These often plainly indicate God's will in connection with His Word and Spirit.... I ask God in prayer to reveal His will to me aright.... Thus, through prayer to God, the study of the Word, and reflection, I come to a deliberate judgment according to the best of my ability and knowledge; and if my mind is thus at peace, and continues so after two or three more petitions, I proceed accordingly.

"In trivial matters, and in transactions involving important issues, I have found this method always effective." "How I Ascertain the Will of God," quoted in *Bible Readings for the Home*, p. 430.

When we learn to die to self, our opinions, preferences, tastes, and will, when we die to the world, its approval or censure, and to the approval or censure of friends, and seek God's approval and His alone, we shall experience the same prevailing power in our prayers as George Muller had.

Donald Mansell, New Every Morning, page 355. Review & Herald Publishing Ass'n. 1981.

Undersold and Ignored

God has given humanity a gift that will help bring its needs and wants into harmony with its spiritual destiny. The gift? The undersold superproduct of the Bible: the Sabbath. I can hear some saying, "Are you kidding?" No, I'm stone sober serious. Follow along as we see how the Sabbath is the God-ordained practice ground for living a holy life, for integrating the physical and spiritual into a healthy wholeness.

Can we agree that Yahweh, the Creator God of mankind, thoroughly knows the human psyche? Is he not aware that we humans need to bring harmony between the two lives we live, the temporal wants of the body and the transcendent needs of the soul?

Yahweh knows how we are glued together—he did the gluing! He knows that without a ritualized, established routine there is always a reason for the tangible immediate demands of life to take precedence over the more abstract—yet critically important—spiritual cravings of the human spirit. We easily get so busy, too busy, with living to ask why we are we living at all; to ask if we are living the right kind of life; to ask and find the answer to the core and essential question: what is the purpose of life?

Knowing what our psyche needs to survive and thrive, God gave us a gift and he was the first to show personally how it works by resting on the seventh day of creation. Later, when he created a nation he put the Sabbath into his Ten Commandments, that transcendental law code for human behavior.

I borrowed the title for this article from a line in Gerald L. Schroeder's fine book *The Hidden Face of God*. Schroeder is a distinguished physicist (PhD from MIT) and biblical scholar who now does research and teaching in Israel. He wrote:

The Sabbath is the Bible's gift to all humanity; the crown of the six days of creation. It is the undersold superproduct of the Bible. It ritualizes contemplation, fits it into a timely rhythm, superimposing its cycle onto the other cycles that nature has imprinted through light and dark, satiation and hunger, phases of the moon.³

A Time to Cease...Stop!

Readers of this magazine know that the word Sabbath comes from the Hebrew *shabat*, meaning to rest, to cease from one's normal creative work. Its essence is rest: "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done" (Genesis 2:2-3).

This is the Bible's first mention of the Sabbath. At this beginning point it is all about Yahweh's actions on the seventh day: He rested, He blessed it, and He made it holy. God's son, Jesus, later said that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.⁴ Rabbis have long taught that it's not a matter of man "keeping the Sabbath." Rather, it's about the "Sabbath keeping man in harmony with himself and God."

In our time this gift of God is virtually ignored, and the Sabbath may be the least respected of all the Ten Commandments. Our culture is hell-bent on erasing the slightest hint of a Sabbath rest, or Sunday rest, at the end of a week of work. Weekends are full of shopping, sports, and whatever other activities we can be squeeze in. Our culture and our individual psyches are paying the price of continual kinetic activity, of our loss of rest, our loss of spiritual nourishment. Our souls cry out for a break, for a refreshing rest, for some greater meaning to this race of life.

The Sabbath idea in its ideal is stopping to rest for an entire day together as a family, attending a church or having a home Bible study, relaxing at meals made the more joyful by the accompanying conversations and laughter of family and friends. It is a thoughtful basking in the glow of God's goodness and appreciation for the life he has given us. It is the time to take the pack off, sit down, kick up your feet, put your head back and savor the blessings you have. It is the time to lay the worries aside and focus on that lovely wife of yours, or a child or grandchild, or a best friend—give your attention to enjoying the company of another precious child of God. It is a time for leisurely strolls through the big oaks of a city park or along a lakeside or in your backyard flower garden. The Sabbath is also the place for private quiet time to pray and read and to engage in that most important activity, spiritual reflection.

Spiritual reflection may, in fact, be the rarest of thought activities. If thought of as an essential nutrient for a healthy body, say vitamin C or iron, its lack would cause disease and lead to death. Likewise, our spiritual life must be nourished with spiritual thought. By "spiritual reflection" I would include reflecting on God and pondering questions such as: Who is he? What he is like? What are his plans for me and my world? Am I in close relationship with him? What does he expect from me? How am I maturing as a whole person? Am I developing into the image of God's character?

Spiritual reflection is something that, like a mirror, tells you honestly how you look. Are you a kind and loving person? What kind and loving things did you do for another person this past week? Asking such questions of the self and offering truthful answers is a type of spiritual reflection. The process is done, as it were, in the presence of Yahweh, your loving father. Before him

you are safe and free to be unguarded in your thoughts and nakedly honest. Discuss your life with God with a transparency you might not dare share with another. God welcomes your thoughts, your thanks, your praise, your complaints, your pleas for help, and your song of joy.

Spiritual reflection can be the most candid and truthful assessment of yourself, your relationship with others, and most importantly, with God. Purity and truth are the pith of Yahweh's holy nature, and spiritual reflection is purposeful in aiming toward becoming holy as he is holy.⁵ Amid the dry hot sand of daily routines the Sabbath looms as a spiritual oasis to bring needed refreshment and strength to continue the journey Godward.

Practice Time

The Sabbath is the day to practice. Practice what? Practice being "holy." Most of us don't find it too difficult being "holy" in church. We are on good behavior, listen to the sermon, follow along in our Bibles, sing praise songs, smile a lot, greet our fellow parishioners warmly, volunteer to help out with serving duties, note the names of those requesting prayer, etc. But the purposes of true theology extend beyond this good and pious behavior in a church building. Dr. Schroeder explains,

The inherent aim is to bring the holy, the metaphysical, into the daily life of the marketplace. Bringing the spiritual into the tasks of the work week takes practice. Religion provides that practice. It's the pumping iron that gives us the spiritual strength to make theology a part of our mindset. The Sabbath is the day of practice. It's Eden, the message of which is that humankind was created for pleasure. The Sabbath returns to us a taste of Eden and helps us spread it through the entire week.

The absence of work introduces a formalized time for family intimacy on all levels. Not by chance, the structure of the Sabbath makes it the most physical and the most spiritual of days. A receptive spirit requires a happy body. Spirituality can't be weighed, but our emotions tell us there is an aspect to life that transcends the physical.⁶

Jews have traditionally been proud of their Sabbath habit and looked forward to it as the most pleasurable day of their week. There was fun, feasting, Torah study and discussion, lots of singing and laughter with family and friends all around. In fact, some Christians like Saint Augustine scolded Jews for missing the point of the Sabbath since they were having too good a time and generally kicking up their heels. He said they "observe their Sabbath by a kind of bodily rest, languid and luxurious. They abstain from labor and give them-

selves up to trifles...; it is better to plough than to dance." The Greek biographer Plutarch, a pagan priest, condemned the Jews in a similar vein for loosening up with a few drinks on their Sabbath.⁷ Well, Augustine was a sour puss, and his Sunday "Sabbath" was to become for much of history a rather austere day not known for its joy. We should not follow that pattern.

On the Sabbath—because of ritual, routine, rules, habit or whatever—we bring the physical needs of the body and the metaphysical needs of the spirit into proximity. Physically we need rest, food, drink, and yes, pleasure, which is best provided by loving family and good friends. The human psyche also has profound spiritual needs which often remain unmet. Even after satisfying our physical needs, we feel there is still something missing. There is an emptiness in the "soul" crying for nourishment. We seek significance, meaning, relevance and a place where we truly belong in the big picture of life. We seek purpose in living. The Sabbath opens space to consider what that purpose might be.

The Sabbath is a practice field to integrate the physical and spiritual in a working harmony, a natural organic union of the whole person as God designed us. Its weekly drill can be a template for the remainder of the week. Spirituality and holy living are not to be confined to church or Sabbath, they must become part of how we live and work every waking hour of life.

The Sabbath operates like a feedback loop. Our current choices are influenced or skewed in large measure by how we chose in the past. How we thought in part determines how we think. It takes time to form new habits of thought and action, but once formed, those mindsets dictate future thoughts and actions. Practicing the pleasurable integration of the physical and spiritual on the Sabbath can begin a growth cycle that permeates every day.

One may say, I want my cake but don't want to make it, bake it, or buy it. I want to be a more loving person but haven't had (i.e. *taken*) the time to work at it. I could have read that the Bible insists I can and must learn to love my neighbor as myself (Lev. 19:18). But then, sorry, I didn't have time last weekend, or last week for that matter, or last year to tell the truth, to do any real Bible reading. God could then ask me, "Why don't you rest on the seventh day and celebrate it with me. You would then have the time to do some reading in Leviticus, or Psalms, or Romans. You want to grow into a more loving person. Here, let me show you how." That's an offer I shouldn't refuse.

Growth requires nourishment. If you want to grow to be a more loving person, begin with spiritual reflection. Then feed the desire to grow with *knowledge and practice*. Dr. Schroeder offers some examples of practice beginning with the specifics listed in the passage in Leviticus (knowledge):

Don't take vengeance and don't bear a grudge. In daily terms, don't keep accounts of what your spouse did or did not do. If you want some poison for marital bliss, remember each time your partner was late or forgot your birthday or didn't compliment you on your new garment. That's keeping accounts. Acting on those accounts is vengeance. The Bible's suggestion is to define love as focusing on the virtues while acknowledging the shortcomings. Identify your loved one with those virtues. At the end of a tough day, consider that it may have been tough for your spouse too. Just before you walk in the door review why you married in the first place. Your spouse is the same person, but now with the additional demands of family life attached, not all of which are filled with fun. Cut through and see beyond that baggage. A happy spouse is a happy house. Do it just for the totally selfish reward of having a happier life. Forget the spirituality altogether. That will come naturally, from the bottom up.⁸

Love is a decision that can become a habit and internalized into part of your spiritual character. That takes time, effort, and thought—spiritual reflection such as Schroeder illustrated above. Once internalized, love will not be a surface show, but will flow out from within the depths of your heart. God will direct you and assist you in that process. These are the sorts of things the weekly Sabbath provides the sweet space to learn, to ponder, to practice, and to live.

What a Super Product!

There is something mysterious about the Sabbath, something that cries out for discovery. The Sabbath is the first item that the Bible declares holy, holy in the biblical sense of being separate from everything else (see my article on "The First Holy Thing," *Sabbath Sentinel*, Nov-Dec 1999). The Sabbath is not a place, not a person, but totally abstract, intangible time. It has qualities of Eden, Israel's walk with Yahweh, and visions of the world to come.

The great prophet and poet Isaiah quotes Yahweh describing the faithful who properly understand and respect the Sabbath by calling it an "exquisite delight" (lit. Heb.). He promises that "you will find your joy" in Yahweh. God will cause those who regard the Sabbath as an exquisite delight and Yahweh's day honorable to ride on the heights of the land and feast on the inheritance of father Jacob (Isaiah 58:13-14).

Isaiah contrasts the Sabbath with the phony fasts that religious hypocrites exercised for their own manipulative purposes—to exploit people and obligate heaven. God was not against fasting *per se*, but the hollow denial ritual as practiced was opposite to what God wants from people. The Sabbath is not a fast but a feast day. Isaiah counters the negativism by setting the

sincere Sabbath feast over against the motives behind the contrived fast described in the first part of chapter 58.

God is more interested in enjoyment of his blessings through obedience than in self-imposed deprivations. (The Essene sect of Jesus' day were so fastidious about ritual purity they taught followers not to defecate on the Sabbath.⁹ Joy, apparently, was not their consideration.) The heart of true religion is to conform to what God has ordained, not to ignore his ordinances, and certainly not to invent inferior substitutes.

In his fine commentary on Isaiah, scholar Alex Motyer writes,

In a word, the Sabbath calls for careful, thoughtful living. It is not a day for *doing as you please*, because it is *my holy day*, the Lord's holy day and 'worthy to be honored' (honorable). Neither, however, is it a burden because truly understood, it is an "exquisite delight." It is a day, therefore, for reverential, thoughtful use coupled with sweet joy....A true use of the Sabbath brings delight in the Lord himself....The Lord's ordinances, truly used, are means of grace, avenues to the Lord himself.¹⁰

The Creator's gift of a day of rest, reflection and joy is marvelous thing. It should be in everyone's life. Perhaps it really is the most undersold superproduct in the Bible, and that's a shame.

The Sabbath is truly a *Superproduct*—the sure proof of which is in the using. Try it; you'll like it. Please use as directed.

End Notes

1. *Christianity Today* magazine, October, 2009, p. 65
2. Romans 2:4
3. Schroeder, Gerald L., *The Hidden Face of God (Science Reveals the Ultimate Truth)*, Touchstone by Simon & Schuster, 2001, p. 181
4. Mark 2:27
5. Lev 19:2, Mt 5:48, 1Pe 1:16
6. Schroeder, p. 182
7. Klinghoffer, David, *Shattered Tablets (Why We Ignore the Ten Commandments at Our Peril)*, Doubleday, 2007, p. 87
8. Schroeder, p. 183
9. Wylen, Stephen M., *The Jews in the Time of Jesus*, Paulist Press, 1996, p. 88
10. Motyer, J. Alec, *The Prophecy of Isaiah (An Introduction & Commentary)*, IVP, 1993, p. 483

Ken Westby is the founder and director of The Association for Christian Development (ACD) and is a director emeritus of the BSA. The ACD Web site is located at www.godward.org.

2012: Is the End Written in Stone?

by Ed Dickerson

Many people today expect a global disaster to occur in the year 2012. Should you be concerned?

In December 2012, at the winter solstice, when the sun and the earth precisely align with the galactic equator, the Mayan Long Count calendar will come to an end. Its beginning points back to a time five centuries before the pyramids, 1,500 years before the Exodus. The midpoint came around the time Daniel spent a night in the lions' den. Two full millennia have passed since the birth of Christ, and still the long count continues. But now, according to this calendar, the end of this world cycle is in sight.

You may wonder what difference it makes. After all, aren't the Mayas long gone? Actually, although the Mayan civilization came to an end long before Columbus's first voyage, the Maya as a people still exist in Central America. I discovered this personally some years ago, when as a young man, I bargained with an Indian woman over the price of some woolen capes at a marketplace in Chichicastenango, Guatemala. As we haggled, I slowly realized that her Spanish was no better than my own few words. Later I learned that she spoke Quiche (KEE-chay), one of the Mayan dialects that still live in the mountains of Central America.

A few weeks later, walking through the vast complex of Mayan buildings at Copan, Honduras, I found it impossible not to be impressed with the achievements of this people who lived so long ago. I also understood why some people would credit them with prophetic insight. The magnificent structures, including temples, were vast man-made mountains of stone aligned precisely with the movements of the sun. There was a "ball court" with its stone goal ring, where victory and defeat determined who would be sacrificed to the gods and who would live. I saw stelae, their rectangular columns taller than a man, intricately carved with images of great leaders and covered with numbers representing dates.

Always dates. The Mayas were obsessed with time.

What we know

The Mayan civilization emerged around 500 B.C., and it dominated Mesoamerica for centuries. Yet nearly everything we know about them came to light during the last century.

The Mayas kept records on tree bark, which they formed into books by folding the leaves accordion-style. But their great cities were abandoned, their civilization replaced by the Aztecs and others before the arrival of the Spanish.

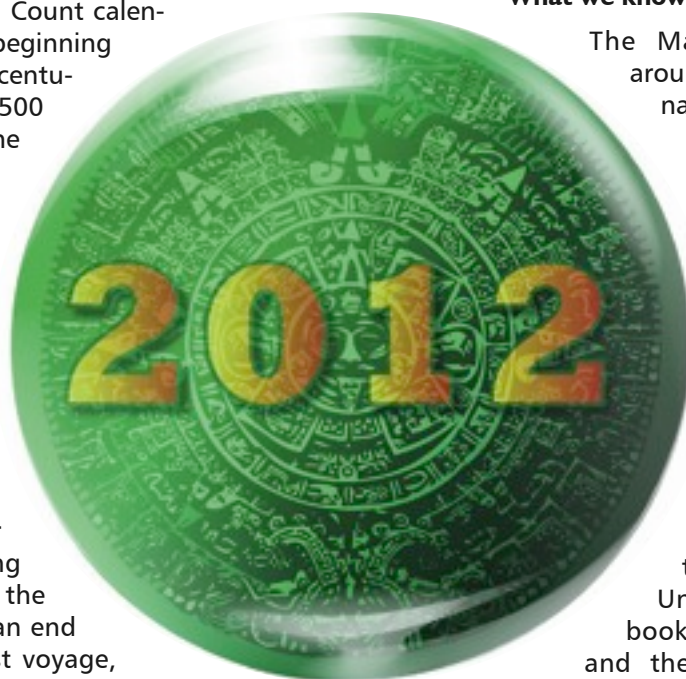
Unfortunately, most of their books were destroyed by Cortez and the priests that accompanied him during the Spanish conquest in A.D.

1519. Only four of these ancient Mayan books are known to exist today. With the books gone, most of the remaining evidence of their civilization exists in stone carvings lost in the jungles of Mesoamerica. It wasn't until the twentieth century that explorers for the Wrigley Company, seeking sources of *chicle* for chewing gum, stumbled upon the remnants of the Mayan civilization overgrown by rainforests.

Lacking the knowledge contained in the lost books, archaeologists faced the task of reconstructing the history and culture of the Mayas based on the stone carvings in these ruins. Unfortunately, many of these structures had been defaced by time and nature, and some had even crumbled and been scattered. It took time to piece together these carvings, discover their meaning, and assemble a picture of the ancient Mayan culture. But then, the Maya people would have appreciated that.

Mayas and time

The Mayas saw time as an ever-changing river, not of water, but of energy, ebbing and flowing, full of cross-



currents and eddies, making a sort of music as it flowed along. Their weeks, which consisted of thirteen days, were known as “tones.” For the Mayas, dates designated both a point in time and the “energy signature” of the universe at any one point in time.

Their fascination with time led them to devise at least 17 calendars, many of them far more accurate even than the Gregorian calendar we use today. Viewing time as a river of energy, the Mayas considered their calendars to be prophetic, describing the energy state of the universe past, present, and future. And they took a long view—a very long view.

The Mayan sacred calendar, called the *Tzolkin*, consisted of the 26,000- year cycle of the Pleiades that was then condensed into 260 days.

The 260-day *Tzolkin* used 13 numbers or “tones” and 20 “glyphs,” which represented various things in the real world. Children were named after the tone and glyph of their birth, such as “1 Monkey,” or “12 Storm.” The Mayas believed that the day of a person’s birth was the day he “stepped into the River of Time,” and it described who he was and defined his relationship to the universe.

This sacred calendar is still being used for divination by the traditional Mayas all over the Yucatan, Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras.

The Long Count calendar. But the calendar exciting all the interest these days is the Mayan Long Count calendar. Twenty days in this calendar made a *uinal*, the Maya equivalent of a month. Eighteen *uinals* made a *tun*, the Mayan civil year of 360 days. Twenty years made a *katun*, and 20 *katuns* made up a *baktun*. After 13 *baktuns*—5,200 years—the numbers reset. At that time, in the Mayan view, the level of energy changed and the world with it. And while the tones and glyphs repeat, the Mayas believed they did so at a higher energy level each time.

This would be similar to the musical notes on a piano. Starting at middle C and progressing up the scale, every eighth white key is another C an octave higher, vibrating exactly twice as fast as the previous C. On the Mayan Long Count calendar, every *baktun* is a new octave.

The Long Count calendar began its cycles, its first *baktun*, in the year 3114 B.C., so the energy has been building up for a very long time. According to Maya belief, at the end of the thirteenth *baktun*, this cycle of the world’s history will come to an end, and the discharge of that accumulated energy will occur at the winter solstice, on or about December 21, 2012.

What does it mean?

You’ve no doubt heard about the year 2012, when cataclysmic and apocalyptic events are predicted to



The extent of the Empire of the Mayas

occur, possibly precipitating the end of the world. Numerous books have been written about 2012, and Hollywood has produced a science fiction film called *2012: We Were Warned* that’s set for release in early November this year. It depicts global disaster on a massive scale. And it’s all based on the Mayan Long Count calendar.

Surely the sophistication and complexity of Mayan mathematics—they were the first to discover and use the digit zero—make their predictions difficult to ignore. And, for all our differences from the Mayas, we moderns share a fascination with the future and a desire to control events, or, failing that, at least to foresee them.

What the Bible says

How does all this relate to the Bible’s prediction of the end? Actually, there are some similarities. The Old Testament book of Joel, using imagery the Mayas would have recognized, warns of “wonders in the heavens / and on the earth, / blood and fire and billows of smoke. / The sun will be turned to darkness / and the moon to blood” (Joel 2:30, 31).

Jesus declared that at the end of the world, “ ‘There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. ... Signs in the sun, moon and stars’ ” (Luke 21:11, 25).

Nor will all of these miraculous signs originate with God. Paul warned the Thessalonians that “the work of Satan [will be] displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders” (2 Thessalonians 2:9). And Revelation depicts a false prophet who is empowered to perform “great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men.... [In order to deceive] the inhabitants of the earth” (Revelation 13:13, 14).

Will all of this take place at the end of the Long Count calendar? Certainly, we would all like to know. The twelve disciples asked Jesus directly, "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). In His reply, Jesus warned, "Watch out that no one deceives you" (verse 4). Then, after describing a series of events close to the end, Jesus declared, "When you see all these things, you know that [My return] is near, right at the door" (verse 33). Many Bible students agree that we live in the times described by Jesus; that His return is indeed "near, right at the door."

But what about December 21, 2012? Jesus also cautioned us that "no one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (verse 36). "Therefore keep watch," He said, "because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.... You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (verses 42, 44).

Notice that Jesus said neither we nor even the angels in heaven know when He will return. So if the angels do not know the time, then neither did the ancient Mayan priests and astrologers who devised the Long Count calendar. The Long Count calendar of the Mayas—with its precise calculation of

the positions of heavenly bodies over a span of more than 5,000 years—is a remarkable human achievement, but it is not prophetic. The Mayas demonstrated great knowledge about mathematics, but God "determines the number of the stars / and calls them each by name" (Psalm 147:4). The Mayas may have observed the Pleiades and based a calendar on their movements, but God "is the Maker of the Bear and Orion, / the Pleiades and the constellations" (Job 9:9).

Will the world as we know it end? Certainly! Will it end on December 12, 2012, as some believe the Long Count calendar predicts? Probably not. It is God who set the planets and stars on their courses. He determines their movements; they do not determine His. But the Bible is clear: we know that His coming is "near, even at the door," and that "in just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay" (Hebrews 10:37).

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2012 WE WERE WARNED ABOUT WHAT?

On December 21, 2012, the Mesoamerican Long Count calendar, a 5,125-year cycle calendar system designed by the Mayas, will come to an end. When something ends (even something as innocent as an ancient calendar), people seem to think up the most extreme possibilities for the end of civilization as we know it. A brief scan of the Internet will pull up some of the more popular ways some people think—with little logical thought—that humanity will evolve or be wiped off the face of the planet.

Author John Major Jenkins proposes that the earth, the sun, and the center of the galaxy will come together in an extremely rare cosmic alignment, with the foot of the "Dark Rift," a band of black dust clouds that the Mayas called "Xibalba Be," or the "Black Road." Jenkins believes this marks the precise center of the Milky Way Galaxy, and when the alignment takes place, it will result in a profound spiritual shift for humanity.

Barbara Marx Hubbard, writer and president of the Foundation for Conscious Evolution, believes 2012 will see an "accelerating pace of evolution" and that by altering our DNA, we may literally transform into a new species.

The Timewave Zero theory of the late Terence McKenna proposes that on December 21, 2012, "novelty" will reach its maximum, and anything and everything imaginable will happen simultaneously. Other theories include that the earth's magnetic field will reverse — north switching poles with south; extraterrestrials will officially show up to bring peace to Earth; huge volcanos will erupt, filling the atmosphere with ash, blotting out the sun, and plunging Earth into a 15,000-year winter; and even that earth will collide with a planet called Nibiru—which astronomers deny exists.

What You Don't Know About Job Loss

Here's what job fairs and career counselors forget to tell you.

by Sherri Langton

December 1988: my last full month of employment at a large downtown Denver bank. A layoff wiped scores of employees' names off the bank's payroll, and mine was one of them. But I had a plan: Update my résumé, land some interviews, and find a job I *really* wanted. Prepared to hit the streets and find work, I hummed the tune "I'm living by faith and feel no alarm."

But in time I *did* feel alarm — and other things besides, like discouragement, loneliness, and depression. No wonder: Severance pay and unemployment checks covered my bills but weren't replenished by a paycheck. Businesses ready to hire turned me away or didn't return my calls.

I berated myself. Faith alone should get me through this job famine, right? I should be stronger, sure of God's goodness to deliver. But some days I wondered if He cared or even knew what was going on.

That was twenty years ago. Today from my desk at the Bible Advocate Press, I look back on that time and thank God for His deliverance to this place of "rich fulfillment" (Psalm 66:12). And my heart goes out to the millions of unemployed in the fire and water of deep recession.

So does Gary Hansen's. Last December Gary started "Inspired Calling," a career coaching organization that helps people in job transition. Based on his personal and professional experience, Gary teaches what those in layoff have learned but aren't hearing: that a job loss is more than tightening the budget and churning out résumés; it means dealing with emotional, spiritual, and relational complexities as well.

Emotional workout

First, the discouragement, loneliness, and depression I felt are just a few of many negative reactions to a layoff. None of them signal an absence of faith; rather, they reflect what it means to be human, to be "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). Many people spend significant time cycling through shock, denial, anger, and blame after a layoff. This is because losing a job is an immense change. It ranks third on the grief



Photo: iStockPhoto

scale, behind the death of a family member and divorce.

Gary learned this firsthand. This time last year he served as human resources director and chief of staff at a large Christian ministry. A change in leadership handed Gary his own pink slip last September. Fourteen years of fulfilling work abruptly ended, and Gary found himself spinning in a whirlpool of unfamiliar emotions. "For a few days, I was in shock and denial. *Is this really happening to me?* Once I realized that, yeah, the decision's been made and everyone's moving on, then blame and anger set in. *Did I do something wrong? Did somebody else?*"

Fear and insecurity also rank as major emotions in job loss. They start us on the treadmill of "What ifs?" Every day we run through an exhausting routine: "What if we lose the car or house? What if we have to cash in our IRA? What if we spend all our savings?"

The longer the time without work, the harder the emotional workout. And the more other areas of our lives are affected, like sleep, eating, health — even relationship with God.

Questioning God

Questioning the Almighty in times of loss is as old as Job. Who wouldn't wonder about a God who had once provided everything and then, in one breath, blew it all away? His silence to our prayers for work only adds to the pain of the pink slip. Job voiced what many feel:

Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat! ... Look, I go forward, but

He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; when He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him; when He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him (23:3, 8, 9).

Indeed, at times this is a God beyond figuring out. But even in the midst of frustration, Job challenged his own doubt:

But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold (v. 10).

God always knows the way of His people. He engineered Israel's escape from Egypt. In fact, Gary suggests that when you think layoff, think Red Sea. While God may seem removed, He is invisibly overseeing your passage to the other side. Trusting Him in job loss, then, isn't a sprint to the far shore but a grueling, tedious walk of faith.

Gary feels those in job loss need to be reminded of this sweeping Old Testament event. He's even made it part of Inspired Calling's curriculum, based on Robert J. Morgan's thin volume *The Red Sea Rules* (Thomas Nelson). The book's premise: The God who led you in will lead you out.

Not admitting to such emotional and spiritual struggles in job loss risks greater problems in other areas. Gary explains, "I know people who have said, 'Oh, I'm fine, I'm fine. I'm just moving on. Losing my job is no big deal.' But those emotions tend to creep back into your thinking at very unpredictable times. When people have lost a job and have anger they haven't dealt with, it can creep back into their marriage and into stressful situations with their kids. They tend to overreact."

Strength in numbers

How, then, can an unemployed person work through these issues? Not by himself, Gary says. While God is our "very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1), He also uses fellow believers for support. "Two are better than one," the teacher writes in Ecclesiastes 4:9 — not just for a greater return of labor but also for survival through tough times:

If they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up (v. 10).

A jobless person may need to take the first step by telling others what he's going through. "It's very uncomfortable to tell somebody you just lost your job," Gary admits. "But if you can start talking about it with your close friends or family, then the sting goes away a little and you can get past the whole self-esteem issue. You can begin to talk about help."

That help, Gary feels, comes through deeper connections: prayer partners. "Start with people you know

and trust; ask them to start praying for you," Gary suggests. "Ask them to call you once or twice a week to see how you're doing, and tell them how you're feeling. [Doing this] promotes healing. It's like putting salve on the wound."

Going it alone in a layoff isn't just unhealthy; it's dangerous. Gary believes that isolation after a layoff is "the Devil's playground." You can combat his lies by fixing your thoughts on what is true, honorable, and right (Philippians 4:8). "Satan lives in a world of half-truth," Gary explains. "He's going to tell you just enough so you'll think about what he's planting in your mind, but he's twisted it for his own purpose to cause a negative result in your thinking.

"[Satan's half-truths] could be something about your wife and her attitude toward you or about a job you applied for. Maybe it's a job that would involve moving, and Satan will plant lies about whether it would be a good idea to move or not, when it might be a wise move for your career."

Prayer partners are the weapons to help you combat these half-truths. Gary says, "When you bring prayer partners into your life, you can tell them about what your thought life has been. You say, 'I'm feeling awfully discouraged. I just don't feel like I've got a lot of skills or I'm too old or I'm overweight' — a hundred different things. Your friends can challenge those lies and help turn your thoughts from negative things to the blessings God is giving you, and remind you of the positive things you can do with your life."

Changeless God

Much about job loss has changed since my out-of-work days in 1989. Looking for employment is mostly high tech now. Sites like LinkedIn help put your best foot forward to recruiters. Even Twitter may soon be harnessed by those looking for work. Other impacts of joblessness — emotional, spiritual, and relational — have not changed and never will.

Neither will God. No matter how deep the recession or how high the unemployment rate, He retains His power and plan (Ephesians 3:20; Jeremiah 29:11). He still watches over His people, guiding them toward deliverance in His time and way. (See "How the Church Can Help" on the following page.)

Reprinted from the *Bible Advocate*, the July–August 2009 edition, page 8 (<http://cog7.org/BA/>).

How the Church Can Help

Gary Hansen feels that the local church is the best place to assist those going through job loss. Inspired Calling's six-hour sessions, in fact, are presented at churches. Also, Gary and one of his team members, Al Hodges, have started support groups for the unemployed in their local congregations. Once a week they meet for prayer, review *The Red Sea Rules*, and work on skills-building. Since mid-December, six people in Gary's group have found jobs. Contact Gary at Inspired Calling (www.inspiredcalling.com) for ideas on what you can do in your church.

Besides this, Gary urges the unemployed to network with those in their congregations who may know of job openings. If they lack technological skills in setting up profiles on the business site "LinkedIn," they can seek those in their congregations who do know and can help.

— Sherri Langton

The Other Victims

Jenny Hanahan offers these insights on job loss from a spouse's point of view:

"People tend to forget that the supporting spouse doesn't go off to the Bahamas while the other goes through a layoff. It's just as much, if not more, stress on the supporting spouse who isn't looked at by others as having sacrificed anything. The supporting spouse has to keep the other's spirits up as well. The loss of income to the family is a loss to everyone and turns all their lives and credit upside down. That is a sacrifice of both husband and wife, or of the whole family.

"Don't treat the supporting spouse and the family as though they are observers of the loss. They are participants.

"When two people love and respect each other, what affects one, affects the other. If a family is involved, others need to understand that the whole bunch is experiencing loss and stress."

— Sherri Langton

George Washington's 1789 Thanksgiving Proclamation

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

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

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

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



The Church in the World

Iranian Judge Charges Converts with Apostasy and Propagation of Christian Faith

By Dan Wooding
Founder of ASSIST Ministries

Friday, October 9, 2009

Tehran, Iran (ANS) — International Christian Concern (ICC) says that it has learned that on October 7 an Iranian judge charged Christians, Maryam Rustampoor, 27, and Marzieh Amirizadeh, 30, with “crimes” of apostasy and propagation of the Christian faith. They could face life imprisonment if convicted of apostasy.

Elam ministries told ICC that Maryam and Marzieh were unexpectedly taken to appear before the court on Wednesday morning.

“In a positive development, their case has now been transferred from the revolutionary court to the regular courts after the judge dropped the earlier charge of anti-state activities. Maryam, Marzieh and their lawyer are pleased with this development,” said an ICC spokesperson.

Maryam and Marzieh were detained on March 5, 2009. The Iranian officials accused them of “anti-state activities” following their conversion from Islam to Christianity. During their appearance before the revolutionary court on August 9, they told the court that they would not recant their faith in Christ.

ICC stated that Iranian officials sent Maryam and Marzieh to the infamous Evin prison where they have endured mistreatment, including solitary confinement and deprivation of medical attention. Both of them are in poor health. On October 4, Maryam suffered severe food poisoning and was given medical attention after much insistence.

In an interview with the Voice of America Persian News Network, Maryam and Marzieh’s lawyer said, “My clients are not prepared to lie about their faith under any condition.”

ICC’s Regional Manager for Africa and the Middle East, Jonathan Racho, said, “We welcome the move by the Iranian court to drop the charges of anti-state activities against Maryam and Marzieh. We urge Iranian officials to drop charges of apostasy and propagation



Maryam Rustampoor and Marzieh Amirizadeh

of Christianity, as well. As party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Iran has an obligation to respect the right of Maryam and Marzieh to follow the religion of their choice.”

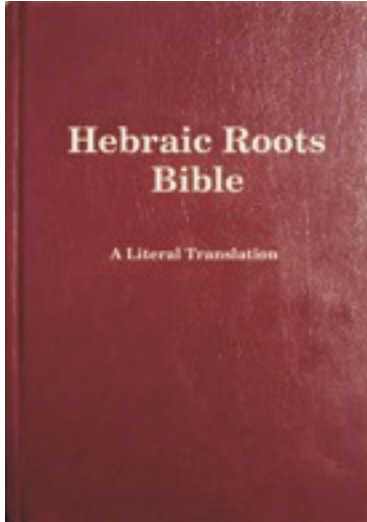
“Please continue to pray for the release of Maryam and Marzieh. Also pray for improvement of their health,” said the ICC spokesperson.

Note: ICC is a Washington-DC based human rights organization that exists to help persecuted Christians worldwide. ICC provides Awareness, Advocacy, and Assistance to the worldwide persecuted Church. For additional information or for an interview, contact ICC at 800-422-5441 or go to their website which is www.persecution.org.

Dan Wooding, 68, is an award winning British journalist now living in Southern California with his wife Norma, to whom he has been married for 46 years. He is the founder and international director of ASSIST (Aid to Special Saints in Strategic Times) and the ASSIST News Service (ANS—www.assistnews.net). He was, for ten years, a commentator, on the UPI Radio Network in Washington, DC., and now hosts the weekly “Front Page Radio” show on KWVE in Southern California and which is also carried on the Calvary Radio Network throughout the United States.

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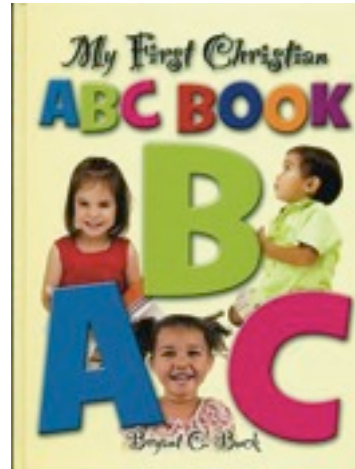


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by Carlyle B. Haynes

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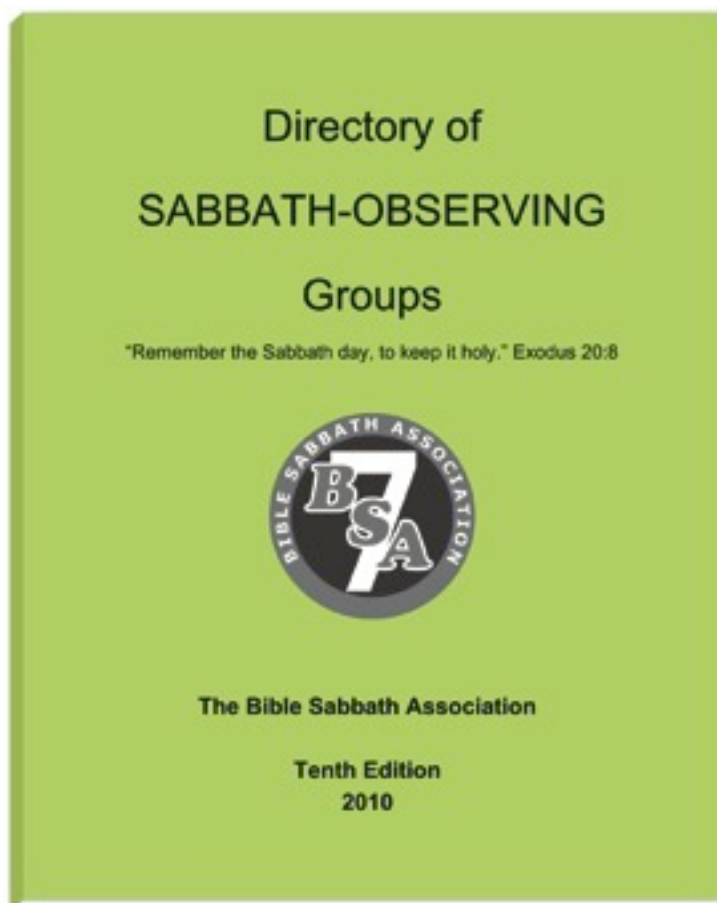
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