

# GENESIS 38: TABLOID SLEAZE OR PROPHETIC FORESHADOW?

Daniel Botkin

In Genesis 37 we read about Joseph's being sold into slavery by his ten jealous brothers. Then we come to chapter 38, which reads like a soap opera. Judah, the brother who suggested selling Joseph, takes a pagan Canaanite to be his wife and has three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah. When Er is old enough to marry, he weds a girl named Tamar. God slays Er because he is "wicked in the sight of the Lord." Tamar is given to the second son, Onan, who is expected to "raise up seed" to carry on the line of his childless deceased brother. Onan does not like the idea of raising up seed in his brother's name, so he spills his seed on the ground during intercourse with Tamar, and thus becomes the first person in recorded history to practice onanism, the form of birth control which now bears his name. Onan's action displeases the Lord, so the Lord kills him, too. At this point Judah is afraid to give his third son, Shelah, to Tamar. Judah suspects this woman is bad luck, so he tells her to go home and wait til Shelah is older.

Shelah grows to adulthood, but Judah does not give him to Tamar as he promised, so Tamar, still childless, takes things into her own hands. She covers her face and dresses like a prostitute and sits in a public place. Judah, not realizing who she is, happens to be the first man to proposition her. They agree on a price for sex, and Judah gives her his signet, bracelets, and staff to keep as collateral until he pays her.

When Judah tries to send the payment so he can retrieve his collateral, no one can find this harlot. Three months later, news reaches Judah that his daughter-in-law Tamar "hath played the harlot" and is "with child by whoredom." Judah orders Tamar to be brought forth and publicly burned to death. When Tamar is brought forth, she produces Judah's signet, bracelets, and staff, and announces, "By the man whose these are am I with child." Judah confesses, saying, "She hath been more righteous than I; because I gave her not Shelah my son." Six months later Tamar gives birth to twins, Pharez and Zerah. Thus ends chapter 38.

This is one of those Bible stories usually omitted from children's Sunday school lessons. At least I don't remember ever hearing the story as a child in Sunday school - and I doubt that I would have

11729 B.C.	<b>CANAAN ENQUIRER</b>	2 SHEKELS
<b>MAN DISCOVERS THAT HARLOT HE IMPREGNATED IS HIS OWN DAUGHTER-IN-LAW!</b>		
<i>INSIDERS REVEAL DETAILS OF SHOCKING SCANDAL</i>		
	JUDAH: "How was I supposed to know?"	
	TAMAR: "If he had given me Shelah, like he promised...."	
	SHELAH: "After what happened to my brothers, I think she's a jinx!"	
ER'S ERROR page 8	YOSEF BEN-YAKOV Still missing, presumed dead	
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forgotten anything this racy. As a matter of fact, I do not recall ever hearing a sermon on this chapter as an adult, either. Most preachers apparently don't think the story of Judah and Tamar is suitable material for a public sermon, I guess. However, this story is recorded in the Holy Scriptures in all its unholy, lurid detail for a purpose.

Why is this story in the Bible? To entertain us with tabloid sleaze? The New Testament tells us that the events recorded in the Scriptures are "written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4) and are to serve as "examples" or "types" to instruct us (1 Cor. 10:11). The Apostle Paul's view of Biblical events as types and allegories and foreshadows is in accord with rabbinic thinking. The events in the lives of the fathers, the rabbis state, foreshadow the events in the lives of their descendants. The lives of the Patriarchs give a brief preview of the history of the nation which descended from them.

With this thought in mind, what significant events and developments in Jewish history can we see forecasted in the story of Judah and Tamar, the father and mother of the Jewish people?

The first thing we need to observe is the location of this story in the Biblical narrative. In chapter 37, Joseph is sold into slavery; chapter 38 tells of Judah and

Tamar; chapter 39 then picks up the story of Joseph again. At first glance, chapter 38 seems to be out of place and irrelevant to the story of Joseph. The Scofield Reference Bible even gives this chapter the heading "Parenthesis: the shame of Judah," and the story does seem to be a rather insignificant "parenthesis" in the story of Joseph. However, the Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Lord does not need a course in creative writing to help Him improve the organization of His manuscripts. The story of Judah and Tamar is in the context of the story of Joseph for a reason.

Many students of Scripture have seen Judah's betrayal of his brother Joseph as an obvious prophetic picture of First Century Judaism's rejection and sale of Yeshua into the hands of the Gentiles, which results in Yeshua's being exalted among the Gentiles even as Joseph was, and eventually revealing Himself to His brothers and forgiving them, as Joseph did. If we want to understand how Judah's actions in Genesis 38 fit into the "Joseph equals Yeshua" allegory, we simply need to look at the things Judah did, and then ask some questions:

What theological developments began to take place in First Century Judaism immediately after Yeshua was "sold into the hands of the Gentiles"? When we look at Judah's actions, can we see any spiritual parallels in the development of Judaism? How are Judah's actions (and the results of his actions) prophetic of what evolved out of the womb of First Century Judaism?

The first thing Judah did was to join himself to a pagan woman. Has Judaism joined itself spiritually to paganism in any way? Yes, it has. The Talmud contains numerous references to the use of magical arts - amulets, incantations, charms, etc. The Talmud also teaches many vain superstitions which are obviously of pagan origin. (See A. Cohen's *Everyman's Talmud*, pg. 251-297.) Some forms of Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah) make use of astrology and other "New Age" philosophies. Without the Messiah, First Century Judaism evolved into a less-than-100%-kosher religious system.

But historic Christianity has fared no better. Christianity without the Torah likewise joined itself to paganism. The Church adopted many, many pagan

customs, and evolved into a less-than-kosher religious system. (See A. Hislop's *Two Babylons* or R. Woodrow's *Babylon Mystery Religion* for details.)

As Judaism without the Messiah developed into a less-than-kosher religious system, so Christianity without the Torah developed into a less-than-kosher religious system. In their present forms, both non-Messianic Judaism and Torah-less Christianity are hybrid, illegitimate religions. Christianity and Judaism both grew out of First Century Judaism after Yeshua was rejected by Israel's leaders and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles. These two religious systems, Judaism and Christianity, grew and developed side by side, like twin sons, both coming out of the womb of First Century Judaism.

This brings us back to the story of Judah. After Joseph had been sold into the hands of the Gentiles, Judah brought two bastard sons into the world, twin sons from a single womb. After Yeshua was sold into the hands of the Gentiles, First Century Judaism brought two illegitimate religious systems into the world, twin religions that grew and developed side by side and came from a single womb.

The good news is that God can use someone or something illegitimate for His purpose and glory. Judah's twin sons, Pharez and Zerah, are mentioned in the genealogy of the Messiah on the first page of the New Testament.

God has used Judaism (even though it is illegitimate and incomplete without the Messiah) to preserve the Torah, the Sabbath, and the Biblical calendar. God has used Christianity (even though it is illegitimate and incomplete without the Torah) to preserve the testimony of Yeshua as the Messiah. This is why Satan hates Jews and Christians. And Satan especially hates Jews who believe in following the Messiah Yeshua and Christians who believe in practicing the Torah: "And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Yeshua" (Rev. 12:17).

The Devil makes war against those who are the greatest threat to him. A zealous Jew, even without the knowledge of the Messiah, is a threat to Satan, as is a zealous Christian, even without the knowledge of the Torah. But a zealous Christian with the knowledge of the Torah or a zealous Jew with the knowledge of the Messiah is a double threat to Satan. These are the people described as "saints" just prior to the Return of Messiah in Rev. 14:12: "Here is the patience of the saints:

here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Yeshua." Then the next chapter describes these overcomers as those who "sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb" (Rev. 15:3). "The song of Moses" is Torah; "the song of the Lamb" is the testimony of Yeshua as Messiah.

Around the mid-1800s, the message of the seventh-day Sabbath began to be proclaimed more widely and more rapidly than it had ever been before. This was due primarily to the zealous efforts of the newly-formed SDA (Seventh Day Adventist) church. The SDAs believed that the call for the restoration of the seventh-day Sabbath was a fulfillment of Rev. 14:6-8. Even though I am not a SDA, I believe they were correct in their understanding of this. One reason I believe they were correct is because of the fact that the end-time message being preached in verse 7 is to "worship Him that MADE heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters."

This call to worship God specifically as Creator ("Him that MADE") clearly points to the only commandment of the Torah which, when obeyed, specifically acknowledges God as Creator: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy ... For in six days Yahweh MADE heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it" (Ex. 20:8, 11). Rev. 14:7 is an echo of this commandment, and even mentions the same three elements of creation, i.e., heaven, earth, and water.

It is no coincidence that Satan inspired Charles Darwin to publish *On the Origin of Species*, which denies God as Creator, in 1859, during the same period of history in which God's people were attempting to restore the one command which points to God as Creator. It is ironic that most of the Christians involved in the "Creation versus Evolution" debate today do not obey the only commandment in the Bible which has as its basis the fact that God created the universe.

The Church needs to come to the realization that the 7th-day Sabbath is not a peripheral issue. It is not just a cute-but-optional "Jewish custom" that SDAs and Messianic groups practice. The restoration of the true Sabbath is significant because it marks the beginning of Babylon's fall. After the call in Rev. 14:7 to "worship Him that MADE heaven, etc." [a call to keep the Sabbath], another angel immediately announces, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen" (Rev. 14:8).

The restoration of the Sabbath knocks

the cornerstone of Babylon's foundation out from under her. Why can we make such a statement? Because the Roman Catholic Church boasts that her changing of the Sabbath from the 7th day to the 1st day of the week is "proof" of her authority to enact new laws and to change or abolish old laws, even Biblical laws. And Catholic leaders rightly point out that Protestants are acknowledging Rome's claim to this authority by continuing to honor Sunday instead of the 7th-day Sabbath. (See *Roman Catholic and Protestant Confessions about Sunday*. Write to us for a copy.)

By rejecting Rome's change of the Sabbath from the 7th day to the first day of the week, we take our stand with the God of the Bible, who declares, "I am Yahweh, I change not" and with the Messiah, who declares, "Think not that I am come to destroy the Torah or the Prophets" (Mal. 3:6; Mt. 5:17).

As we approach the final days before Yeshua's return, people are going to have to choose between Rome, the headquarters of Babylon, and Jerusalem, the headquarters of God's Kingdom. "How long will you hesitate between two opinions?" Elijah said to the apostate nation of his day. "If Yahweh is God, follow Him; but if Ba'al, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21).

Those Christians who choose to include Sabbath and Torah observance in the practice of their faith, and those Jews who choose to include the testimony of Yeshua in the practice of their faith, will enrage Satan. For this reason we must be prepared for a militant lifestyle in the spiritual realm. The idea of a militant lifestyle may sound strange and foreign to the ears of American believers, but it is not an idea that is foreign to the New Testament:

"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Yeshua the Messiah. No man that wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life [NIV, "civilian affairs"; NAS, "everyday life"]; but that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:3f).

Many Jews who are trying to follow Yeshua, and Christians who are trying to follow Torah, are still entangled in the affairs of everyday, civilian life. It is time for us to free ourselves from the things that hinder us from being soldiers. We need to learn what it means to be an army of true disciples, and prepare ourselves for the Enemy's rage that will soon be upon all those who "keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Yeshua the Messiah" (Rev. 12:17). □

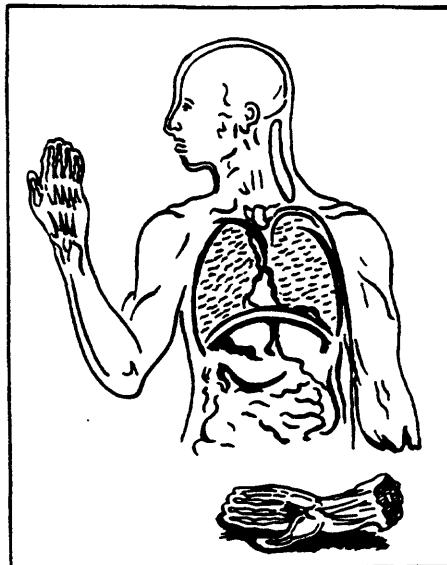
# THE IMPORTANCE OF CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

Daniel Botkin

The Biblical concept of congregational life - the shared life of a group of disciples in a local body - is a concept that is foreign to many American Christians. A believer may attend meetings, seminars, and conferences for years, and yet never know anything of genuine corporate, congregational life, either by experience or in theory. There are several Christian groups who do have a good grip on the importance of community life (close-knit groups such as the Amish, e.g.), but these are the rare exceptions rather than the rule.

By and large, real community life is missing from most churches in America. This is due in part to the strong emphasis that our American culture puts on the individual: individual rights are carefully guarded; individual self-expression and self-esteem are encouraged; the individual is told to be proud of the things that make him unique. And the ideal American is the "rugged individual" who pulls himself out of the mud by his bootstraps. As a result, American Christianity puts a lot of emphasis on the importance of the individual's having a personal relationship with God, but very little emphasis on the importance of the individual's having a personal relationship with the members of the congregation to which he belongs. There are hundreds of tracts and sermons on the importance of having "a personal relationship with God." How many tracts and sermons are there on the importance of having a personal relationship with other disciples?

The "personal relationship with God" is viewed as the all-important issue. Being an active part of a congregation, then, is regarded by many as an option which one can either choose or refuse. Years ago country singer Tom T. Hall had a hit song called *Me and Jesus*. The song began, "Me and Jesus, we got our own thing goin'. Me and Jesus, we



got it all worked out. Me and Jesus, we got our own thing goin'. We don't need nobody to tell us what it's all about!" The singer then went on to brag about the fact that he did not need anyone else to be a part of his spiritual life: no preachers, no teachers, no church congregation. His religion was solely and strictly a private matter, and he intended to keep it that way.

Tom T. Hall's version of Christianity may appeal to many Americans, but it is not the faith of the Bible. The idea of the independent, "do your own thing," Lone Ranger Christian, unattached to any local congregation, is foreign to the New Testament. The Bible speaks of individual believers as members joined to other members in a body, with Messiah as the Head of that body.

A believer who is not attached to a local congregation is like a hand which is not attached to a body. A hand that is not attached to a living body is a real hand, but it will never serve the purpose for which it was designed if it is not attached to a body. It may be a lovely hand, but it will be nonfunctional and useless. And if it remains detached from a body for too long, it will eventually just

wither away and rot. I have seen this happen to more than a few believers who refused to join themselves to a local congregation.

The so-called "Lord's Prayer" shows how important it is to the Lord that we pray and think with a corporate mentality rather than with a "personal relationship" mentality: "Our Father [not '*my Father*']... Give us this day our daily bread... forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation... deliver us from evil." All the pronouns are in the plural, not the singular. To pray as Yeshua taught requires that we be part of a body. This is a far cry from the "Me and Jesus" mentality of our Western culture.

The Bible is not a product of Western culture. It was written in the Middle East. Eastern culture and thought differs from Western culture and thought in many ways. One difference is in the way the two cultures view the individual versus the group. People in Western culture are generally more concerned about the welfare of the individual than are people in Eastern culture; people in Eastern culture are generally more concerned about the welfare of the group than are people in Western culture. This difference is apparent in the hiring methods at a Japanese-owned company near my home. This company not only interviews applicants as individuals, but also puts each applicant into a small group with other applicants. The group is then given a problem and told to work together as a group to solve the problem. Each potential employee is then observed to see how well he works in a group.

Having a corporate mentality and being able to work well in a group is important to people in Eastern cultures. It is important to our Heavenly Father, too, for He views His people as a body, not as a mere bunch of independent individuals who are not

attached to one another. "And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it," the Bible says, "or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:26).

Our very real connection to the other members in a congregational body is not just a New Testament concept. Centuries before the New Testament, one man, Achan, took some of the forbidden spoils of Jericho, and the entire congregation suffered for it. Although Achan acted alone, the Bible declares that "the children of Israel committed a trespass... the anger of Yahweh was kindled against the children of Israel... Israel hath sinned... Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies." (See Joshua ch. 7.)

Yahweh views a congregation as one body, and if one member sins, the whole body suffers for it. This may not seem fair, but it is the way life works. If I kick an officer of the law, he will not just arrest my foot; he will put my whole body under arrest. Or if I am convicted in court for shoplifting, the judge will not imprison my hand which stole the merchandise; he will imprison my whole body. It will do me no good to tell the judge that it was only my hand, one small member, which committed the crime. My whole body will suffer for the sin committed by just one member. And so it is in a congregational body of believers.

This may frighten or discourage some people from joining themselves to a local body. It's risky! However, the alternative, being totally detached from any body, is far more dangerous. Those who are content to be "cut off" from God's people will weaken, wither away, and rot, just like a hand that is not attached to a living body.

Some people say, "I'm deeply committed to God, but I want nothing to do with being a part of a body of believers!" The Apostle John wrote, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John

4:20). By the same token, to those who are not committed to a local body, yet claim to be committed to Messiah, the Head of the body, I would ask, "How can you say you are committed to the Head, whom you cannot see, if you refuse to be committed to the body, which you can see?"

Commitment to the body is not the only proof of commitment to the Head, but lack of commitment to the body is a sure indication of a shallow commitment to the Head.

If a person truly loves Yeshua, the Head of the body, he will also love the body. And when I speak of loving the body, I do not mean just loving the theological concept of "the body." It is not some impersonal, faceless, nameless "universal invisible Church" we are to love; it is real flesh and blood people in our local congregation.

I realize that many people have great difficulty finding a local body where they feel comfortable. However, we have not been called to comfort, we have been called to obedience. Some people who refuse to be part of a congregation are just too picky. On the other hand, there truly are many lone believers who do want to be part of a congregation, but simply do not know of anyplace they can go that will not drag them down rather than build them up. This is especially true among Sabbath-keepers. Let me offer a few suggestions to those who are in this type of situation.

**1. Make more of an effort to locate a congregation within driving distance from your home.** Go to the library and check the yellow pages of every city within driving distance. Make inquiries. Religious organizations often publish directories which can be useful. The Directory of Sabbath Observing Groups, for example, lists hundreds of congregations, many of which may not be in the yellow pages. Messianic organizations also publish directories. By making many inquiries of many sources, you might be surprised what

you will find. I have had readers phone me and ask if I had any contacts in their area.

**2. Consider starting a congregation in your area.** Not everyone is called to do this, of course. Leadership, especially in a new work, requires both the call and the capability. But even if you are not called to leadership, this does not mean that you cannot be instrumental in helping to get things off the ground. Maybe you can encourage someone else who does have leadership potential to establish a new congregation. If you know of no one locally, you might be able to recruit someone from outside your area to come and establish a congregation.

**3. Relocate to a city that has a congregation you can join.** This may sound extreme, but it is exactly what I did a number of years ago. My wife and children and I were living in a small town in western Illinois, and could not find good fellowship. Housing and job-related difficulties also seemed to be pushing us out of Illinois. I obtained a directory of Messianic congregations, wrote a letter explaining our beliefs and background, and sent copies of the letter to all fifty congregations listed in the directory. After receiving phone calls or letters from about half the congregations I had contacted, we ended up moving to New York, where we stayed for two and a half years. Our years with the congregation there helped prepare me for the leadership role which I now fill at the Gates of Eden congregation that we established nearly two years ago.

Finding a congregation that you can join may not be easy, but it is necessary if you want to be all that God intends you to be. It may require some sacrifice on your part, but "whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after Me," Yeshua said, "he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27). The choices we make reveal where our deepest loyalties lie. □



Purim, a holiday with its roots in the Bible, can provide loads of fun for adults as well as for children. Purim can provide fun-filled family activities which reinforce Biblical truth. The Purim holiday is celebrated with special food, gift-giving, music, games, costumes, and noise-making. It is also celebrated with the public reading of the Book of Esther, which explains the cause of all the merriment.

The Book of Esther recounts the events that gave birth to the Purim holiday. Esther, a young Jewish girl living in Persia, is chosen to be the bride of King Ahasuerus, who is unaware of Esther's Jewish background. One of the king's highest officials is a wicked man named Haman, a notorious Jew-hater.

Through his wiles and deceit, Haman tricks the king into authorizing a complete massacre of all the Jews living in the kingdom. Esther exposes the plot and reveals her Jewish identity to the king, and Haman is hanged on the gallows he had built for Mordecai, a prominent Jew who had refused to bow down before him. The story is filled with excitement, drama, suspense, irony, and even some humor.

Haman had cast lots to determine on which day the Jews should be massacred. The Hebrew word for "lots" is *purim* (פָּרִים), hence the name of the holiday. "Therefore they called these days Purim, after the name of Pur" (Esther 9:26). After Haman's plot failed, the decision was made to celebrate the deliverance every year with "feasting and rejoicing and sending portions of food to one another and gifts to the poor" (9:22).

"So these days were to be remembered and celebrated throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city," the Bible says, "and these days of Purim were not to fail from among the Jews, or their memory fade from their descendants" (9:26).

dants" (9:28).

Purim is considered a Jewish holiday, but that does not mean that non-Jewish disciples of the Messiah cannot join in the celebration. After all, Yeshua was a Jew, and He no doubt celebrated this holiday. Jews had been observing Purim every year for around 500 years before Yeshua was born, and there is no reason to suppose that Yeshua and His family did not observe it. Therefore Christians can celebrate Purim, and get a taste of a holiday which Yeshua celebrated with His family.

Purim can be meaningful to Christians as well as to Jews, because it celebrates the deliverance of God's people from all of the Hamans, Herods, Hitlers, and Husseins of history. It is interesting that Saddam Hussein's defeat in the Gulf War took place on Purim. Also Joseph Stalin, after setting into motion a plot to destroy the Jewish people, was stricken with a cerebral hemorrhage on the day of Purim. Stalin's plot died with him.

Even though God is not once mentioned in the Book of Esther, it is plain to see that God was at work behind the scenes, arranging for the deliverance of His people from those

who would destroy them. Purim affirms the fact that God continually watches over His people.

So, how is Purim celebrated? Children (and some adults!) wear costumes, often depicting characters in the Purim story. The disguise is to serve as a reminder that God often wears a "disguise" as He works in a hidden manner to help His people, as He did in the Book of Esther.

A food traditionally eaten during Purim is a triangular pastry filled with poppy seeds or fruit. These pastries are called *hamantashen* - Yiddish for "Haman's pockets," because they have a fruit-filled pocket. They are triangular to look like the three-cornered hat Haman is believed to have worn. Making hamantashen can be a fun family activity.

Purim celebrations often include a children's play and/or a Purim carnival with games and prizes for children. The highlight of Purim, though, is during the public reading of the Book of Esther. This is no ordinary reading. The Bible instructs us to "blot out the name of Amalek" (Deut. 25:19). Haman was an Agagite, a descendant of Amalek. Therefore, every time Haman is mentioned during the reading, his name is "blotted out" by loud boos, hisses, stomping of feet, and the twirling of noisemakers called *gragers* - any noise that will drown out the sound of that scoundrel's name. It is very helpful to have children for this part of the celebration.

**THREE GREAT SLAUGHTERS AND  
THREE GREAT REDEMPTIONS**  
**Daniel Botkin**

Yahweh has accomplished two great Redemptions in history, and there is one Redemption yet to come. The first great Redemption occurred in Egypt, when God's people were freed from slavery. This Redemption was accomplished under the leadership of Moses, Yahweh's chosen Redeemer, and is celebrated every year at Passover.

The second great Redemption occurred in Jerusalem, when God's people were freed from slavery to sin's power. This Redemption was accomplished by the death and Resurrection of Yeshua of Nazareth, Yahweh's chosen Redeemer, the "Prophet like unto Moses." Disciples of Yeshua commemorate this second great Redemption, as well as the first Redemption, every year at Passover.

The third and final great Redemption will occur when Yeshua returns and sets up the Messianic Kingdom, freeing God's people from the presence of sin and all the effects of sin. This Redemption for which we wait is called "the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23).

The first great Redemption was preceded by a great slaughter of innocent babies. "And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, 'Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive'" (Ex. 1:22). The second great Redemption was likewise preceded by a great slaughter of innocent babies. "Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men" (Matt. 2:16).

The people of God who awaited their Redemption were deeply grieved over both of these massacres that preceded their Redemption. In our generation, God's people are deeply grieved over the slaughter that has

been taking place at abortion mills across the world. Those who grieve over the abomination of abortion can find hope and comfort in the fact that this great slaughter, like the other two slaughters that preceded Redemption, is one more indication that our Redemption is near. "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Lk. 21:28).

"So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it."

Numbers 35:33

If those who participate in the slaughter of this generation do not repent, they will pay for their sin, as surely as Pharaoh and Herod will pay for their sins on the Day of Judgment. □

# CAN THE SABBATH BE KEPT ON ANY DAY OF THE WEEK?

Daniel Botkin

A few weeks ago I happened to hear a discussion about the Sabbath on a Christian radio program. The host of the program was interviewing a woman who had written a book urging Christians to keep the Sabbath. This author was telling Christian radio listeners about the wonderful benefits of keeping this neglected commandment. As she extolled the importance of the Sabbath and the blessings of Sabbath-keeping, her statements sounded very much like things I have said or written about the Sabbath. The only difference is that this woman keeps the Sabbath on Sunday, the first day of the week, instead of Saturday, the seventh day of the week.

The host of the live radio program was taking phone calls from listeners. One listener called and tactfully pointed out the fact that the Biblical Sabbath is actually Saturday, not Sunday. The caller politely asked how the author could observe Sunday and call that day the Sabbath, when the Bible never refers to Sunday, the first day of the week, as the Sabbath.

The host of the program was obviously annoyed by this caller, and referred the question to the author of the book. The author admitted that the caller's observation was correct; the Bible Sabbath is Saturday, not Sunday. However, she said, as long as we take one day a week to use for a Sabbath, that is all that matters. Most Christians use Sunday, she said, because that is the most convenient day to worship and rest. Some doctors that she knows take Thursday for their Sabbath; some pastors take Monday for their Sabbath. Which day of the week we use for our Sabbath is not important, she stated. It's only the one-day-in-seven principle that is important.

And that was the end of that

phone call. The host did not give the caller who raised the question an opportunity to respond to the woman's remarks.

Is it okay to keep the Sabbath on some day other than the day which God has specified in His Word? The author of this book claims that she has experienced great spiritual, emotional, and physical blessings from consistently keeping the Sabbath every Sunday. I have heard other Christians make similar claims, referring to Sunday as "my Sabbath." Can Christians experience the blessings of the Sabbath simply by proclaiming any day of the week "my Sabbath"?

The fact that some Christians derive benefits from observing Sunday as the Sabbath is not proof that God has authorized Christians to pick any day that they please. An atheist or an idolater can experience benefits by setting aside one day of the week for rest, relaxation, and meditation. An atheist or idolater who regularly practiced this would naturally improve his physical, emotional, and psychological health. One day of rest each week would naturally make him a more productive person during his six working days.

I will not deny the fact that Christians can experience blessings by observing Sunday. However, the blessings which they experience are the natural results that anyone, Christian or not, would experience from taking a day off to focus on other things. Of course the Christian, unlike the atheist, can experience spiritual blessings. However, these spiritual blessings have absolutely nothing to do with the real Sabbath; they are simply the result of setting aside some time to rest, worship, focus on the Lord, and have fellowship with other Christians. Of course these are the same activities

which are to be done on the seventh-day Sabbath, but doing them on Sunday does not make Sunday the Sabbath, any more than celebrating Independence Day on August 4th would make August 4th the anniversary of America's Independence. Even beer, barbecues, fireworks, and flag-waving could not magically turn August 4th into Independence Day. America's Independence Day will be July 4th for as long as America exists. By the same token, worship, rest, and fellowship on Sunday do not magically transform Sunday into the Sabbath. The seventh day of the week will be the Sabbath for as long as the earth endures.

In the Bible the seventh day of the week is the Sabbath, and the Sabbath is the seventh day; the two terms are synonymous. The seventh day of the week is the only day of the week that God ever designated as the weekly Sabbath. It is the one day of the week which Yeshua specifically declared Himself to be Lord of. It is the one day of the week which He said was made "for man" (*ανθρώπος anthropos* = all humanity, not just "the Jews").

If our Creator has not clearly authorized anyone to modify His specific commandment, it is presumptuous for us, His creatures, to take it upon ourselves to tamper with His laws. When Yahweh gave Moses the instructions for the building of the Tabernacle, He was very specific about all the details. Read through these instructions in Exodus chapters 25-40. You may get the impression that God seems to be very picky about the kind of worship He will accept. When giving the plans for the Tabernacle, Yahweh warned Moses, "See that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown to you on the mount" (Ex. 25:40). The New

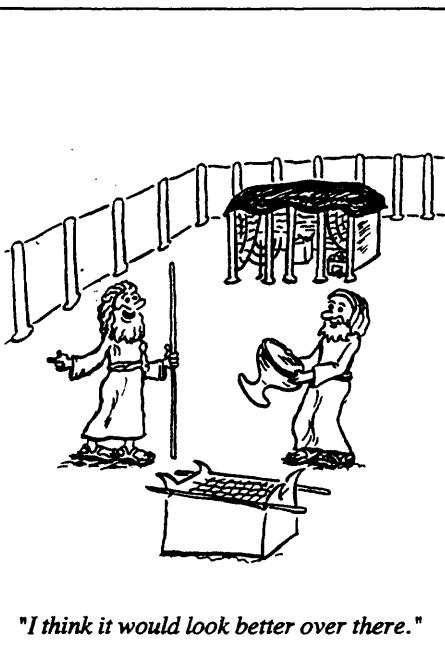
Testament repeats this warning in Hebrews 8:5. Even under the New Covenant, Yahweh is still particular about the kind of worship He will accept.

Moses heeded this warning, and did all things "according to the pattern." In the final chapter of Exodus, when the rearing up of the Tabernacle is described, we are told no less than eight times that the Israelites carried out the instructions "as Yahweh had commanded Moses." When they completed the task, then "the glory of Yahweh filled the Tabernacle," so much so that "Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of Yahweh filled the Tabernacle."

What would have happened if Moses and Aaron had decided to make some slight modifications of Yahweh's instructions? What if Aaron had said, "Moses, I know He said to put the lampstand in the holy place, but I think it would be better if we moved it forward into the next room, the holy of holies."

I am not sure what would have happened if Moses and Aaron had rearranged the furniture to suit their own fancy, but I know what would not have happened: the glory of Yahweh would not have filled the Tabernacle. The Israelites would have had a Tabernacle without the Holy Presence of God in it.

Can you imagine Moses and Aaron waiting for the glory to be manifested, while God is waiting for them to get everything in its proper place? Can you imagine Moses and Aaron saying, "But Lord, we do have the candlestick in the Tabernacle! We've just moved it into the next room!" Ridiculous, you say? Perhaps, but no more ridiculous than Christians who say, "But Lord, we do keep the Sabbath in our church! We've just moved it to the next day!" The Church has rearranged the furniture to suit its own personal preferences, and we wonder why the glory of God is not manifested among us.



*"I think it would look better over there."*

Some readers may say, "Daniel, your congregation keeps the Sabbath on the seventh day. Is the Shekinah glory of God manifested in your congregation?"

If you mean outwardly and visibly, as it was in Moses' day, no, not yet. But the glory of Yahweh has certainly been manifested to my inner man since I began keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. I cannot speak for every individual in my congregation, but I know that when I began keeping the Sabbath in 1989, I underwent a major spiritual transformation. I found myself propelled into a spiritual realm which was far more glorious than what I had experienced during my 17 years as a faithful, zealous Pentecostal Christian. After I started keeping the Sabbath, I felt like I had truly been born again - again!

I do not question the reality or legitimacy of my spiritual experience prior to 1989. I am convinced that I had eternal life, forgiveness, and a true relationship with my Heavenly Father. I believe God winked at my ignorance of the Sabbath because mine was not a willful ignorance. But when the knowledge of the Truth comes, ignorance vanishes. Either that, or God sends strong delusion to keep

the person in ignorance because that person does not love the knowledge of the truth, and prefers to be willfully ignorant. (See 2 Thes. 2:10-12.) The thought of that possibility should terrify every Christian who is not sure whether or not he loves the knowledge of the truth enough to embrace it and walk in it.

The Sabbath is not the only thing that is out of order in the Church, of course, but it is one of the major things that is not being done "according to the pattern." Christians seem to think that the Sabbath is a peripheral issue, and not one of the "weightier matters of the law." Yahweh, on the other hand, considered the Sabbath to be important enough to be written with His own finger, as one of the "Top Ten" on the Tablets of the Law. He considered it important enough to have a man stoned to death for picking up sticks on the Sabbath. And He made sure that His prophets told the exiles in Babylon that their Sabbath-breaking was one of the main reasons they had gone into captivity. Is it too far-fetched, then, to think that the Church's spiritual decline and captivity may be due in large part to the Church's neglect of the Sabbath?

Christians who have a vision for the restoration of the Church to her former glory sometimes quote Isaiah 58:12, a verse with a glorious promise of restoration. These Christians need to read the next verse, though, which explains one of the conditions of the fulfillment of this promise, namely keeping the Sabbath. And Yahweh is careful to tell us in this verse that by the Sabbath, He means the Sabbath *He* has designated. "*My* holy day," he calls it. A substitute day which we have proclaimed to be the Sabbath is not *His* holy day.

Yahweh longs to fill the Church with the fullness of His Shekinah glory. But until we set things in their proper place, "according to the pattern," we will only experience glimpses of His glory. I am thankful for those glimpses, but let's not be content until we have the fullness. □

# THE MYSTERIOUS "MR. K"

By Daniel Botkin

Mr K was a Christian professor who lived in Nazi Germany. His area of expertise was Judaism of New Testament times. Prior to 1933, Mr K published works in which he praised the Jewish people and the Talmud and emphasized the Jewish roots of Christianity.

In 1933, though, Mr K joined the Nazi party. This was the same year that the Protestant church of Germany was being divided into two separate groups, the pro-Nazi "German Christians" (*Deutsche Christen*) and the "Confessing Church" (*Bekennende Kirche*) which opposed the "Aryan paragraph" and other heretical distortions of the German Christians. Mr K affiliated himself with the German Christians, whose motto was "The Swastika on our breasts, the Cross in our hearts." The German Christians denounced the Jewish influence on Christianity, and called for the removal of the Old Testament from the Bible. They proclaimed an Aryan Jesus, not a Jewish Jesus. Julius Leutheuser, a prominent leader of the German Christians, said, "Christ has come to us through Adolf Hitler ... We know today the Savior has come ... We have only one task, be German, not be Christian."

Mr K claimed that he did not agree 100% with everything the German Christians stood for, but this was the branch of Christianity which he chose to join himself to. Like other German Christians, Mr K believed that God had elevated Hitler to power in order to save Germany from the "culture-destroying" Jews. Mr K viewed the Nazi movement as "a religious renewal," so he openly and enthusiastically supported Hitler.

Mr K used his writing ability to produce propaganda for the Nazi cause. He became a leader in the *Forschungsateilung Judenfrage*, a Nazi organization which published a journal. The purpose of the organization and its journal was to establish a scientific base which would justify Nazi atrocities against the Jews. Mr K was the most frequent contributor to this journal, in which he described Jews as "depraved," "refuse," and "enemies of humanity."

In a speech in 1933, Mr K discussed four possible solutions to the "Jewish problem": 1) *Extermination*. Mr K said he rejected this idea, not because it was inhumane, but because it was impractical - others had tried this, and failed. 2) *Zionism*, i.e., resettle all Jews in Palestine.

Mr K rejected this idea for practical reasons, too. 3) *Assimilation*. Mr K strongly opposed this for reasons of racial purity. 4) *"Guest Status."* This was the only possible solution to the Jewish problem, he stated. Mr K recommended that Jews be stripped of their citizenship and deprived of normal civil rights. Guest status would also mean isolation in ghettos and strict limitations on the types of employment Jews could engage in.

Mr K wrote a great deal to help establish a scientific base to justify the mistreatment of Jews. However, Hitler needed theological justification as well as scientific justification, and as a theologian, Mr K was the man for that job, too. Mr K has been credited with "making extermination of the Jews theologically respectable" and establishing "a solid Christian foundation for the opposition to the Jews."

Mr K did his scientific writing and his theological writing simultaneously. In 1933, the same year he joined the Nazi party, Mr K began working on a major project: a theological Greek New Testament dictionary. If New Testament theology was to be made compatible to Nazi philosophy, then a theological dictionary written by Nazis would be very helpful. Other anti-Jewish theologians helped Mr K on this project. Grundmann and Bertram, theologians whose stated goal was "dejudification of Church and Christianity," wrote a total of 39 articles in the first four volumes of the dictionary. With the help of other such theologians, Mr K's dictionary eventually grew into a monumental 10-volume set.

After the war, Mr K went to trial for war crimes. He was convicted and imprisoned for the role he played as Hitler's "scientist" and "theologian." Mr K's writings and speeches had contributed to the extermination of millions of innocent people, so Mr K went off to prison.

But what happened to the 10-volume theological dictionary that Mr K produced during those years when he worked as Hitler's theologian? Oh, it is still around. I just saw an ad for it in a *Christian Book Distributors* catalog that came in my mailbox today. This 10-volume *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, by Gerhard Kittel ("Mr K"), is, according to the CBD catalog, "the standard N.T. theological dictionary" and "a necessity for the serious Greek student." It is published by Eerdmans, a major Christian publisher in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

This work, by a Nazi who was convicted and imprisoned for war crimes, is widely used and trusted by modern Bible translators and by theologians and by

students in Christian seminaries. As the CBD catalog says, it is "the standard N.T. theological dictionary." According to one writer, it "has almost unparalleled status among biblical scholars." The *ARBA: Guide to Subject Encyclopedias and Dictionaries* says Kittel's work is "an indispensable starting point for serious study of the ideas of the New Testament."

Is it any wonder that the Church cannot free herself from the anti-Semitism and anti-nomianism that blind her? How can Christians hope to see the Jews as God's chosen people and the Torah as God's loving instructions, when their understanding of the New Testament is influenced, directly or indirectly, by the theological work of Torah-hating, Jew-hating Nazis?

It is not enough for a Christian to say that he has never used Kittel's Theological Dictionary. If the Christian relies on only a modern translation of the New Testament, then his understanding of the New Testament has probably been influenced to some degree by Kittel and his Nazi cohorts, for virtually all modern translations rely heavily on Kittel. And a Christian who sits under Bible teachers who were trained in seminaries also runs the risk of being indirectly influenced by Kittel, for virtually all seminaries use Kittel's work. Our New Testament theology should not be based on the Theological Dictionary of Torah-hating, Jew-hating Nazis. Our New Testament theology should be based on the Torah and the Prophets, as both Yeshua and Paul taught (Mt. 5:17-19; 2 Tim. 3:15-17).

One writer suggests that copies of Kittel's work carry a warning label: "Theology students are warned that this dictionary was edited by, and contains articles by, Nazi theologians whose stated aim was to create a theological foundation for an anti-Jewish, 'racially pure' Christianity, and it should therefore be approached with caution."

A CBD catalog from 1991 describes Kittel's work as "the best New Testament dictionary ever completed ... Every serious Greek student dreams of owning a set." I, for one, do not dream of owning Kittel's work. I dream of something else. I dream of seeing Christians rid themselves of the influence of their Jew-hating, Torah-hating forefathers of the faith. I dream of the day when Christians will embrace the Torah, and Jews will embrace their Messiah, Yeshua of Nazareth. Then Christians and Jews can embrace one another and become one people, a people who honor both the Messiah and the Torah. □

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# "URBAN LEGENDS" IN THE CHURCH

## Daniel Botkin

*"A theory if you hold it hard enough  
And long enough gets rated as a creed"*  
-Robert Frost in "Etherealizing"

In 1976 my wife and I went to Israel and lived there for one year. When we returned to the United States, some people showed me a tract that had been circulating and causing a great deal of excitement among Christians, especially those who were into end-time prophecy. The title of the tract was "Why All the Vultures?"

According to this tract, vultures were multiplying at an unprecedented rate in Northern Israel, in the vicinity of the Valley of Armegeddon. The tract gave the impression that Israelis all over the Galilee area were scratching their heads in bewilderment, wondering why the vultures were becoming so numerous. Of course the reason for the vulture population explosion was obvious to Christians familiar with end-time prophecy: the vultures were multiplying in preparation for the Battle of Armegeddon, when an angel will cry to all the fowls that fly in the heaven, "Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; that you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men" (Rev. 19:17f).

Christians who showed me the vulture tract asked me if I had any additional information, since I had just spent a year in Israel. I told them that the last six months of my one-year stay in Israel had been spent living in Northern Israel, and this was the first time I had heard anything about the subject. I had not seen a single vulture, nor had I heard anyone else say a word about vultures. Some Christians seemed a bit disappointed by my answer, and at least one seemed upset and a little angry that I would dare to cast doubt on the accuracy of the tract. "But it says so right here!" he exclaimed.

A couple months later we returned to Israel and lived in the Galilee for another six months, and I still neither saw nor heard any signs of the vultures. A few years later I read in an Israeli publication that the vulture

was actually an endangered species in Israel, and Israeli scientists were conducting breeding experiments in Tel-Aviv to prevent its extinction.

During my 25 years as a disciple of Yeshua, I have seen Christians gullibly swallow unsubstantiated rumor after unsubstantiated rumor, no matter how far-fetched and ridiculous it sounded. Christians know they should "believe not every spirit, but test the spirits," but they do not think this principle applies to unsubstantiated rumors that they hear. They spread these "Christian legends" as quickly as the world spreads its "urban legends."

Christians are especially prone to believe information that sounds like it has something to do with the fulfillment of end-time prophecy. In 1967 a paper reported that 60,000 tons of pre-cut stones were on their way from Bedford, Indiana to Jerusalem, where the stones were to be used in the building of the Temple. (Never mind that Israel has plenty of its own excellent building stone!) The shipments were being handled by Pier 26 in New York, the story claimed. A few weeks later the paper printed a retraction, admitting that the story was false, and that "Pier 26" did not even exist.

Another end-time rumor made the rounds in 1980. Christians claimed that the IRS had sent several people social security checks which required an identification mark on the hand or forehead of the recipient in order to be cashed. The IRS recalled the checks, explaining that these checks were not meant to be issued til 1984. Of course the IRS does not even send social security checks - a different branch of the treasury department does this - but this did not prevent Christians from believing and spreading the rumor. This whopper was discussed in *Christianity Today* in an article entitled "The Faithful Fall for Another Far-fetched Fable."

A "far-fetched fable" that I heard (and, I admit, believed) in the 1970s concerned "the missing day." Space scientists had supposedly discovered that there are 24 hours of "missing time" in the universe. Extensive computer checks discovered that this

was due to two Biblical events: when the sun stood still "about a day" (Josh. 10:13) and when the shadow of the sundial went backwards 10 degrees (Isa. 38:8). This story was printed in several religious magazines and newspapers, then later retracted because it could not be verified.

Another unsubstantiated rumor I believed in the 1970s was the claim that Darwin renounced evolution and embraced the Bible at the end of his life. Several tracts printed this story, but none of the tract companies, to my knowledge, has ever been able to verify the story. Each tract company just copied it from a previous tract. The story may be true, of course, but the only proof the tract companies have to show is their own tracts.

Apparently tracts have been used to spread unsubstantiated rumors for quite some time. I have in my possession a copy of an old tract, "A Stranger Appears Before the United Nations." The tract contains the transcript of a radio broadcast given by Paul Harvey on Christmas Eve, 1950. The story tells about a "Stranger" (obviously Jesus Christ) who mysteriously appeared at a special session of the UN and answered several questions by quoting Scriptures. Paul Harvey has insisted that the entire story was fiction, nothing more than his own "literary invention," and did not actually take place. Many Christians disagreed with Mr. Harvey, though, and insisted that it *did* take place, because Mr. Harvey reported it on the radio!

The editors of *Biblical Archaeology Review* found themselves in a pickle similar to Paul Harvey's when they printed a tongue-in-cheek article about geologists in Siberia drilling a hole nine miles deep and accidentally discovering Hell. Microphones were lowered deep down into the hole to Hell, it was claimed, and scientists heard the sounds of human voices screaming in pain and agony. Some readers apparently took the story seriously. After a barrage of letters from readers, the editors were forced to print an explanation with the title "Honest, We Were Only Kidding!"

Some of the Church's "urban legends" are relatively harmless, except for the fact that they make us look like the naive, gullible saps that we are. This destroys our credibility in the eyes of people who are wise enough to look for confirmation from a reliable source before believing fantastic stories. Unfortunately, not all rumors have been harmless. Some rumors have been outright lies, which, when repeated, slandered entire groups of innocent people. Jewish people have certainly learned this by experience over the centuries.

Early Adventists were rumored to have all made white robes and worn them on October 22, 1844, the date of William Miller's predicted Return of Christ. The only people known to have actually donned white robes on that day, however, were not Adventists but unbelievers who did it to mock the Adventists. A mob of ungodly scoffers had gathered around a church in Paris, Maine, where Adventists were gathered for prayer. Two of the rowdies put on white robes, sat on the church roof, and sang songs to mock the Adventists inside. After the story was changed to say that the Adventists had worn robes, the Adventists offered a \$500 reward (a lot of money in those days!) for proof that even one Adventist had worn a white robe. The reward was never claimed, of course.

Sometimes Christians unknowingly slander a legitimate business by repeating gossip and hearsay. Probably the most widely-spread rumor among Christians in recent decades has been the claim that Proctor and Gamble's moon-and-stars trademark is a symbol of Satanism and devil worship, which Proctor and Gamble is accused of supporting. The "proof" of this claim is said to have first been made public on "The Merv Griffin Show" and on "Donahue." Of course none of the Christians who circulate petitions and warnings to boycott Proctor and Gamble have ever seen a tape of either of the TV shows, because they do not exist. (If I am wrong, someone please send me a videotape of the show, and I will print an apology and retraction.)

It is ironic that the founders of Proctor and Gamble were actually devoted Christians. William Proctor gave over \$80 million to Christian causes. The idea to name their soap "Ivory" came from Psalm 45:8. Billy

Graham, Jerry Falwell, *Christianity Today*, and even "Dear Abby" have appealed to the public to ignore this false rumor. Nevertheless, it resurfaces from time to time, and gullible Christians are convinced that they will be helping to support Satan worship if they buy Proctor and Gamble products. A similar story about McDonald's tithing their profits to Satanic churches circulated among Christians in 1977.

The latest unsubstantiated slander I have heard concerns medical doctors. Bible believers are being told that they should avoid all contact with doctors because doctors take the Hippocratic Oath, an oath that invokes pagan gods and goddesses, by whom the doctors solemnly swear. This, of course, makes the doctors look like nothing more than high-tech pagan witch doctors. So Bible believers, especially those who want to keep their lives free of any paganism, are led to believe that they are compromising their faith by getting medical help from physicians.

What are the facts about doctors and the Hippocratic Oath? The Hippocratic Oath that doctors take is in *Funk and Wagnalls Encyclopedia* and in the *Academic American Encyclopedia*, and there is not a single reference to pagan gods and goddesses in the entire Oath, as it appears in these two encyclopedias. However, if you look up the Hippocratic Oath in *Encyclopedia Americana* or the *World Book Encyclopedia*, it does mention the pagan gods and goddesses.

Are these encyclopedia publishers contradicting one another? No, not at all - they are simply not telling the entire story. *Collier's Encyclopedia* does tell the entire story. *Collier's* has the Oath as Hippocrates originally wrote it, complete with references to pagan gods and goddesses. However, *Collier's* also informs us that the so-called "Hippocratic Oath" which doctors take today is *not* the Hippocratic Oath that Hippocrates wrote. The so-called "Hippocratic Oath" which doctors take today is actually the Declaration of Geneva, an oath adopted by the General Assembly of the World Medical Association in 1948. The Declaration of Geneva is often called the "Hippocratic Oath" because it is similar to Hippocrates' original Oath. Today's "Hippocratic Oath" has no references to pagan gods and goddesses. An article in *Chris-*

*tianity Today* mentions other "post-Hippocratic alternatives" to the original Oath.

If it were not for the references to pagan gods and goddesses, the original Hippocratic Oath would sound very much like a Christian document. The medical practitioner who took the Hippocratic Oath vowed to never perform an abortion and to never practice euthanasia. He vowed to avoid "all malicious or destructive wrong-doing, including especially sexual misconduct with persons of either sex, free or slave." Also as part of his oath, he made this solemn pledge: "I shall conduct my life and the practice of my profession in a pure and holy manner."

These are pretty lofty ideals and morals, considering they were written by a 5th-Century BC pagan. *Christianity Today* makes reference to Hippocrates' "vision of human dignity that so remarkably anticipated the Judeo-Christian vision of care for those who are made in the image of God." And incidentally, Hippocrates did not write his Oath for the purpose of glorifying the pagan gods he believed in; he only appealed to the gods "to witness this oath." He seems to have been a "god-fearer." He just did not know the right God to fear.

So, do all medical doctors today really swear an oath to pagan gods and goddesses? Apparently this is another false rumor. Either that, or all the major encyclopedia publishers have conspired with the American Medical Association to keep the dark secret from the public, and even all Christian and Jewish doctors have agreed to go along with the cover-up.

All disciples of Yeshua, especially those who have a high regard for the commandments, should remember that the 9th commandment is "Thou shalt not bear false witness" (Ex. 20:16). We can unknowingly break this commandment if we spread unsubstantiated rumors that slander people or businesses. The Bible requires at least two witnesses, preferably three, to establish an accusation against someone. And these are two or three *witnesses*, not two or three people repeating an unsubstantiated rumor they have heard. Furthermore, if a person is found to be bearing false witness against an innocent person, the penalty for the alleged crime is to fall

upon the false witness. (See Deut. 19:15ff.)

When we hear something that sounds like a "far-fetched fable," it is important to verify the facts by checking reliable sources before we repeat the information and present it as fact. This is especially true if we plan to print the information for wide distribution. And it is especially important if an individual, a group of people, or a business is being accused of wrong-doing. It is fairly easy to prove or disprove rumors that we hear. Often just a phone call or a letter of inquiry or a trip to the library will tell us whether or not something is true. (And in case anyone is wondering, yes, I did check the sources to verify the information about "Mr K" on page 7.) □

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# "EXCEPT THE LORD BUILD THE HOUSE"

Daniel Botkin

*"Except the LORD build the house,  
they labor in vain that build it"*

-Psalm 127:1

When it comes to building, there are certain principles that always hold true, whether we are building an actual house, a local congregation, a family, or our own individual spiritual life. There are two important things which must be carefully considered before building: 1) the foundation, and 2).the type of materials used to build upon the foundation.

A good foundation must be deep and solid and strong enough to bear the weight of the house we intend to build upon it. The foundation must also be straight and level, and the corners must be properly squared. If the foundation is slightly askew, it will cause problems later on. It will make the construction of the house much more difficult, because major adjustments will have to be made as the house is being put together. This explains why spiritual, emotional, and psychological problems can sometimes be due in part to some flaw in our formative years. The more flawed the foundation is, the more difficulty we will have in building. This holds true for both the building of an actual house and for the building of our individual lives.

Our choice of building materials will determine whether we construct a mansion or a shack upon the foundation. We can build our lives with good materials or with trash. We therefore have four possibilities: 1) a shack on a poor foundation; 2) a mansion on a poor foundation; 3) a shack on a good foundation; 4) a mansion on a good foundation.

It is important that we build our spiritual life on a good foundation. Unfortunately, many cannot see the Biblical foundation, because it is covered up by centuries of man-made religious traditions. The exiles who returned from Babylon to rebuild the

walls of Jerusalem said, "There is much rubbish, so that we are not able to build the wall" (Neh. 4:10). Before they could begin building, they had to clear away the rubbish (which was there because of the sins of their forefathers) and get down to the original foundation. As we come out of spiritual Babylon, we have to clear away the rubbish of man-made, extra-Biblical traditions that hide the foundation of our faith.

Not all traditions are evil, of course. Some traditions can enhance our faith, but some traditions hide the foundation. It is important that we not mistake our traditions for the foundation. The foundation of our faith is not Peter, though the teaching of Roman Catholics would seem to suggest this. The foundation of our faith is not the epistles of Paul, though the practice of Protestants would seem to suggest this. Both Peter and Paul tell us what the foundation is. The foundation is the Messiah Yeshua, described by Peter as the Chief Corner Stone, the Living Stone upon which we, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:4-7). "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ," Paul writes (1 Cor. 3:11).

But what does it actually mean, in real-life practice, to have Yeshua as our foundation? Yeshua's words about building on the right foundation should give us some understanding of what this means:

"Therefore whosoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that hears these sayings of Mine, and does them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds

blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell. And great was the fall of it" (Matt. 7:24ff).

These were the words with which Yeshua ended the Sermon on the Mount. "Therefore whosoever hears these sayings of Mine," He said. The words "Therefore" and "these sayings" point us back to the Sermon He has just preached. If we wish to build upon Yeshua as the foundation, then, we need to understand the theme of the Sermon on the Mount. The theme of the Sermon is a description of the Messianic Kingdom Yeshua has come to establish. He describes the character, the laws, and the principles which will govern the subjects of the Kingdom. Therefore, if we wish to build upon Yeshua as the foundation, we must let the Holy Spirit change our character so we will become more like the Master. This character at which we aim is described in the Beatitudes ("Blessed are..."), which serve as an introduction to the Sermon (Matt. 5:1-12). As our character develops, we become salt and light to the world around us (Matt. 5:13-16).

Next, Yeshua speaks about the laws which will govern the subjects of His Kingdom. He tells His disciples to not even think that He will abolish the Torah or the Prophets of the Old Testament. On the contrary, He has come "to fulfill them," i.e., to fill them full of meaning, thereby giving us all the more reason to live according to the commandments of Torah! Therefore, breaking even just one of the least of Torah's commandments, and teaching others so, He says, will guarantee us the lowest position in His Kingdom; doing and teaching the commandments of Torah will cause us to be called great in the Kingdom (Matt. 5:17-19).

These statements of Yeshua about the importance of the Torah serve as an introduction to the remainder of the Sermon, which is, in

essence, Yeshua's commentary on Torah. For the rest of the Sermon, He expands and expounds on this concept of Torah as the Law of His Kingdom. By giving examples and explanations, He shows us how to correctly understand and interpret the written Torah. By the example of His lifestyle and manner of worship, He shows us how He wants us to live and worship according to Torah.

Yeshua is the Chief Corner Stone of the foundation. If we say we are building on Yeshua as our foundation, we cannot ignore the Torah, for He tells us to obey the commandments. To build on Yeshua as the foundation means that we will both hear and do the things He teaches.

He sums up His commentary on Torah ("Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this sums up the Law and the Prophets," 7:12), and then He warns us of the false prophets who tell us it is enough to just call Him "Lord," but not obey the Father's commandments:

"Not everyone who says unto Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto 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, you who practice lawlessness [ἀνομίαν, *anomian*, "without law"]'" (Matt. 7:21-23).

It is immediately after this stern warning that Yeshua ends the Sermon with the illustration of the house built on the rock and the house built on the sand. It is obvious, then, that building on the proper foundation requires obedience to the Torah as Yeshua taught it and modeled it. Once we have established this as our starting point, we can then begin to build upon the foundation.

As we build upon the foundation, we must use the right kinds of materials. When the Apostle Paul writes about Yeshua as the foundation, he

says, "Let every man take heed how he builds thereon ... Now if any man build upon this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work will be made manifest, for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (1 Cor. 3:10-13).

The methods and materials which we select for the building of our lives fall into one of two categories, or "sorts": the gold-silver-precious stones category, or the wood-hay-stubble category. Contrasting these elements can help us select the right building materials for our lives.

Gold, silver, and precious stones are long-lasting; they represent eternal materials. They cannot burn or rust or rot or die. Wood, hay, and stubble, on the other hand, are much more temporal. These materials easily die and burn and rot away. This teaches us that we must build our lives with things of eternal value, things that are precious in God's eyes.

A second difference between the gold-silver-precious stones category and the wood-hay-stubble category is this: wood, hay, and stubble can be reproduced by man; gold, silver and precious stones are created by God. This teaches us that we must examine the origin of our building materials. Are our ideas, goals, and methods of God or of men? Are they born of the Spirit or of our own wishful thinking? Examining our motives and priorities can help us determine the answers to these questions.

A third difference between the two categories has to do with where these elements are found. Gold, silver, and precious stones are below the ground, hidden from public view. Wood, hay, and stubble grow above the ground, where they can be seen of men. "Take heed that you do not your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen of them," Yeshua warned. "Otherwise you have no reward of your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 6:1). Are we building because we want to please our

Heavenly Father, or because we want to impress others and make them think we are more spiritual than we really are?

If we build with man's fleshly, worldly, temporal methods, and/or if we desire to be seen by men, we labor in vain. Our work will be burned up like wood, hay, and stubble, the Bible says, even if we are building on the foundation. "If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. 3:15). Some people will get into the Kingdom by the skin of their teeth, but receive no reward for all the time, energy, and resources that they poured into "serving the Lord." As they watch their houses go up in smoke, they will discover to their sorrow that they were really serving themselves instead of the Lord. If, on the other hand, we simply and humbly build on the foundation, using the materials and methods which God has ordained, our house will endure the fires and floods of testing, and we will be rewarded. "If any man's work abide which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward" (1 Cor. 3:14).

When Paul likened the proper building materials to gold, silver, and precious stones, he did not just arbitrarily choose these three particular elements. These three elements, "gold, silver, and precious stones," point us back to the materials used in the construction of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and have deep significance.

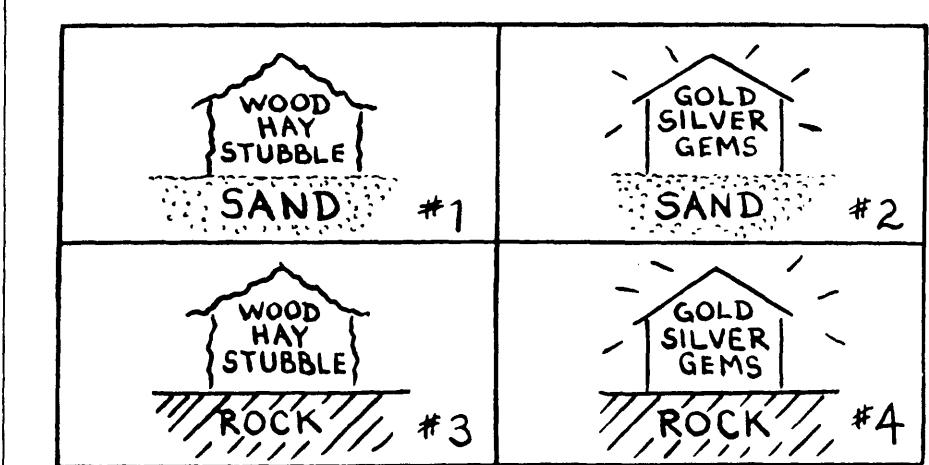
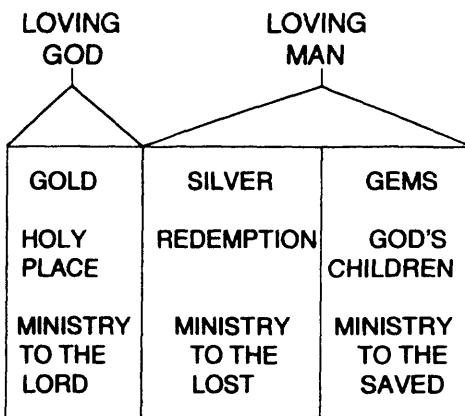
Where was the gold in the Tabernacle? On the menorah, on the table of bread, on the incense altar, and on the ark of the covenant - all of these items hidden away in the holy place and holy of holies, unseen by the general public. When we are hidden away in the holy place, worshiping, praising, and thanking our Father in secret, we are building with gold. We could refer to this aspect of building as our *ministry to the Lord*.

What of the silver? The silver for the Tabernacle was obtained from the shekels of redemption, "atonement money"; thus silver speaks of re-

demption. (See Ex. 30:11-16.) All the boards of the Tabernacle rested upon sockets of silver which were made from the redemption money. As we build, we rest upon the redemption which Messiah purchased by His death, not only for us, but for the world. When we share the news of that redemption with others, we are building with silver. We could refer to this aspect of building as our *ministry to the lost*.

The precious stones of the Tabernacle were found on the garments of the High Priest. There were two onyx stones on the shoulders, each stone engraved with the names of six of the tribes of Israel, so that Aaron would "bear their names before Yahweh upon his two shoulders for a memorial" (Ex. 28:12). There were also twelve precious stones on the breastplate, each stone engraved with the name of one of the tribes. "And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart when he goes in unto the holy place, for a memorial before Yahweh continually" (Ex. 28:29). When we bear the burdens of God's children, our brothers and sisters in the faith, and bring their names on our hearts before God in prayer, we are building with precious stones. We could refer to this aspect of building as our *ministry to the saved*.

By building with gold, silver, and precious stones in this way, we fulfill the two greatest commandments of the Torah: to love Yahweh our God and to love our fellow man. □



HOUSE #1 represents the life of a raw pagan who neither hears nor does the teachings of the Messiah. There is no religious activity in his life, and he has no interest in spiritual matters. He is dead in his sins and lives only for temporal things. He may actually have more hope than the man represented by HOUSE #2, though, for the man represented by HOUSE #2 is deluded by his devout religious activity. He is using some Biblical principles and methods to achieve his goals, so he has some measure of success. Unfortunately, he is not building on the foundation, which Yeshua described as "these sayings of Mine." Instead of building on the sayings of Yeshua, he is building on the sayings of the popes or the sayings of the rabbis or the sayings of Mohammed or Joseph Smith or Charles Taze Russell, etc. He has a false sense of security. His beautiful mansion is destined to fall when the storm comes and the sand is swept out from under it. The men on whose sayings he depends will not be able to help him on the Day of Judgment.

The man represented by HOUSE #3 is better off than #2, for he at least has the foundation, and "he himself shall be saved." He is put to shame by #2, though, because #2 is using the materials that he ought to be using. Instead of using Bible-based, God-ordained methods to serve the Lord, #3 trusts in the world's methods. He thinks that the gospel can be packaged and promoted as if it were just another business enterprise. He cheapens the gospel by making it into a product that appeals to the flesh. He justifies the compromise by saying that we must use "bait" that will attract fish. He doesn't realize that if the bait appeals to the flesh, that is all he will catch - flesh. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" and "the flesh profits nothing" (John 3:6 & 6:63). HOUSE #4 is our goal: using God's methods to do God's work on God's foundation.



# THE ARCHITECT

Daniel Botkin

I want to tell you a true story about an architect that I know personally. This architect is a real master builder. After many years of experience, he designed a beautiful mansion that was to be his masterpiece. He carefully completed a detailed blueprint for the building. He had the location picked out before he designed the building, and, like most architects do, he designed the building to fit in well with the terrain of the building site. The location was somewhat desolate, but it was the perfect place for this particular building. The building was designed to be both beautiful and functional. It was a perfect plan.

Now, architects do not do all the actual labor of erecting the buildings which they design. The architect's job is to plan and design the building, select building crews, appoint bosses over each crew, and supervise the project. This architect that I know, however, went to the construction site and personally laid the foundation himself. He made sure that all the necessary materials were available to the workers. Then he nailed his blueprints to a tree, told his workers to get to work, and left the building site.

Most of the workers in the building crew weren't very bright. They didn't bother to read the blueprint very carefully before they started building. After all, the blueprint was 66 pages long! For some odd reason, the workers spent most of their time studying only the last 27 pages of the blueprint; they barely looked at the first 39 pages. The latter pages of the blueprint did give them a pretty good idea of what the finished product was supposed to look like. But the workers foolishly assumed they could ignore the details in the earlier pages and still reach the goal. So every man started grabbing tools and building materials, and happily went to work. Pretty soon, though, the workers started arguing among themselves.

"Hey, I wanted to put the living room there," one said.

"Well, I've already started building the dining room here," another replied.

"Say there! Where are you going with those bricks? I was planning to use them to make a patio out here!" a third said.

"Sorry! I'm using them for a chimney!"

Occasionally someone in the building crew would say, "Gee, maybe we had better take a closer look at those plans." They would look at the blueprint just long enough to see one or two of their errors. This helped a



*The Ancient of Days*  
by William Blake, 1794

little, of course, but most of the time they continued to bumble along, getting in each other's way and hurting one another, like the Three Stooges.

Now it so happens that the architect has an enemy, who is his main competitor. The architect's enemy saw the blueprint and said to himself, "That's a great plan! I'll lay my own foundation and use some of those same ideas to construct a building like that in my territory! Then I can lure people over to my place of business."

The good architect's building crew still continues to argue among themselves as they assemble, disassemble, and reassemble. Meanwhile, the architect's competitor is making sure that *his* workers are well-disciplined and deeply devoted to the work they do for him.

I'll sure be glad when the architect's building crew takes the time to study the entire blueprint, especially those first 39 pages they want to ignore. And I'm sure the architect will be glad, too. □

B'NAI NOACH "SONS OF NOAH"  
**THE NOACHIDES**

Daniel Botkin

For the past ten years or so, a significant number of non-Jewish people have found themselves being drawn to the Torah. Most of these non-Jewish people are Bible-believing Christians, of course, and the great majority of them find that their faith in Yeshua is greatly strengthened by practicing the Torah. For a few, though, the effect is just the opposite. Instead of drawing them closer to Yeshua, their interest in Torah causes them to reject Him as the Messiah and deny Him. These people call themselves *B'nai Noach* ("Sons of Noah") or *Noachides*.

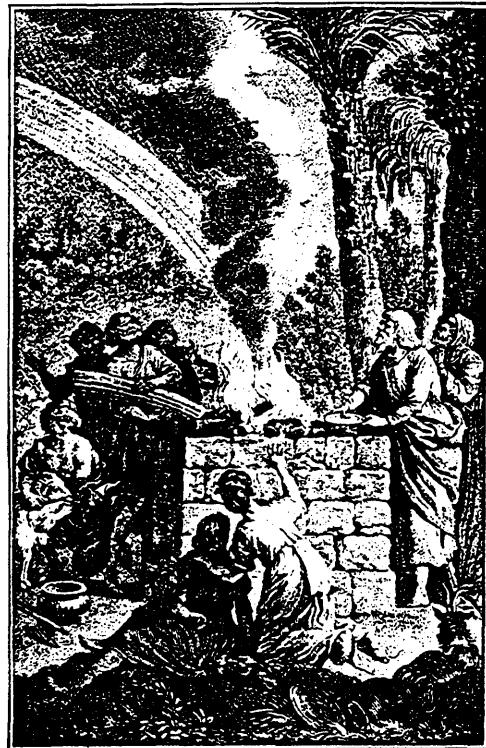
The Noachide movement first came into the public eye in March 1991, when the *Wall Street Journal* published a front-page article about J. David Davis and his congregation of Noachides in Tennessee. Davis was formerly an independent fundamentalist Baptist minister. In the winter of 1973-74, Davis began "searching for the historical Jesus." Through his study of the Bible and history, Davis came to realize that his fundamentalist Christianity was filled with theological errors and paganism.

So in 1989 Davis threw the paganism out of his theology. Unfortunately, he also threw out the proverbial baby with the bathwater. In this case the "baby" happened to be Yeshua of Nazareth, who has promised to deny before the Father all those who have denied Him.

Davis views Yeshua as "an idol coming between Man and God," in contrast to Paul's description of Yeshua as the "one mediator between God and men" (1 Tim. 2:5). Thousands of fundamentalist Christian families have followed Davis' example and become Noachides in recent years.

Noachides believe in following the so-called Seven Laws of Noah, which consist of six prohibitions (against idolatry, blasphemy, murder, sexual immorality, theft, and eating flesh cut from a living animal) and one positive command (to establish courts of justice).

These so-called Noachide laws should certainly be followed; how-



Noah Offering Sacrifices After the Flood

ever, they are not listed as a moral code in the Biblical story of Noah. If you do not believe this, hand a Bible to a person who has never heard of the Seven Laws of Noah, and ask him to identify the Seven Laws of Noah from the pages of the Bible. If he reads the story of Noah, he is liable to guess that two of the laws might be a prohibition against drunkenness and a command to honor parents. (See Gen. 9:20ff.)

The rabbis teach that the Seven Laws of Noah are the minimal requirement for Gentiles who wish to have their part in the *olam ha-ba*, the world to come. However, to find the concept of the Seven Noachide Laws, one must go not to the Bible, but to the Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 56, a-b.

"Every one who is a Ben Noah," writes *Jerusalem Post* reporter Gail Lichtman, "is so only because he or she accepts the Oral Law. Nowhere in the Bible are these laws stated. They are purely oral law phenomenon."

As a non-Jewish lover of the Torah, I normally rejoice when I hear

of other non-Jews who have discovered the joy of Torah. But I have no respect for Gentile apostates who deny the Lord Yeshua and make shipwreck of their faith. Wolves like J. David Davis have rejected Yeshua, the Living Torah, the Word made flesh, and traded Him for a dead letter, a religious system which denies Yeshua His rightful place at the right hand of the Father. The Noachides who once believed in the Messiah have exchanged Yeshua for Barabbas.

If our practice of the written Torah does not draw us closer to Yeshua, the Living Torah, then something is drastically wrong. And that something is neither the Torah nor Yeshua; it is our own evil heart.

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Yeshua the Messiah is come in the flesh is of God. And every spirit that confesseth not that Yeshua the Messiah is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of anti-Messiah, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is in the world. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. -1 John 4:1-4

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# BOOTH BUILDING

Daniel Botkin

The Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot* in Hebrew) is the last of the seven annual Feasts of Yahweh in Leviticus 23. Yahweh instructed His people to erect *sukkot* - "booths" covered with leafy branches - and to dwell in these temporary shelters during this week-long harvest festival.

"Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto Yahweh seven days. On the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before Yahweh your God seven days" (Lev. 23:39f).

The purpose of this holiday is stated in verse 43: "That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am Yahweh your God."

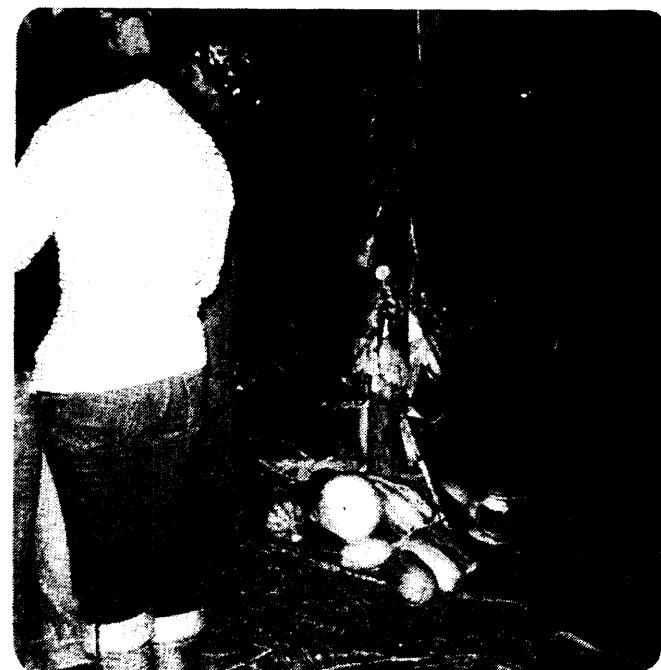
Spending a week in a fragile, temporary shelter points us back to our humble origins as a people who were taken out of slavery, led into the desert, and there forced to rely on the God who had delivered us. Sukkot reminds us that we have to depend on God, as our spiritual forefathers in the desert had to.

Sukkot not only points us back in history to our beginnings in the desert; Sukkot also points us forward in time to our future destiny in the Messianic kingdom. Zechariah 14 describes the Return of the Messiah, the destruction of the wicked, and the setting up of the Messianic kingdom in Jerusalem. Zechariah informs us that all the nations "shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, Yahweh of Hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles" (14:16). As the final feast, which takes place at the end of the harvest, Sukkot is a picture of the Messianic kingdom, that kingdom for which we pray when we say, "Thy kingdom come."

As a young disciple, I had read about this holiday in the Bible, and was aware of its memorial and prophetic significance. I had never seen it celebrated, though, until my wife and I went to Israel. In the fall of 1976, Teresa and I were living in Jerusalem. It was the week of Sukkot. On one of our evening walks, we passed by a synagogue and heard loud, lively music, accompanied by singing and shouting. We looked in an open window and we saw a large crowd of Orthodox men dancing in a circle and rejoicing before the Lord. We passed by that synagogue several nights that week, and every night we witnessed the same scene. The worship reminded us of the worship of Pentecostal Christians, so thereafter we always referred to that particular synagogue as "the Pentecostal



1978. The first Botkin-built booth.  
Bottom photo shows the center post inside the sukkah.



synagogue."

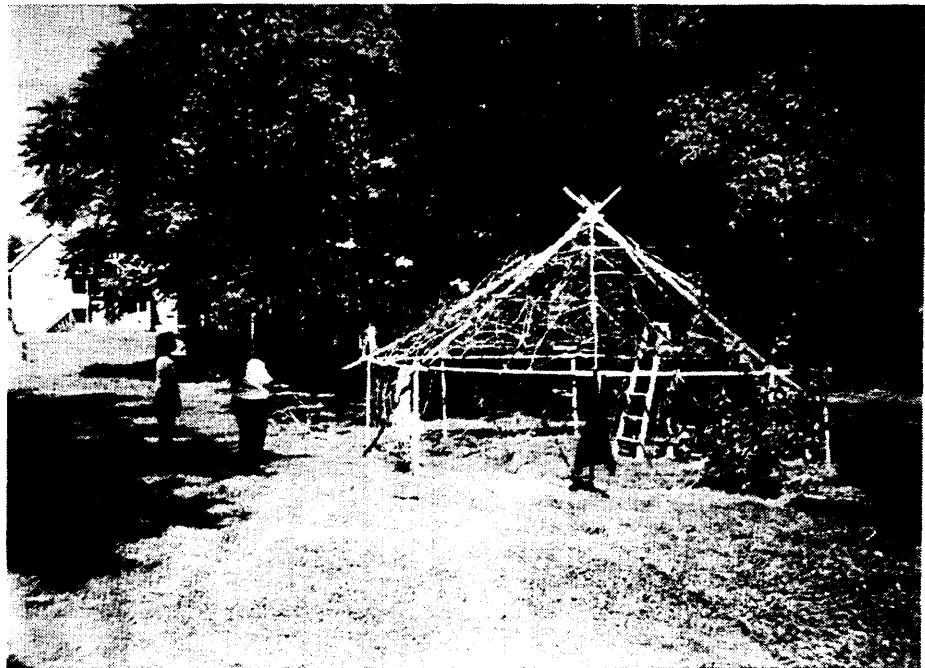
The first fall after our return home from Israel, we decided that it would be a good idea to build a booth and celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. We were attending an independent Pentecostal church at the time. I shared a little bit about the Feast of Tabernacles with the pastor and the congregation. I informed them that Teresa and I intended to build a booth, and I let them know anyone was welcome to join us for any or all of the evenings that week.

I was surprised at the positive response we got. A number of enthusiastic people came and helped us erect a large sukkah. We cut down small trees for the frame and wrapped string along the walls and roof. Then people foraged for natural materials to weave into the string - prairie grass, dried corn stalks, willow branches, etc. One brother got an old Christian flag at a garage sale, so we cut a tall pole and raised it up over the sukkah.

Because the sukkah was so large, the roof sagged in the middle. We raised the roof by sinking a supporting post in the middle of the floor. Then we decorated this center pole with gourds, ears of corn, fruit, flowers, and feathers. For the final touch we spread a thick layer of straw all over the floor to make comfortable seating.

Every night we had a campfire, singing, food and fellowship. This was 1978, and we had not yet seen the validity and the value of God's dietary laws, so I imagine some swine-flesh franks were probably cooked over our campfire that week. If any swine's flesh was consumed at our Feast of Tabernacles, God knew that we did not know any better, and He blessed us in spite of our ignorance.

This was the first of many sukkot that we have built over the years. Most years we have followed this same basic design and made our sukkah square or rectangular with a flat roof. A few times we did things a little differently. One year we made



1990. Octagonal "Indian teepee" sukkah under construction

an octagonal sukkah with a cone-shaped "Indian teepee" roof mounted on four-foot high walls. We were able to build a fire in the center of this sukkah, and let the smoke go out the top, just like the Indians! Another year we built an "A-frame" sukkah in a pine grove behind our house, and covered it with pine branches.

Last year we constructed a standard cube-shaped sukkah at the campground where we held the Feast. About midway through the Feast, though, a windstorm toppled our sukkah. We were able to resurrect it - sort of. For the remainder of the Feast, we had a sukkah that was no longer cube-shaped. It now had an A-shaped entry and a very low roof that slanted and tapered back to the ground at the rear of the sukkah. This made it rather crowded but very cozy. The reduction of floor space allowed us to pile the straw up much thicker than it had been, which delighted our two-and-a-half year old twin daughters. They sat in the deep straw and pretended that they were baby birds sitting in a nest.

Of all the holidays, Sukkot is my favorite. Erecting and decorating a sukkah with brothers and sisters provides wonderful camaraderie. It's

even better than building a house together, because with a house you have to pay close attention and be sure everything is just right. A sukkah only has to last for a week, though, so if a corner is not exactly square or if a wall leans a little to one side, it doesn't matter. I don't think I've ever heard brothers arguing or bickering about the details of construction while building a booth. All I've heard during my booth-building experience is brethren talking pleasantly to one another and whistling the theme song of "Gilligan's Island" as they laid branches on the roof of the sukkah.

This year Sukkot begins the evening of October 15. If you have never built a sukkah, let this be your first year to do so. If you need help with the design and construction, maybe you can get information from a local synagogue or from the library. Or maybe even from the Boy Scouts!

If you are free to travel that week, consider joining us at Zion Oaks Tabernacle Campground near Peoria. Call us for more information, (309) 698-9467.

*Happy Holiday!*

# NEHEMIAH AND THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

Daniel Botkin

One reason I like the Book of Nehemiah so much is because it is so relevant to the believers of our generation. Nehemiah was a man who had it made, by the world's standards. He had a cushy job in the palace as the king's cupbearer. All he had to do was smile and be pleasant while he served the king, and all would be fine.

But Nehemiah was a Jew. When he learned of the sad condition of the faithful remnant of Jews who had left the comforts of Babylon and returned to rebuild Jerusalem, Nehemiah had to go and join them. He left the pleasures of the palace and went to help rebuild the broken-down walls of Jerusalem.

Yahweh wants people today who will follow the example of Nehemiah and the faithful remnant who labored with him to rebuild the old waste places and repair the breaches in the walls. Those Jewish exiles who returned to the Promised Land had to abandon the comforts, the pleasures, the familiarity, and the worldly security that Babylon offered. Christians of this generation who want to be involved in the work of spiritual restoration can expect to pay the same price. For some, it may mean giving up a nice job and moving to a new, unfamiliar location, as Nehemiah did. For others, it may mean leaving a church that refuses to repent, and going to a small, struggling congregation that is working toward spiritual restoration.

Those who follow the example of Nehemiah can also expect the same kinds of problems that Nehemiah and his workers experienced. The enemy opposed them with words of discouragement, mockery, ridicule, angry threats, and subtle temptations to compromise. We can expect the same from our enemy, the devil.

Following the example of Nehemiah will also mean hard work. There was "much rubbish" that had to be cleared away (Neh. 4:10), and there is "much rubbish" in our lives, in our theology, and in our congregations that needs to be cleared away in order to get down to the original foundations of our faith.

As the adversaries of Nehemiah planned their attack, they said, "They

shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease" (4:11). This statement occurs immediately after the verse that mentions "much rubbish" (or "rubble" in some translations). Apparently the enemy was hiding behind the rubbish as he launched his attack on God's people. In the same way, our enemy the devil hides behind the spiritual rubbish that our spiritual forefathers left: the rubbish of white-washed pagan traditions, anti-Semitism, anti-nomian theology, etc. Getting rid of this rubbish angers the enemy, because it removes his refuge and exposes him.

Another important lesson from Nehemiah is that the work cannot be accomplished by one man, regardless of how gifted he is. Read Nehemiah chapter 3, and you will see a picture of God's people working side by side as a body, each individual in his appointed place, doing his appointed task. The independent builder, the believer who cannot work with other disciples, will accomplish nothing. He will only get in the way and hinder those people in the Body who are doing the real work.

Nehemiah and the remnant finished the walls of Jerusalem in the fall, just in time to celebrate the Fall Festivals of Yahweh. When their enemies heard about this, "they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived

that this work was wrought of our God" (6:16). When our work of restoration is finished and all of God's remnant prepares to celebrate the Feasts, our enemy the devil will be "much cast down in his own eyes" because he will know our work has been "wrought of our God."

After the walls of Jerusalem were erected, the people were able to focus their attention on the Torah. This was during the Fall Feasts, and they happened to read about the Feast of Tabernacles and the commandment to build booths. So the people went out and gathered "olive branches, pine branches, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written" (8:15).

The Bible says "they found written" and they did "as it is written." The amazing thing about their simple obedience to the written Word of God is this: The Bible says that "since the days of Joshua (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ, Yeshua) the son of Nun unto that day the children of Israel had not done so" (8:17). It did not matter to them that this commandment of the Torah had been neglected by God's people for approximately 1,000 years. What mattered to them was that "they found written in the law" that they should build booths and celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Fortunately, they did not have the attitude of some Christians today who disregard the Sabbath and Feast Days only because the Church as a whole has not honored these days since the days of our "Yeshua." If the remnant in Jerusalem had had that attitude, they would have said, "Now that's a strange idea! God's people haven't worshipped this way for over a thousand years, since the days of Yeshua. Surely this can't be important to God anymore!"

The Scripture says that they did "as it is written," and as a result of their simple obedience, "there was very great gladness" (8:17). If we want to experience "very great gladness," celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles this fall is a good way to start. Happy Holidays! □

# THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE OF GOD'S PEOPLE: DOES IT MATTER?

Daniel Botkin

*"For man looketh on the outward appearance, but Yahweh looketh on the heart."*  
(1 Sam. 16:7)

*"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess."*  
(Matt. 23:25)

Is God concerned about the outward appearance of His people? Do our decisions about clothing, hair styles, jewelry, and other such things matter to Him? Some Christians answer "No!" and as proof quote verses such as those above (divorced from their context, of course). Furthermore, anyone who dares to disagree and say "Yes, God does care about outward appearance" is considered a legalistic hypocrite who strains at gnats and swallows camels. Regardless of such accusations, I say Yes, God most definitely cares about our outward appearance.

Merely changing one's hair style and clothing does not impart spirituality, of course. Nor does getting a GI haircut and putting on a uniform magically transform a man into a trained soldier. Yet the soldier-in-training is expected to conform to the military standards of dress and appearance from the first day he enters training. The Lord of Hosts has established certain standards of dress and appearance for the people of His army, and these standards are neglected by a great number of Christians today.

Outward appearance is not the real issue, of course. Outward appearance which violates Scriptural guidelines is merely a very obvious symptom of a much deeper spiritual problem. The real problem underlying the abandonment of God's standards of dress and appearance is a problem that has its roots in compromise, rebellion, and a desire for more independence than God is willing to give.

Let me explain. Most normal people do not want to be outwardly and noticeably different from those around them. Normal people do not like being stared at by strangers and viewed as an oddity. So when the world pressures God's people to abandon God's standards and conform to the world's standards, it is very tempting for God's people to give in and compro-

mise.

This compromise and world-conformity pleases the world and relieves the Christian of the stigma of being peculiar. But "friendship of the world is enmity with God" and "whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). Therefore the Christian who ignores God's instructions about outward appearance is actually rebelling against God and claiming his independence from the standards God has set forth in His Word. If people do not recognize this as the real root of the problem, it will do no good to try to force them to "get into uniform."

"Cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter," Yeshua said, "that the outside of them may be clean also" (Matt. 23:26). The Lord clearly wants our outward appearance to conform to God's standards of holiness, but we must first recognize that our abandonment of God's standards is merely a symptom of our own internal rebellion against God. We resent God telling us how to dress or wear our hair. We want to decide for ourselves what is acceptable.

Once we have identified and acknowledged our rebellion as the real issue, we can let God take our rebellious nature to the cross and crucify it. We then come to the Father with a surrendered heart, willing to learn His ways and to walk in them. This will certainly change much more than our outward appearance. It will change our nature and our character, and this in turn will produce any necessary changes in our outward appearance. We will want to please our Heavenly Father. It will not matter to us whether or not our outward appearance pleases the world.

How we dress and wear our hair should never be the most important aspect of our faith. It should, however, be one of the things which identify us as one of God's children. There are several passages in the Bible which clearly show that God is concerned about these things. Here are some of them, with brief comments:

*"...and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons ... Unto Adam also and to his wife did Yahweh God make coats of skins, and clothed them"* (Ge. 3:7, 21).

Man's very first attempt at proper dress was a failure. God corrected Adam and Eve's misconceptions about proper clothing, and He has had to continue correcting His people ever since.

*"...neither shall a garment mingled of linen and wool come upon thee"* (Ex. 19:19).

God clearly prohibits the wearing of a linen-wool blend. He gives no explanation or reason for this prohibition; He simply commands it and expects His people to obey.

*"You shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard"* (Lev. 19:27).

*"...if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him ... But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory for her* (1 Cor. 11:14f).

If any hair style were acceptable to God, He would not give instructions concerning hair styles.

*"Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am Yahweh"* (Lev. 19:28).

God forbids the mutilation of our body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The recent popularity of tattoos and bizarre body piercings is one more sign of our nation's disregard for God's commandments.

*"And the priest shall set the woman [suspected of adultery] before Yahweh, and uncover her head..."* (Num. 5:18).

We can conclude from this verse (and history confirms it) that a woman's normal clothing in Biblical times included a head covering. The absence of a head covering marked a woman as someone suspected of adultery. This is probably what Paul had in mind when he wrote that "every woman that prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head [i.e., her husband]" (1 Cor. 11:5).

*"Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make themselves fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put*

*upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue. And it shall be unto you a fringe, that ye may look upon it and remember all the commandments of Yahweh, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye used to go a whoring" (Num. 15:38).*

*"Thou shalt make thee fringes upon the four quarters of thy vesture, wherewith thou coverest thyself" (Deut. 22:12).*

These verses are the basis for the *tallit* ("prayer shawl") and *tsitsit* (fringes).

*"The woman shall not wear that which pertains to a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto Yahweh thy God" (Deut. 22:5).*

People may disagree about cultural differences and whether or not certain garments (usually pants) "pertain to a man," but one thing is clear: God expects gender-specific clothing, and those who violate this are described as "abomination unto Yahweh," a phrase which carries with it the strongest condemnation possible. Even if the Bible said nothing else about clothing, this verse alone would be proof that God cares what His people wear.

*"When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment ... I coveted them, and took them" (Josh. 7:21).*

Achan's desire to dress like a Babylonian cost him his life and the life of his entire family.

*"Jezebel ... she painted her face" (2 Kings 9:30).*

One of the very few places where makeup is specifically mentioned in the Bible. (The other references are in a negative context as well - Jer. 4:30 & Ezk. 23:40.) Do women of God really want to follow the example of Jezebel?

*"...there met him a woman with the attire of a harlot" (Prov. 7:10).*

The clothing of God's people should be easily distinguishable from "the attire of a harlot." Among some Christian women this is not the case.

*"As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion" (Prov. 11:22).*

God expects women (and men) to be discreet in choosing modest clothing.

*"I [God] will punish ... all such as are clothed with strange apparel" (Zeph. 1:8).*

Clothing which the world calls acceptable is often viewed as "strange apparel" by God; clothing which God calls acceptable is often viewed as "strange apparel" by the world.

*"Who can find a virtuous woman? ... Strength and honor are her clothing" (Prov. 31:10, 25).*

*"Whose adorning let it not be [merely] that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves..." (1 Pet. 3:3-5).*

*"In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" (1 Tim. 2:9f).*

*"Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and seductive eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet ... In that day the Lord will take away the beauty of their anklets, headbands, crescent ornaments, dangling earrings, bracelets, veils, headdresses, ankle chains, sashes, perfume boxes, amulets, finger rings, nose rings, festal robes, outer tunics, cloaks, money purses, hand mirrors, undergarments, turbans, and veils" (Isa. 3:16, 18-23).*

The Bible does not condemn the wearing of every single item of clothing and jewelry listed in the verses above. However, when the daughters of Zion concern themselves with their outward adornment and physical beauty, and neglect the inward adornment and spiritual beauty, then these items become offensive to God.

\*

It is obvious from the above Scriptures

that outward appearance is important to God. God's remark to Samuel ("man looks on the outward appearance, but Yahweh looks on the heart") must be read in context. Samuel thought that one of David's older brothers must be "the Lord's anointed" because they were all tall and handsome. God was simply telling Samuel that when Yahweh chooses to anoint someone for a task, He does not base His choice on how tall or handsome the person is, but on the condition of his heart. This does not mean that God is not concerned about the outward appearance of His people. He is concerned, as the above verses show. If this were not so, Satan would not be so busy inspiring people to violate the Biblical standards.

We are dealing with something much deeper and much more serious than clothes and hair; we are dealing with the authority of God. Those who knowingly defy God's instructions are defying God and questioning His right to command His people.

Satan's goal is to blur the distinction of the sexes, because the distinction of the sexes is a testimony to the authority God has established on earth. God created the human race male and female. There are gender-specific roles in the family and there are gender-specific roles in the Body of Messiah. Satan is doing all he can to blur those distinctions, and his efforts extend even to clothing and hair styles. Working through the feminists, the sodomites, and the fashion designers, Satan changes the world's definition of what is modest, what is appropriate for men, and what is appropriate for women. A short time after the world has accepted these changes, the Church embraces them, and anyone who questions the wisdom of this is called a legalist.

Bible-believing Christians know that Satan is attacking marriages and the family. Few realize, though, that one important strategy of Satan's attack is to blur the distinction of male and female roles by persuading people that gender-specific clothing and hair styles are not important. The very fact that Satan is hard at work in this area should tell us that it must be important. This should give God's people all the more reason to take a strong stand against the unisex trend.

The Enemy's attempt to blur the distinction of the sexes should cause God's people to go on the offensive and make it a special point to wear clothing and hair styles which clearly distinguish males from females. My beard and my

pants distinguish me from my wife; my wife's long hair, dress, and head covering distinguish her from me. This serves as a silent testimony to Satan, to the angels, to the world, and to the Church that God has authority in the earth. Proper clothing and hair do not produce holiness, but true holiness will result in proper clothing and hair.

This subject always brings up dozens of questions. Usually the questions are raised by people like the lawyer in the New Testament who, "willing to justify himself," asked, "And who is my neighbor?" ("And who decides what is 'modest'? And who decides what is 'costly array'? And who decides what 'pertains to a man'?)

There are legitimate questions, of course. Should all these things be left up to the individual? Or should a community of believers use the Bible to establish guidelines for a community standard? Most Christians balk at such a suggestion. "*A dress code!?*" they shriek. "*Are you kidding!?*" While I do not particularly care for the words "dress code," it should be pointed out that establishing a community standard of dress and appearance, *and sticking to it*, is one thing that has helped certain groups (Orthodox Jews, Amish, Mennonite, and other Christian "plain people") survive as distinct groups.

The purpose of this article is not to deal with all the specific details. The purpose of this article is simply to awaken God's people to the fact that these things really do matter.

Some people will no doubt think I am majoring in minors by even writing about this subject. Anyone who feels this way should consider the fact that the Apostles and Prophets were inspired by the Holy Spirit to rebuke, correct, and give instructions to God's people about proper dress and appearance. From what I have seen in some churches, I believe our generation needs to hear and heed these words of the Apostles and Prophets. □

For further reading, I recommend *Why Do They Dress That Way?* by Stephen Scott (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1986).



## SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE

DANIEL BOTKIN

A certain man owned a large field. The man had two sons who tilled the ground and planted and harvested the crops. In the center of the field was an immense boulder. The father told his two sons that this rock was very valuable.

"You will learn that there are many things which make this rock precious," the father told them, "but I want to tell you about one benefit the rock will provide for you. This rock will cast a shadow and make a nice, cool place for you to rest from your toil. The rock won't cast the shadow every day, though. It's a supernatural rock, and it will only cast the shadow every seven days, plus a few times a year on certain holidays. On the days when the rock casts its shadow, I want you to take the day off. Lay down your tools, come out of the hot field, step into the shade, get close to the rock, and enjoy one another's company."

Sure enough, on the seventh day the rock cast a shadow. The first son laid down his tools, stepped into the shadow, and sat down close to the rock. "Aren't you coming?" he asked his brother.

"No, I think I'll wait til tomorrow,"

the second son replied. "I think I'll do some yard work today, go shopping, and clean the house."

So the second son spent the day working, shopping, and cleaning, while his brother sat and enjoyed the cool shadow of the rock.

The next day the first son, greatly refreshed from having rested in the rock's shadow, went back to work in the field. The second son said to himself, "I guess I'll go sit in the shade today."

When he arrived at the rock, though, there was no shadow.

"Oh, well," he said. "I can still sit close to the rock and just relax. I don't

need a mere shadow."

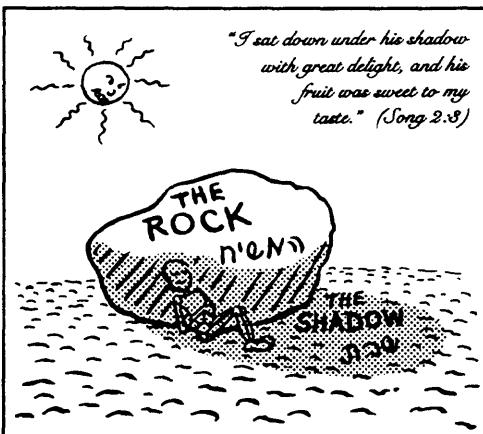
He sat by the rock, but the heat of the sun beat down on him all day long. Without the shadow, his rest was not nearly as refreshing as the rest his brother had gotten a day earlier, when the shadow was there.

Year after year this arrangement continued. The first son rested in the shadow of the rock every seventh day, and the second son rested in the hot sun the following day.

The first son really learned to appreciate the rock and the shade it provided for him every seventh day. Many times he tried to persuade his brother to step into the shade with him. The second son always declined the invitation. "It's only a mere shadow," he said.

Now tell me: Which son was wiser?

The Sabbath and holy days are a shadow of things to come. (Col. 2:16f) They *are* a shadow, not "were" a shadow which existed only before the Messiah. They are a shadow of *things to come*, not just of things that have already come with the first Advent of the Messiah. □



# **FEAR OF FAILURE**

**Daniel Botkin**

I believe that most people live far below their potential. One of the things that prevents people from even attempting to reach their full potential is *kakorrhaphiophobia* - a fear of failure or defeat.

It saddens me to see gifted people who are afraid to use their talents and abilities because they fear failure. Many people who fear failure do so because they failed at something in the past. Rather than risk the disappointment and humiliation of another failure, they settle for far less than God has for them. Like the servant in the Biblical parable who buried his talent, they say, "I was afraid" (Mt. 25:25), and these three words become their epitaph.

Failure can certainly be a very depressing experience. Our goals and hopes and dreams do not materialize, and we feel ashamed, inadequate, and humiliated. It is normal to be disappointed when we fail at something, but it is not necessary to let ourselves be emotionally crippled or paralyzed by our failures. One failure does not mean that we are doomed to fail at everything we try. We can try again, even if we have to set new goals that are entirely different from the goals we had hoped to reach.

Many of the great accomplishments of history were carried out by people who had failed many times before they succeeded. Abraham Lincoln faced failure many times before he became President. Thomas Edison's perseverance in the face of repeated failures gave the world the electric light. The early sermons of the great evangelist D.L. Moody were so pathetic that a friend told him he would best serve the Lord by keeping quiet.

The Bible records the stories of many men who failed and made a comeback. Moses' initial efforts to deliver the Israelites from Egypt resulted in exile for Moses. But when he returned to Egypt forty years later, it was in the power of God. Thomas



was rebuked for doubting the testimony of the witnesses who had seen the risen Lord, but Thomas went on to carry the gospel to India, and died there as a martyr. After boasting, "I will never deny you!" Peter denied knowing his Master three times. About two months later, though, Peter boldly proclaimed the message of the Resurrection to a large crowd of stunned onlookers, and about 3,000 people were baptized that day as the result of Peter's preaching.

There were many other people in the Bible who failed miserably but later were given the opportunity to make things right. The example that most amazes me is the story of King Manasseh. God had commanded that every king write his own copy of a Torah scroll, and read the Law of God all the days of his life, "that he may learn to fear Yahweh his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them" (Deut. 17:18f). Manasseh's father, King Hezekiah, was a godly man, but when he died, Manasseh abandoned the God of his father.

Manasseh led Israel into idolatry of the worst kind. He set up idols and altars to pagan gods throughout the land. He embraced occult practices, he shed innocent blood, and he even sacrificed his children in the fires of the Valley of Hinnom. The Bible says that "Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen" (2 Chron. 33:9).

God sent prophets to warn Manasseh to turn from his wickedness, but he ignored their warnings. Finally, the Lord sent the king of Assyria against Manasseh. Defeated, Manasseh was bound in chains and led into exile and captivity with a hook through his nose. But that is not the end of the story. In the next verse, we read these amazing words:

"And when he [Manasseh] was in distress, he entreated Yahweh his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. When he prayed to Him, He was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem to his kingdom" (2 Chron. 33:12f).

Restored to his throne, Manasseh immediately set out to make amends for the damage he had done. He purged the land of pagan idols and altars, repaired the altar of Yahweh, and "commanded Judah to serve Yahweh, the God of Israel" (2 Chron. 33:16).

Some people think that the Old Testament portrays God as a harsh, stern God who will not easily pardon people for their sins and failures. However, we see from the story of Manasseh that God is willing to forgive the worst of failures when the person sincerely repents and turns to God in prayer.

Perhaps you have failed at being a good parent. Or maybe you have failed to be a good son or daughter, or a good brother or sister, or a good friend. Regardless of the mess we have made of things, God is able and willing to forgive us and, in most cases, to restore and mend broken relationships with family members or friends.

If we have failed in our human relationships or if we have failed to reach goals we feel we should have reached, we do not need to despair and give up. Prayer and repentance are much more productive than despair. If God heard the sincere prayers of a terrible person like Manasseh, there is no reason to think that He will not hear our prayers and give us another chance to do things right. □

# THE VIRGIN BIRTH AND THE INCARNATION

Daniel Botkin, Litt. D.

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" ~John 1:1, 14*

*"Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" -Matthew 1:21-23*

It puzzles me when I hear people object to the possibility of the Messiah's Virgin Birth because they find the idea "too hard to believe." After all, if there is an all-powerful God who created the entire universe out of nothing, why should it be difficult for this same God to create a baby out of a virgin's womb if He wants to?

I am especially surprised that many Jewish people find the idea of a virgin birth hard to believe. If Jewish people believe their own Scriptures, then they believe that God made the first man, Adam, out of the non-living dust of the ground. So why should it seem impossible for God to make the Messiah out of the womb of a living virgin? Which is the greater miracle?

God brought forth a woman, Eve, from the rib of a man; why can't He bring forth a man from the womb of a virgin? If we want to get really technical, we could view the creation of Eve as a "virgin birth." Adam was a virgin, and God brought forth a woman from this male virgin. In the Old Testament, God brought forth a woman from a male virgin; in the New Testament He brought forth a man from a female virgin.

Another New Testament teaching many people struggle with is the Incarnation - John's claim that "the Word was God" and "the Word was made flesh." Years ago I read a story about a man who refused to believe in Jesus because the idea of the Incarnation seemed too far-fetched. "Why would God want to dwell in human flesh?" he asked.

One winter night this man's wife and

daughter were at church, and together they prayed that God would somehow show this husband and father the truth about Jesus.

In response to their prayer, God sent a flock of birds to their house, where the man was home alone. The man looked out the window and saw the flock of shivering, hungry birds sitting on the snow in his front yard. Feeling compassion for the birds, he decided to open the garage door and put some bird seed on the garage floor, so the birds could have some warmth and food.

He got everything ready, but the birds refused to come into the garage. They just stayed there shivering in the cold. The man tried everything he could think of to coax them into the garage. He turned the garage lights on. He turned the garage lights off. He made a trail of seeds leading up to the garage. He tried to chase the birds into the garage, but this only frightened them and scattered them further away from the garage.

In his frustration, the man thought to himself, "If only I could communicate with them, speak to them in their own language! I could tell them they don't need to fear, that there's warmth and food inside. If only I could just be one of them long enough to show them the way, by going in myself, as a bird, as one of their flock, as one of their own kind."

Suddenly it dawned on the man that this is what the Incarnation is all about. The man fell on his knees in the snow and looked up at the stars and wept. He had found God in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth.

I do not claim to understand all the mysteries of the Virgin Birth and Incarnation. I only know that in some way God came to humanity, in the Person of Yeshua of Nazareth, long enough to show us the Way. We are like a flock of cold, miserable, hungry birds, shivering, starving, suffering in a cold, sinful world. But if we simply follow the One who, for a season, became one of us, we have nothing to fear. He will lead us to a place of warmth and safety, where there is food

to satisfy our spiritual longings.

Too many people get too hung up trying to understand the mysteries of the Virgin Birth and Incarnation. Some of God's truths are beyond human comprehension, and we waste our time trying to make these things understandable to man's limited ability to comprehend all the mysteries of God.

"The secret things belong unto Yahweh our God," Scripture says, "but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this Torah" (Deut, 29:29). God wants us to be more concerned about "those things which are revealed" so that "we may do all the words of this Torah." It is not so important to God that we be able to explain His anatomy. He is more concerned that we simply love Him and follow Him as our Master taught us to do.

Richard Wurmbrand put it this way: "A Christian is a person who is madly in love with Christ. Juliet could not make a peroration about the anatomy of Romeo's body. She could only caress him and express to everybody her burning desire for him." (*Sermons in Solitary Confinement*, p.186)

Romeo did not want Juliet to travel around giving formal lectures describing Romeo's anatomy. He did not want her to spend time writing articles that explained how Romeo's internal organs functioned. What Romeo wanted most from Juliet was her love, her time, and her attention.

And this is what God wants most from us. We are not required to understand and explain all the details of the Virgin Birth and Incarnation. We can simply believe the Divine record of these events, just as we believe the Divine record of the creation of Adam and Eve. Rather than trying to understand "the secret things" which "belong unto Yahweh our God," let us focus on "those things which are revealed" so that "we may do all the words of this Torah." □

# GOD'S DIETARY LAWS: ABOLISHED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

Daniel Botkin, Litt. D.

**READERS:** The purpose of this article is not to condemn or insult those who hold to the standard Christian teaching that God's dietary laws are abolished under the New Covenant. The purpose of the article is to examine the New Testament passages which are commonly quoted in support of this teaching, and to show that these passages do not really teach what most Christians think they teach. -DB

The Bible tells us that there was a distinction between clean and unclean animals for at least a thousand years before the Torah was given to Moses. This distinction between clean and unclean animals is mentioned in Gen. 7:2 and 8:20, in the account of Noah's Flood. Genesis does not tell us which animals were clean and which were unclean, but it is obvious that Noah knew the difference.

About a thousand years later, when the Torah was given to Moses, God went into great detail and listed which animals were clean (kosher; fit for human consumption) and which were unclean (non-kosher; not fit for human consumption). The entire 11th chapter of Leviticus is devoted to this subject. A shorter version of the list is repeated in Deuteronomy 14.

Orthodox Jews take these commandments literally, and do not eat pork, shellfish, or any of the other forbidden meats. Christians, on the other hand, feel that there is nothing wrong with eating these things. Many Christians (and doctors and nutritionists, too) will admit that people would be a lot healthier if they followed God's dietary laws, and a small number of Christians actually do make an effort to avoid meat from unclean animals. But the great majority of Christians do not view the dietary laws as Divine commandments which ought to be obeyed.

A number of arguments have been put forth to support the standard Christian position. Probably the oldest argument is drawn from the Second Century *Epistle of Barnabas*. The writer spiritualizes the dietary laws, and says that the various unclean animals

represent different types of behavior which a Christian should not engage in. While there may be a legitimate analogy here (Christians shouldn't behave like pigs, etc.), the analogy does not prove that God does not want His people to take the commandments literally and abstain from these meats.

Of course the most common argument against the validity of the dietary laws is the claim that God abolished them in the New Testament. This claim is often coupled with the idea that God originally gave the dietary laws because people didn't have refrigeration in Old Testament times. I've got news for you. People didn't have refrigeration in New Testament times, either. If God's dietary commandments had anything at all to do with the absence of refrigeration, He wouldn't have "abolished" them until about a hundred years ago, when refrigeration was invented.

There are six New Testament passages which can give the impression that God did, indeed, abolish the dietary commandments which He established in the Old Testament. However, a close look at these passages reveals that they really prove no such thing. The only way a person can use any of these passages to "prove" the nullifying of the dietary laws is to 1) ignore the context of the passage; 2) ignore the historical background of the passage; 3) ignore what the rest of the Bible says about the subject; 4) ignore the implications and logical conclusions of this theological position.

Before we look at the six New Testament passages, let us consider two important questions: 1) Were the dietary laws, as written in the Bible, man-made traditions, or were they commandments of God? Bible-believers must admit that these were, indeed, commandments which God expected His people to obey. 2) Did the Son of God teach His disciples to disobey the commandments of God? Some might think this is a ridiculous question, yet this is exactly what some Christians actually believe Jesus did in Matt. 15, the first passage we will look at.

MATT. 15:11, 17f

"Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man ... Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man."

Many sincere Christians believe that Jesus abolished the Old Testament dietary laws when He made these statements. This idea is given further support in modern translations of the parallel passage in Mark 7:19, where the NASB adds "(Thus He declared all foods clean)" and the NIV says "(In saying this, Jesus declared all foods 'clean.')"

What most Christians do not know is that this parenthetic interpretation of Jesus' words does not exist in the *Textus Receptus*, the "Received Text" that was accepted by the Church as the only authoritative Greek New Testament text until about a hundred years ago. This parenthetic interpretation of Jesus' words was obviously a comment that some scribe wrote in the margin of the text. Later scribes accidentally or deliberately incorporated the marginal comment into the text itself, so the statement appears only in corrupted texts. But the statement does not appear in the *Textus Receptus*, which is why the KJV says nothing about Jesus "declaring all foods clean."

Let us examine this passage, though, and see if Yeshua really was declaring all foods clean. If we back up a few verses, we see Yeshua rebuking the scribes and Pharisees for disobeying the commandments of God: "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God?" He asks them. "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men. You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! You invalidate the word of God by your tradition." After making statements like these, are we to suppose that Jesus would then set aside and invalidate one of the com-

mandments of God by declaring "all foods," including meats God had forbidden, "clean"? If so, this would make Jesus either a hypocrite, or stupid, or both. These are charges I would certainly not want to make against Him! Yet this is exactly what the standard Christian position makes Him out to be.

The real meaning of Yeshua's words can be clarified by looking at the context. The controversy in this chapter was not over whether or not pork is kosher. The controversy was initiated when the scribes and Pharisees criticized Yeshua's disciples for eating with unwashed hands. The Pharisees believed that *Shibta*, an evil spirit, sat upon the hands at night, and this spirit had to be washed off before eating. (*Dake Reference Bible*, 42, fn.r) Jewish beliefs about hand washing are stated in the Talmud:

- "A person who despises the washing of the hands before a meal is to be excommunicated" (Ber. 47b).
- "Whoever eats bread without first washing his hands is as though he had sinned with a harlot" (Sot. 4b).
- "Whoever makes light of the washing of his hands will be uprooted from the world" (Sot. 4b).
- "Whoever eats bread without scouring his hands is as though he eats unclean bread" (Sot. 4b).

These beliefs are rooted in the traditions of men, not in the commandments of God. When Yeshua made His statements that seem to be "declaring all foods clean," He was simply saying that kosher food does not become unkosher if it is eaten with unwashed hands. He was simply disagreeing with the belief that "whoever eats bread without scouring his hands is as though he eats unclean bread." His final statement makes it clear that this was the point He was making: "...but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man" (Mt. 15:20).

The issue was not over whether or not pork and shellfish are kosher. God had already made that clear in the Torah. The issue was over whether or not unwashed hands caused kosher food to become unkosher. The only way we can say He "declared all foods clean" is to say that He "declared all kosher foods clean," even if eaten with unwashed hands. Yeshua, a Torah-

observant Jew, would not have considered pork or shell fish to be "food."

## ACTS 10

Acts 10 tells about Peter's vision of a great sheet descending from heaven. The sheet is filled with unclean animals, and a voice says, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." Peter says, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean."

This was many years after the Crucifixion and Resurrection. If Yeshua had "declared all foods clean" several years earlier, Peter certainly didn't know anything about it! Yet many Christians believe that God sent this vision to tell Peter that He had "changed His mind" about the dietary laws, and abolished them. However, the context shows that the vision had nothing at all to do with a change in God's dietary laws.

The message of the vision was that God was cleansing the Gentiles through their faith in the Messiah, and God wanted these Gentiles to be part of the Body of Messiah, a body which at this time consisted of only native-born Jews and of proselytes who had undergone a full, formal conversion to Judaism. The unclean animals in the sheet were symbolic of the Gentile nations. This kind of symbolism would not have seemed unusual to Peter, a Jew who was familiar with the Scriptures. In the writings of the Prophets, the Gentile nations are symbolized by unclean animals such as the eagle, the lion, the bear, and the leopard. (See Ezk. 17 & Dan. 7).

To properly understand Peter's vision, we must put ourselves in Peter's shoes. Like the Messiah he followed, Peter was a Torah-observant man. He knew God had clearly commanded His people to not eat certain animals. This is why he said, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything common or unclean."

To put yourself in Peter's shoes, imagine that you, as a born-again Christian man, go into a trance and see a great sheet let down from heaven. The sheet is filled with naked women. You hear a voice address you by name and say, "Arise, take and commit adultery!"

Like Peter, you would be taken aback by such a vision, because you know that the Scriptures clearly forbid

such an act. The only conclusion you could draw from such a vision would be: a) it is of the devil; or b) it is of the Lord, but certainly not meant to be taken in a literal sense.

When the messengers of Cornelius arrived, Peter understood that the vision was indeed from the Lord. The fact that these men were Gentiles led Peter to understand the true meaning of the vision: "God hath shown me that I should call no MAN common or unclean" (Acts 10:28). Peter's explanation makes it clear that the vision was meant to be understood in a figurative sense.

Peter had the brains to know that God would not command him to do something that the Scriptures clearly forbid. Peter understood that the vision had nothing at all to do with a change in the dietary laws; it was God's way of showing Peter His intention to graft the Gentiles into the commonwealth of Israel through their faith in Israel's Messiah. And those grafted into Israel should obey the commandments which God gave to Israel.

## COL. 2:16

"Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink," Paul wrote. Does this mean that Christians are absolutely free from any dietary restrictions? If that is the case, then I can be a glutton and a drunkard. "But gluttony and drunkenness are condemned in other Bible passages!" you object. True. And eating meat from unclean animals is condemned in other Bible passages, too.

As with other New Testament passages, we just need to look at the context of this statement to understand its intended meaning. Verses 13 & 14 tell us we have been forgiven because the "certificate of debt" has been "taken out of the way." This "certificate of debt" is not God's Torah. This is the *χειρογράφον* (*cheirographon*). This word is used only one time in the New Testament. It is a legal term used in extra-Biblical Greek writings, and it means "certificate of indebtedness" (Gingrich Lexicon). In this context, it means that the *record of our sins* has been thrown out of God's Court. Because the Messiah died for our sins, this record of our transgressions is inadmissible evidence in the Courtroom of Heaven. Because of the work of our

Advocate, Yeshua, we have triumphed over our accuser (verse 15). It is *for this reason* that we are to let no man judge us: "Let no man *therefore* judge you..." The word "therefore" points us back to the previous verses which I have just discussed. One way we could paraphrase the passage is this:

- You have been forgiven. (v. 13)
- The record of your sins has been removed from God's Courtroom through the work of your Advocate, Yeshua. (v. 14)
- He triumphed over your accuser, the devil, so you can be victorious over sin. (v. 15)
- For that reason ["therefore"], don't give anyone the opportunity to condemn you ["let no man judge you"] in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or the new moon, or the sabbath days. In other words, through the Messiah you have the power to obey the commandments of God which regulate these things. Therefore walk in obedience so that no man can condemn you for not obeying God's commandments regarding food, drink, holy days, new moon, and sabbaths.
- These things are important because they are shadows [not "were" shadows] of things yet to come [not "of things that have already come"]. (v. 17)

The above paraphrase affirms God's dietary laws rather than abolishing them. Even if someone wants to interpret Col. 2:16 to mean "don't worry about dietary laws," the context forces us to understand this to mean "don't worry about *man-made* regulations concerning food and drink." The entire passage is dealing with man-made regulations of human origin:

- "...lest any MAN should beguile you" (2:4)
- "Beware lest any MAN spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of MEN..." (2:8)
- "Let no MAN therefore judge you..." (2:16)
- "Let no MAN beguile you..." (2:18)
- "...why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances ... after the commandments and doctrines of MEN?" (2:20-22)

Six times the word *man/men* is mentioned in Col. 2. Even the NIV acknowledges that these verses are talking not about God's commandments, but about man-made regulations: The

NIV titles this section "Freedom From Human Regulations Through Life With Christ." Paul was dealing with teachers who were imposing *man-made* regulations as a means to attaining spirituality. Paul was not saying that the laws of God's Torah are not important. Indeed, the word *law* does not appear even one time in the entire Book of Colossians.

#### 1 TIM. 4:1-5

Paul tells Timothy that "in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." One mark of these deluded apostates is "commanding to abstain from meats which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving by those who know the truth." Paul continues: "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving. For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."

Is this passage telling us that we can disregard God's commandments that forbid the eating of unclean animals? We might come to this conclusion if we ignore two phrases which qualify and limit the meaning of "every creature." The first qualifying phrase is "which God hath created to be received [i.e., received as food; created to be eaten]." Which creatures did God create to be received as food? Did God create swine, shellfish, rats, maggots, lizards, bats and moles to be received as food? Obviously the phrase "every creature" means "every creature which God created to be received as food."

How do we know which creatures God created to be received as food? The answer to that question is in the second qualifying phrase, "sanctified by the word of God." Where does the Word of God tell us which animals are sanctified and set apart to be received as food? In Leviticus 11 & Deuteronomy 14, the chapters that give the dietary laws.

If we say that "every creature" is *not* limited and qualified by the phrases "which God hath created to be received" and "sanctified by the word of God," then we have a problem, because the meat of some animals is poisonous and will kill a person. These creatures are obviously not intended to be received as food.

Words such as *all* and *every* are

often limited in their meaning. In this same epistle Paul tells Timothy that God "richly gives us all things to enjoy" (6:17). Does "all" in this verse mean "all" in an unlimited sense? Does God give us *Playboy* magazine and other pornography to enjoy? Does He give us our neighbor's wife to enjoy? Does He give us heroin, cocaine, and marijuana to enjoy? Obviously "all things" does not include those things which God has forbidden, nor those things which are deadly. In the same way, "every creature" does not include those animals which God has forbidden.

We see a similar use of "every" in Gen. 1:29, where God says to Adam, "Behold, I have given you EVERY herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth ... to you it shall be for food." Does this mean that all herbs are suitable to eat? How about hemlock, poison ivy, and marijuana? In the 1960s I saw a hippie poster with this Bible verse from Genesis in bold letters superimposed over a large marijuana leaf. Under the Bible verse in smaller letters it read, "This has been overruled by a 'higher authority.'"

The standard Christian position declares that there are no restrictions on what we eat. But Christians do not think through to the logical implications of this theological position. If there are no restrictions, then we cannot criticize people who eat marijuana brownies. We cannot criticize gluttons and drunks. We cannot even criticize cannibals, for man is also one of God's creatures!

#### LUKE 10:8 & 1 COR. 10:27

"...eat such things as are set before you" (Luke 10:8).  
"...Whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake" (1 Cor. 10:27).

Did Yeshua mean that when we are a guest we should eat anything a host offers us, even if it is meat which God has forbidden in the Torah? Did Paul mean that we should not even ask whether or not the meat is from an unclean animal?

There are a few things we need to consider. Let's look at Luke 10:8 first. Yeshua spoke these words when He sent out the seventy. These were seventy Torah-observant Jews who followed a Torah-observant Rabbi.

Rabbi Yeshua had told His disciples, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6).

It is obvious from this statement that the disciples would be lodging in Torah-observant Jewish homes, where the kosher laws were followed. It is ridiculous to suppose that the disciples might have been offered a pork chop in one of these Jewish homes. Even if this very unlikely possibility had occurred, the disciples would have had enough sense to know that this is not what their Master meant when He said to "eat such things as are set before you." He simply meant to be content with the food which your host provided.

Paul's statement in 1 Cor. is very similar to Yeshua's statement, but the context is quite different. Paul is dealing with the question of eating food which has been offered to idols. The New Testament clearly teaches that it is wrong for Christians to eat food offered to idols. Four times this is written, in Acts 15:20 & 21:25 and in Rev. 2:14 & 2:20. On the surface, Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 8 seems to contradict these verses in Acts and Revelation. But Paul clarifies the issue in 1 Cor. 10, when he writes that "the things which the Gentiles sacrifice [to idols], they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and the table of devils" (v. 20f).

The problem the Corinthians were facing was this: They did not want to eat meat which had been offered to idols. Sometimes meat sold in the public markets came from animals which had been sacrificed to idols. It might be difficult or impossible to find out whether or not a specific cut of beef came from a cow which had been offered to an idol. Should the Corinthian Christians continue to buy meat at the public market, not knowing whether or not the animal had been offered to an idol?

Paul answered this question: "Whatsoever is sold in the market, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake" (1 Cor. 10:25). Apparently Paul was telling the Corinthians that a person was guilty of eating meat offered to idols

only if he knew that the meat had been offered to an idol. If a host offering you meat happened to say, "This was offered in sacrifice to idols," Paul said that a Christian should "eat not" (10:28). But if the host said nothing, then the Christian was free to eat the meat. It is in this context that Paul writes "whatever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake" (10:27). In other words, do not ask whether or not the meat has been offered to idols. However, this does not mean that we cannot ask what kind of animal the meat came from.

Here is a real-life illustration. In 1989 I was standing with some friends near a Hindu temple in India. A Hindu man took some dried fruit from a plate sitting at the foot of one of the idols outside the temple. He came over and offered us some. Because I knew it was food which had been offered to an idol, I politely refused it. Yet I felt free to eat in Indian restaurants, because I had no way of knowing whether or not the food being served to me had previously been offered to idols.

Many well-meaning Christians believe that Jesus' and Paul's instructions to "eat what is set before you" means that a missionary should not refuse food that a host offers, even if it is meat from an unclean animal. Refusing the food might insult the host and hinder him from accepting the gospel. Again, Christians do not think through to the logical implications and conclusion of this position. If it is permissible (and actually preferable) to knowingly disobey God's dietary laws to avoid offending one's host, then why would it not be permissible (or preferable) to disobey other Divine laws to avoid offending one's host? In some cultures a man shows hospitality to a guest by letting the guest sleep with his (the host's) wife. If the guest refuses this offer, it is a great insult to the host and the host's wife. In other cultures it is an insult if a guest refuses to get drunk with the host. In the drug culture it is an insult to refuse to get high with the host. Our quiet, humble obedience to God's commandments will sometimes offend people who are ignorant of God's commandments. Offending some people is one of the unpleasant side-effects of obedience.



## ISAIAH 65 & 66

In Isaiah God speaks about "a rebellious people which walk in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts; a people that provoke Me to anger continually to My face" (65:2f). One of the reasons these people provoke the Lord is because they "eat swine's flesh, and the broth of unclean meat is in their pots" (65:4).

"But that's not talking about Gentiles!" someone objects. "That verse is talking about *Israel!* Paul says so in Romans 10!" True. And in Romans 11, the very next chapter, Paul says that Gentiles who believe in the Messiah are grafted into *Israel*. Paul also says that believing Gentiles are made a part of "the commonwealth of *Israel*" (Eph. 2:12). The context of Isaiah's prophecy is after the Gentiles have been grafted in and made a part of Israel. Therefore these words are not addressed only to Jews. They are also addressed to non-Jewish Christians living under the New Covenant, because these Christians are grafted into Israel.

Before the new heavens and new earth are established, Yahweh declares that He will consume those people "who eat swine's flesh, detestable things, and mice" (Isa. 66:17). The context of this prophecy is the end times, right before the new heaven and new earth are established. This tells us that at this time of history, the Lord still expects His people to obey His dietary laws.

I will not presume to speculate on the standing or the fate of Christians who knowingly disregard God's commandments concerning meat from unclean animals. God is merciful, and I believe He forgives His people when they err in ignorance, when they honestly do not know any better. Of course there is a difference between willful ignorance and innocent ignorance.

I believe that before the Lord destroys those who "eat swine's flesh, detestable things, and mice," that He will make it clear to those who truly love Him that the dietary laws are still valid and for our own good. It is my prayer that this article will be instrumental in helping to open the eyes of those who truly love Him. □

## “MESSIANIC METHODISTS”: THE EVANGELICAL REFORMED METHODIST Daniel Botkin, Litt. D.

Messianic Methodists. That's not what they call themselves, but considering their beliefs and teachings and manner of worship, I think it's a good way to describe these Methodist brethren. Bishop Steven R. Sanchez, S.T.D., presides over the ERM (Evangelical Reformed Methodist), a denomination which currently consists of 68 congregations or “Houses of Prayer” throughout North America.

One purpose of the ERM is “to spread Scriptural holiness over these lands.” And when they say “Scriptural holiness,” they are not just talking about the New Testament Scriptures; they are talking about a holiness which honors the Torah, too. “The Old Testament is not contrary to the New,” their *Doctrines and Discipline* states. “Jesus assures us that He did not come to abolish the Law (also known as the *Torah*), but to fulfill it. He further teaches that those who live out the Law and teach others to do so likewise, will be called ‘great in the Kingdom of Heaven.’”

The Torah is to be obeyed “not out of a fear of condemnation or to attain salvation, but because we are righteous citizens, submitting to our Sovereign King, out of loving obedience.” The ERM states that Torah observance serves “as a living testimony to the pagan nations of the goodness and compassion of Almighty Providence.” Another purpose of the Torah is to “lead one to disciplined living.”

This positive attitude to the Torah makes the ERM quite different from your typical Methodist church. The ERM honors the seventh-day Sabbath from sundown Friday til sundown Saturday, believing that the Sabbath should be observed by “all flesh, Jewish and Gentile” as “a visible testimony to the community that has no faith in the King of the universe.” And keeping the Sabbath means more to the ERM than just going to church on Saturday morning. Their *Doctrines and Discipline* speaks against “the profaning of the Sabbath, either by doing ordinary work therein or by buying and selling.”

The ERM also expects all members to eat a Biblically kosher diet. They recognize that several New Testament

passages have been misinterpreted by historic Christianity, and that the Almighty did not “change His mind” about the dietary laws. “Therefore,” they write, “as willing citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, we submit our palates and our stomachs to Biblically clean foods.”

Members of the ERM are also somewhat different from other Methodists in their outward appearance. “Leviticus 19:27 and 21:5 infer that men are to maintain beards,” *Doctrines and Discipline* states. “The ERM, therefore, encourages wearing beards according to the fashion demonstrated by its bishops.” In obedience to 1 Corinthians 11, women wear head coverings as part of their “modest apparel.”

The Biblical distinction of male and female roles is recognized by the ERM. However, in the absence of qualified male clergy, women are allowed to serve “in all ways, excepting the office of Pastor or higher.” A married woman must first obtain written permission from her husband before being allowed to serve. Any woman serving in the congregation must be accountable to a male supervisor to whom she reports.

The ERM has an episcopal form of government. The Prelate was chosen “through much prayer and petition” to steer and direct the ERM. He serves as a Pastor to the pastors. Each local pastor selects seven people to help him in his decision making.

The ERM is sensitive to Jewish issues. Recognizing what the Bible teaches about the Jewish people, the ERM states that all Christians should “pray for the well-being, prosperity and salvation of all Jewish people, inside and outside of the national boundaries of Israel.” The ERM also encourages Christians to “support Jewish causes where prudent” and “to extinguish anti-semitism in all of its forms.”

The ERM has a liturgy which is very similar to that used in the synagogue. Some of the prayers and blessings and readings are identical; some are slightly modified. Because the cross is viewed as a symbol of persecution in the eyes of Jewish people, there are no crosses in the ERM.

“Why do these people call them-

selves *Methodists*?” some might wonder. “They sound more like Jews! The Methodist Church was started by John Wesley, an Anglican. All this stuff would have been foreign to Wesley.”

Not so, according to the ERM. Bishop Sanchez says that it is a little-known fact that Wesley was at one time a seventh-day Sabbath keeper and believed in keeping the dietary laws. Of course this information is not mentioned in the later biographies of Wesley's life. But according to Bishop Sanchez, the information can be found in the pages of earlier books, most of which are now stored away in obscure library basements, and inaccessible to the general public.

The ERM does not view itself as a brand new denomination; it views itself as “the resurrection of true Methodism.” This is why they call themselves the Evangelical Reformed Methodist - a ‘re-forming’ or going back to the original image of, as they put it. Their Historical Statement explains:

“It is a matter of historical fact that Celtic Christianity (of Britain, Wales, Scotland and Ireland), from which grew the Anglican, and thereafter the Methodist traditions, were, for the first 1200 years more similar to Judaism and the original Nazarenes in doctrinal expression and practice. This, however, came to a halt in the mid-thirteenth century, when the armies of Roman Catholicism moved in, suppressing and replacing this historical and Biblical faith.”

It is encouraging and refreshing to see how the Holy Spirit is moving on the hearts of Christians to return to their historical Hebraic roots. Let us pray that leaders in other Christian denominations will have the courage and chutzpah to follow the example of the ERM, and reform their churches to Biblical patterns of worship, so that the Messiah's Hebrew identity will be more fully revealed. □

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Information for this article was taken from the *Doctrines and Discipline* of the Evangelical Reformed Methodist and from conversations with Bishop Sanchez.