

THE *Sabbath Sentinel*

OCTOBER 1993

WHERE DID WE GET
THE CHURCH?



THE BIBLE SABBATH ASSOCIATION

 BIBLE
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Through the centuries, seventh-day Christians have formulated theories regarding the nature of the Apostolic Church with special interest and emphasis given to the departure from the Biblical Sabbath. "Where Did We Get the Church?" (see page 6) provides a survey of the major movements within Christianity. It is interesting to note that, with the exception of the multiple marriages of Henry the Eighth, the same basic issues continue to concern various seventh-day Christian organizations.

Some have cryptically characterized the Church as a cyclical sequence of men, messages, movements, and monuments. A volatile reaction often ensues when human beings discover the living word of God— Scripture. I think that this, in part, provides a common point of origin for the phenomenon of reactionary movements within Christianity. Subsequent growth within such movements is as varied as the personalities involved.

The Apostle Paul relates this encounter: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news! ... Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."

(Romans 10:15,17)

—MG



EDITORIAL

CON-TRO-VER-SY

The dictionary defines "controversy" as "a discussion marked especially by the expression of opposing views." By this definition *TSS*, as a clearing house for information of interest to Sabbathkeepers, has a readership which holds many divergent views.

The articles on baptism for the dead, the annual feasts, and rewriting Ellen White generated what is estimated to be the greatest number of responses in *TSS's* history — and for that we are encouraged. A sampling of the letters we received appears in the Mailbox section of this issue. We appreciate each reader who took the time to communicate. Your response tells us you are reading and thinking.

As Christians, how should we deal with new information and new viewpoints?

It would seem that we have at least three options:

1. We can simply reject anything that does not agree with our own thinking.
2. We can carefully analyze new information in order to successfully refute it at a later time, or
3. We can use opposing viewpoints to enrich our understanding, to refine our convictions, and to encourage our endeavors toward a deeper search for truth.

As we at *TSS* analyzed the reactions of our readers to various "controversial" topics we discovered what one person thought was heresy was very often what another person embraced as heaven-sent truth. Perhaps that indicates each of us wrestles inwardly with new knowledge when it causes us to rethink our long-established viewpoints.

As we encounter viewpoints that challenge our current beliefs we could ask ourselves four questions:

1. Do we agree or disagree with a particular viewpoint?
2. Why do we agree or disagree?
3. If we hold on to our former view is it because our view is true and Biblical, or because it is traditional?
4. What does the Lord want us to learn as we examine a particular viewpoint?

Once we answer these four questions we are well on our way to fulfilling the Apostle Peter's desire for Christians to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

—SC

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Mailbox

SDA's "Take Over?"

Excellent job on the articles about Ellen G. White (July and August issues of *TSS*)! I have to admit that you had me going there for a while: the big picture of Ellen White on the cover, etc. It looked suspiciously like the SDA's "took over" *The Sabbath Sentinel*. (The) historical research was in depth, yet highly readable. (Subscription enclosed).

Rick Chaimberlin
Editor, *Petah Tikvah*
Rochester, NY

Missing a Great Blessing

We are not in harmony concerning the inspiration of Ellen G. White. You are missing a great blessing in following the belief that she was not inspired.

Name Withheld
Guthrie, OK

All quotations concerning Ellen White's inspiration came from SDA leaders and researchers who knew Ellen White personally or had spent a lifetime reading her books and manuscripts.

Surprised but Not Offended

I just finished reading the July issue of *TSS* and found it quite interesting. I was a bit surprised, but not offended, by the article about Mrs. White not being infallible. The main reason for this letter is that I so greatly appreciated Donna Kupp's article, "Of Flowers and Weeds." It struck a responsive chord in me. Also, if it is agreeable with your other authors, I would like to see more information about them. Their picture is helpful, but their address and church connection at times would be very interesting.

Alan Bond
Marion, IA

Good idea — writers take note!

"Delightful" in Canada

My what a delightful magazine *TSS* has become! And Desmond Ford's article (May *TSS*) is a great perspective on the Sabbath as a permanent memorial and a standard, not a method of salvation in Christ! Thanks!

John & Mindy Bennett
North Vancouver, BC

Not "Understanding?"

Some months ago I subscribed to your

magazine ..., but I do not believe that I have received a single issue that has not in actuality degraded, and disparaged upon one group or another. If my memory serves me correctly the World Church of God and the Seventh Day Adventist do acknowledge Jesus Christ as their savior, and believes the bible to be the word of God. Your magazine has indicated that the World Church of God is a cult and needs to change its doctrine, I know they are changing, and that the founder of the Seventh Day Adventist Ellen G. White is a plagiarist. ... I would hardly think that this is promoting Sabbath, but tearing down Sabbathkeeping groups who do not agree with what you deem to be correct doctrine, and that practice is in fact sectarian, divisive and bigoted. I am not a member of either group, nor do I agree with most of their doctrine, but I would not attack their founders or their current leaders based on their doctrine or the founders or current leaders personal down fallings. But if they fail your test; they do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as their savior, believe the bible to be the word of God then I would consider them as unbelievers. ... Ellen G. White's writings should be judged by the Eternal's Word to determine if true or not, not by whether she borrowed from others, not that I agree with the act of plagiarism. If we are to promote understanding we must be understanding.

Robert Camp
Saint Paul, MN

We appreciate your emphasis on the primacy of the Word of God. One purpose of TSS is to promote understanding of various Sabbathkeeping organizations and their doctrinal teachings. Whether or not we agree with those doctrinal teachings is secondary to our desire to understand and evaluate them by God's Word. We disagree that TSS has labeled the Worldwide Church of God a "cult." In fact, TSS' editorial staff applauds the direction the WCG seems to be taking under Joseph Tkach's leadership (see TSS June, p. 5 and September, p. 5). We agree with you that the primary issue is not whether Ellen White copied. Plagiarism is just one indicator Christians use when determining if her claims to direct inspiration by God are valid. We agree with your suggestion that her writings should be tested by the Word (Isaiah

8:20).

TSS Breaks Down Divisions

Thank you for *TSS* and its new format. The articles are very well chosen for the Sabbath Christian. I know that articles regarding the Festivals, Ellen White & the SDA's, HWA etc., strike a chord with me and many other readers. I personally am glad to see such a magazine help break down some divisions within the Household of the Seventh Day community. Too many of us have held to the idea of our group, our organization, alone represents the Church of God on earth. We need to be focused on our Lord Jesus, in which all believers reside. Enclosed is my renewal and a gift subscription.

Keith Kleier
Montclair, CA

"Delighted" in Florida

I am delighted to see the E. G. White articles appear and pray that the message gets out. ... I have discussed this problem with preachers but they won't meet me again. They react as though I am an enemy. ... I would like further information about the 1919 papers that were lost. ... Praying for the success of *TSS*.

Rex DeGolyer
Avon Park, FL

Write the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-1608, and ask for a copy of the 1919 Bible Conference minutes.

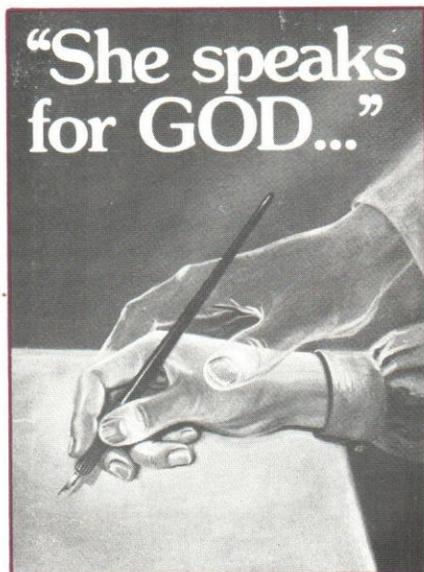
Profited, However ...

I profited from reading "Are SDA's Ready to Rewrite Ellen G. White?" However, I wonder if such articles do more harm than good ... and ... are needlessly offensive ... especially to members of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. I'm sure Sister White copied ideas, good ideas, from others without giving them credit. I do, and I believe other believers do, at least occasionally. Why make such a "mountain" out of this? Does not the same Spirit of Truth inspire different writers; yet His Truth is the same regardless of how many are inspired to write it. I am a Seventh Day Baptist Christian and regard Ellen White as fallible just as all Christians are. To my knowledge she never claimed to be perfect, just inspired and a messenger to help the church "find its way." I do not agree with all Sister White wrote, yet I'm glad to get her opinions

and input on various subjects. The Holy Spirit and the Bible tell me which is true and which is false, mistaken. In future issues of *TSS* I hope we will read healing and non-offensive articles. Bring us together! Increase our mutual love and fellowship.

Joseph McGuire
Birmingham, AL

Thanks for your input. Is it not newsworthy when the largest organization of Sabbathkeepers in the world updates the writings of their prophet?



Wonderful Articles on SDAs

I want to thank you very much for the wonderful articles on SDA's in the July and August, 1993 issues of *TSS*. They were well-written, and Mike Galimore's art work is first rate. What you have done with the format and content of the *Sentinel* is to be commended. Keep up the good work!

Rich Nickels
Gillette, WY

Thanks for *TSS*

Thanks for sending us your fine magazine, *TSS*. May God richly bless this ministry.

Stefan and Vicky Kube
Editor, *Link*
Australia

Loved the Typology!

I loved the study of typology (February *TSS*)! Great new format! Keep driving forward!

Larry Pahl
Galesburg, IL

More on Baptism for the Dead

Concerning Larry Spurgeon's article (July, *TSS*): to understand what Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians 15:29, we need to know two things — (1) the term "the dead" is also used to denote the state of being dead. For example, verse 20 speaks of Christ as "risen from the dead," which means he left the state of being dead, and not from deceased people. (2) We need to know the connection between being baptized and the resurrection, as stated in Romans 6:5: "if we have been planted together (baptized) in the likeness of his (Christ's) death we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." Paul went even further in 1 Corinthians 15:17, 18, by saying, If Christ didn't raise from the dead, then they which are "fallen asleep" (in the dead state) are perished. In that context verse 29 fits very well: "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead (for when they are dead) if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead (when deceased)? In this verse Paul was responding to those in verse 12 who didn't believe in the resurrection. By changing "the dead" in the second question to "them," some translations have made verse 29 impossible to understand. It would then read "why then are they baptized for them (N.A.S.V.)?" There is no such change in the Greek.

Wilbur Foor
Vestaburg, MI

A comment or two on the article "Baptism For The Dead?" It is most obvious that this passage of Scripture has been turned (until it) will *never* be understood! Yet, when the German translation is studied, it seems to be a simple request. ...Those who went out of the mainstream of the teachings of Paul; having been baptized into the body of Jesus were (considered) as having "clothed yourselves with Christ" and as such ... (sought) to clothe their near kin ... in this same manner. Baptism, in the words of Paul (Galatians 3:27), ... (defines) this symbolic practice as a "being clothed with Christ." The German ... speaks of ... baptism as being the act of entering "the skin of Jesus." (So) Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth ... that among them were those who were practicing a strange act of being baptized for some loved ones who had died previously as believers; but had

not known the experience of being baptized. Then Paul made a case out of those who were saying there was no such thing as a resurrection. He asked, Why then go to the trouble of baptizing for those who were long dead? The meaning seems too clear to miss.

Bill Ritz
Walla Walla, WA

Twenty-five Reasons to Worship (Rest) on Sunday?

I have noted in *TSS* that you intend to publish an article on 25 reasons to worship on Sunday. Before even reading that article (which was published in the September issue), let me offer the following thoughts. The question between Sabbatarians and Sunday keepers has been mis-stated for far too long. The question is not on which day to worship, but rather which day is the day of rest. When does the Almighty say to worship? When worship was offered through the ritual of animal sacrifice, there was to be offered "a continual burnt offering every day" (Numbers 28:3, 4). In addition, there were the bread (or Mincha) offerings, as recorded in Leviticus 2. These were traditionally offered in the afternoon. This system of thrice daily worship continued even when prayer had to suffice for animal sacrifices (Daniel 6:10). Both Acts 2:46 and 5:42 speak of the apostles continuing daily in the Temple. Thrice daily worship has never been repealed by the Almighty, just as the Sabbath has never been repealed as the day of rest. One should remember and observe the Sabbath, and one should worship thrice daily, including on Sunday.

Larry Dean Spurgeon
Kansas City, KS

Good point.

THE GOOD NEWS!

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this:

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
— Romans 5:6-8 NIV

WHERE DID WE GET THE CHURCH?

SYDNEY CLEVELAND

It was our Lord Jesus Christ who said: "on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18). Although the church has prevailed against Hades, it has undergone many transformations and changes over the past two thousand years. This chart shows some of the major branches of the church, along with the approximate dates they occurred. A brief summary of reasons why various groups branched off follows.

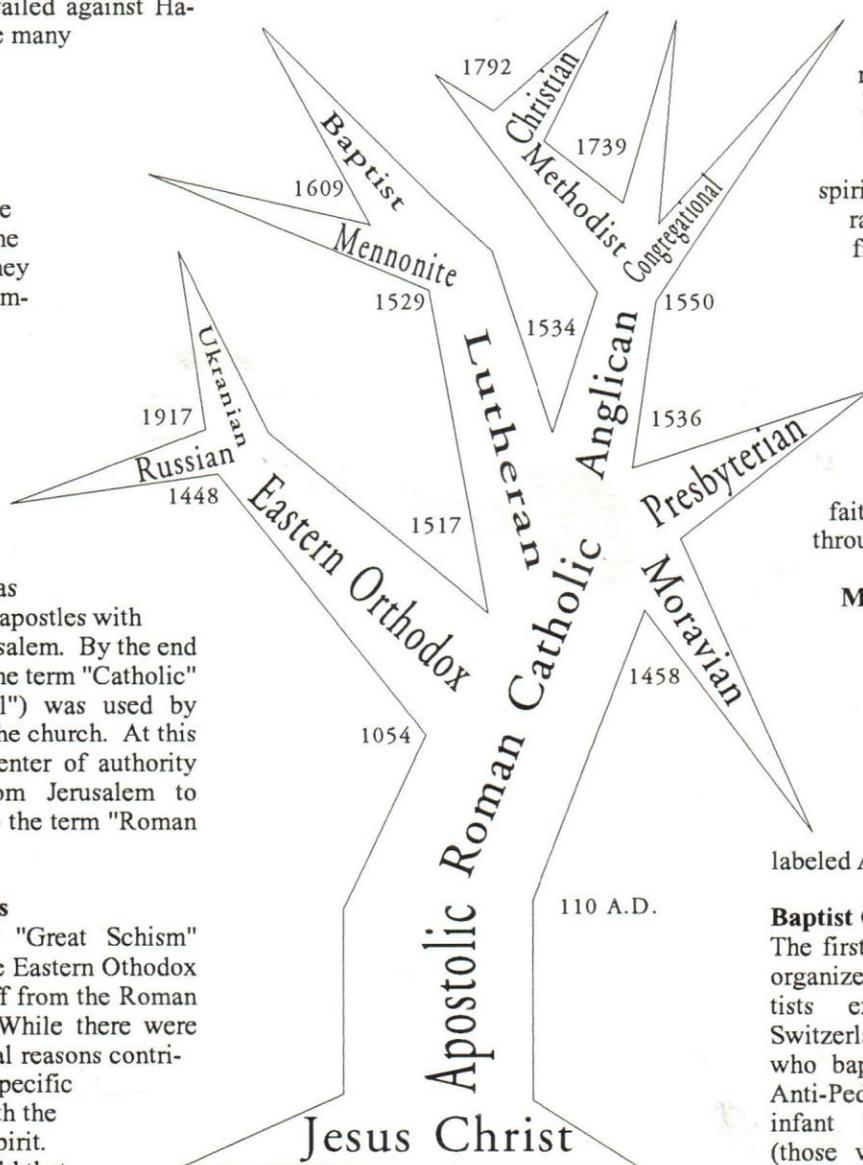
Apostolic Church

Acts 15 indicates that the Apostolic Church was administered by the apostles with headquarters in Jerusalem. By the end of the first century the term "Catholic" (meaning "universal") was used by Ignatius to refer to the church. At this time the church's center of authority began to shift from Jerusalem to Rome, giving rise to the term "Roman Catholic" church.

Orthodox Churches

In 1054 A.D. the "Great Schism" occurred causing the Eastern Orthodox Church to branch off from the Roman Catholic Church. While there were numerous theological reasons contributing to this split, specific differences dealt with the origin of the Holy Spirit. Roman Catholics held that the Holy Spirit was sent by both the Father and the Son, while the Eastern Orthodox proclaimed only the Father sent the Holy Spirit. Another aspect of the controversy revolved around the observance of the Sabbath. Pope Leo IX taught the Sabbath was a day of gloom and fasting, while

Eastern Orthodox Patriarch Cerularius proclaimed the Sabbath to be a day of joy. Headquarters of the newly separated



Eastern Orthodox Church were established in Constantinople. Five years before the Turks invaded and conquered Constantinople in 1453, the Russian Orthodox church split off largely due to the political situation. With the beginnings of Communism,

the Ukrainian church branched off from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1917.

Moravian Church

The Moravian Church had its beginnings with Constantine and Methodius during the Slavic struggles for political and religious freedom in the ninth century. The martyrdom of John Hus and Jerome of Prague hastened the break from Rome and established the church in 1458.

Lutheran Church

The enemies of the Protestant Reformation nicknamed the followers of Martin Luther "Lutherans." His positions that the Roman Catholic church had no divine right in spiritual things; and that Scripture rather than priest or church had final authority over conscience are well known. Drawing the line in the controversy over the selling of indulgences and papal infallibility, Luther sparked the separation of the church beginning in 1517. Luther's emphasis on justification by faith is the basis for that teaching throughout Protestant Christianity.

Mennonite Church

In 525 the first Mennonite congregation was organized in Zurich, Switzerland.

Opposed to Zwingli's interest in the union of church and state, they also objected to infant baptism. Thus they were labeled Anabaptists, or "ReBaptizers."

Baptist Churches

The first English Baptist Church was organized in 1609. Previously Baptists existed in Germany and Switzerland as Pedobaptists (those who baptized infants and children); Anti-Pedobaptists (those who opposed infant baptism); and Anabaptists (those who rebaptized adults once baptized as children).

Anglican Church

After disagreeing with the Pope's decision to not allow England's King Henry the Eighth to marry Anne Boleyn, the king formed the Anglican Church in 1534. Sometimes referred to as the Church of England, the

Anglican and Roman Catholic churches have much in common.

Congregational Churches

Originally the most radical wing of the Puritan movement, dissenting groups of Congregationalists were looking for a better way than having the king of England tell them how to worship. Early members believed that the Anglican Church was unchristian and that attempts to reform it from within were futile. Thus the beginning of the break between the Anglican Church and Congregationalism occurred around the year 1550.

Methodist Church

The Methodist Church began as a Bible Club at Oxford University in England. Ridiculed as the "Holy Club" for "Bible Bigots" and "Bible Moths," the club found its leadership in men such as John and Charles Wesley (sons of an Anglican clergyman) and George Whitfield. Stressing the need

for a methodically religious life consisting of justification before sanctification, and holiness in Christian lifestyle, the members preached and prayed with England's poor commoners. Fanning the flame of religious revival in England soon closed the doors of the Anglican Church to the "Methodists." Soon after, in 1739, the first Methodist "Society" was formed in London.

Christian Churches

There were a number of revolts in the Methodist Church which spawned the Christian Church movement. Initially, James O'Kelly withdrew from the Methodist church in protest against the development of an episcopal form of church government. Charging that the Methodist bishops had absolute power in appointing local ministers, O'Kelly organized his followers in 1792 under the name Republican Methodists. Later the name

was changed to "Christian." This new church taught that the Bible was the only rule and authority, and made the evidence of a Christian character the single requirement for church membership.

While this article can only briefly address some of the high points in the development of the Church, it is significant that God still leads those who earnestly seek Him into His Church. Through all the twists and turns of branches of our church's family tree it is still of utmost importance that we receive our nourishment from the Root of Jesus Christ. Addressing each of us as "branches," Jesus said: "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned" (John 15:5, 6). 5



Encounter with Jehovah's Witnesses

HERBERT JOHNSON

Herb Johnson is a Bible teacher at Christian Community Church, a Sabbath-keeping church in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Since I retired I've been trying to catch up on some jobs at home that had been postponed for years. One day, while working in the front yard, I noticed a van coming down the road and stopping at every house. It stopped next door and I saw a man and woman get out but they didn't stay long, so I wasn't surprised when they pulled into my driveway a moment later.

The man and woman approached me with Bibles in their hands. Long before they told me, it was obvious that they were Jehovah's Witnesses. The man introduced himself and asked "Do you think about world conditions very often?"

"Yes," I told him, "every day."

"Do you know that God is allowing these things to happen for a purpose?"

"Yes," I answered, "I do."

"Are you ready for the end time?" he asked.

I answered his question with a question of my own, "What must I do to be ready?"

He said, "You need to be obedient to God."

"Is that what you call 'repentance?'"

"Yes," he said, "you must repent of your sins."

"What is 'sin?'" I asked.

"That is anything contrary to God's will."

"Can you be more specific?"

He was quick to answer, "Yes, it's anything such as stealing, murder, and other such things."

"Oh, you mean like breaking the Ten Commandments? What if I keep

on breaking the Ten Commandments?" I asked.

"Then you haven't repented."

"What if I *don't know* that I'm breaking a Commandment, such as a doctor who is murdering babies and *thinks* abortion is OK? What about someone who gambles and *thinks* he isn't coveting his neighbor's money?"

"No, he is still sinning."

"Then what you are saying is that if I keep all the Commandments *except one* that I'm still unrepentant?"

"Yes," he replied, "what are you getting at?"

"What about the Fourth Commandment — is it OK to break it?"

"Which one is that?"

"Remember the Sabbath Day to

keep it holy," I said.

At this point the lady enlightened me that the Sabbath Day is Saturday, the seventh day of the week!

"Yes, I know. Do *you* work on Saturday?"

They both answered "Yes."

"Then you are breaking all of God's Commandments according to James 2:10 and by your own logic, you haven't repented. And therefore you haven't been saved!"

About this time the lady started backing toward the van. She said, "I've heard enough, let's go. Don't you know that Satan has deceived you according to Revelation 12:9?"

The man was also starting toward the van. "Wait a minute," I said, "let me enlighten you on some other errors that you have."

"We have to go," he replied.

"Well," I said, "you come back when you can stay longer. You have now been enlightened about the Sabbath, so you have no excuse before God for not keeping it holy. You have a good day and come back again!" S

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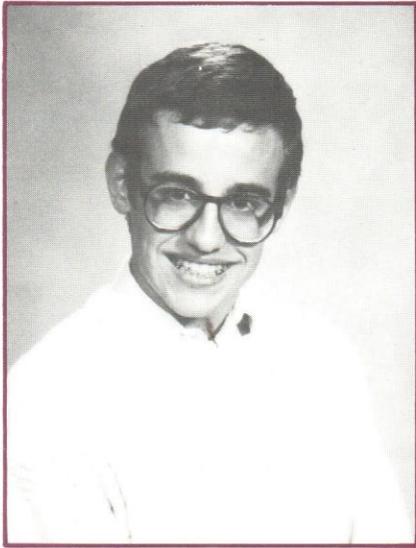
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JAMES B. PATE

Many youth who glance through the Bible think the God of the Old Testament is a vindictive and unloving God. When we read that He commanded the children of Israel to destroy the heathen nations (Deuteronomy 7:23), and declared that He is a "man of war" (Exodus 15:3), we become confused. Is God a God of peace and love or a God of warfare and destruction? And how could God make so many glorious promises to Israel and then destroy them? Why would our loving God destroy a nation which He Himself had established and cared for?

God Cares for Us

In my preceding article (*TSS*, August), I attempted to show that an all-loving and all-powerful God understands and cares about the problems facing today's youth. When we remember that God is a "God of love" (1 Corinthians 3:11) and that His very nature does not change (Malachi 3:6) we logically conclude that He has always been a loving God. Why then do many passages seem to contradict this concept of a loving God?

We Imperfectly Understand God

Could it be that our understanding of God's actions in some situations is imperfect? Do we just not clearly understand why God did what He did? Why did God say His thoughts are not the same as ours (Isaiah 55:8)? Even Job eventually conceded that God's

understanding was infinitely greater than his own. Maybe the solution to our perplexity lies in forgetting our own limited understanding and seeking the thoughts of God Himself.

Perhaps it would help us to understand God's point of view by taking a look at our own personal concepts of "fairness." Suppose you had a little brother who had been placed in your care. Wouldn't you protect him from anyone who tried to bully him? I believe this is also true about God. For over four-hundred years, the children of Israel were afflicted by harsh taskmasters in the land of Egypt. After pleading for assistance from the God of their fathers, the Lord Almighty intervened through Moses and Aaron. He inflicted plagues upon the Egyptians, parted the Red Sea, and performed a variety of other miraculous and majestic feats.

As the Israelites neared the Promised Land, God assisted them in driving out the hostile and heathen nations which attempted to block their path. Whenever the armies of Israel charged against the wicked they fought courageously knowing that God was supporting them.

Is God A Man of War?

Could it be that being a "man of war" is not incompatible with being a "God of love?" The many examples of God intervening on behalf of His oppressed people shows this to be true. Remember it was God's loving concern for the weak and innocent that propelled Him to enact the death penalty for brutal crimes such as rape and murder (Leviticus 24:17, 21; Deuteronomy 22:25-27).

And what about the nations which God helped the children of Israel destroy? Didn't He also love them? During the time the Israelites traveled to Canaan the heathen nations had already demonstrated their great wickedness. Homosexuality, bestiality, incest, human sacrifice and a host of other indescribable acts were rampant throughout the land (Leviticus 18:6-30). God had a compassionate desire to totally extinguish that perverse society. Why? God recognized that true happiness cannot prosper in

a violent and perverse culture. So our Righteous God obliterated these wicked countries. Even though He felt great love toward these nations, it was His greatest desire that His own people not be corrupted by their wicked influence.

Why Did God Destroy Israel?

What about God's repeated condemnation and eventual destruction of Israel as recorded in the Old Testament? Well, suppose that you were going steady with someone and that person continually flirted with other people in spite of your close relationship? Wouldn't you be upset? This was the way it was with God. For centuries He provided His chosen people with riches and wealth, acting as a generous husband to His wife. Rather than appreciating His benevolence and thanking Him for His infinite kindness, Israel "committed adultery (and) did a shameful thing when she said, 'I'll run after other men and sell myself to them for food and drinks and clothes'" (Hosea 4:5). God had every reason to be upset, for Israel "(didn't) realize that all she has, has come from (God). It was (He) who gave her all the gold and silver she used in worshipping Baal, her god!" (verse 8). Despite their repeated infidelity He remained patient and long-suffering toward his chosen people. "'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; I desire that the wicked turn from his evil ways and live. Turn, turn from your wickedness, for why will you die, O' Israel?'" (Ezekiel 33:11). Like Jesus Christ would do many years later, the God of the Old Testament Himself called sinners to repentance. But patience can only go so far, and God was compelled to ultimately destroy the nation of Israel at the hands of the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

The viewpoint that the God of the Old Testament is a cruel God intent upon inflicting pain is unjustified in the light of Scripture. How can one read of God's mercy upon the city of Nineveh, His profound loving kindness in the book of Psalms, or His concern for humanity in the Law without discovering a loving God who genuinely cares for all His children? Every youth can rejoice that our God is a God of love!

The Only Known Cure for Snakebite

MIKE CLEVELAND

"They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food! Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, 'We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. The Lord said to Moses, 'Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.' So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived" (Numbers 21:4-9).

"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

Another Old Testament Type

What a beautiful "type" we have here in Numbers chapter twenty one. What a precious jewel in this passage of Scripture. Since Jesus declares Himself to be the fulfillment of Numbers 21:4-9, let us study it with our Gospel glasses on. "Lord Jesus, help us to see You that we might embrace You."

Impatient Israelites

The Israelites had left Egypt and were on their way to the Promised Land when they grew "impatient" along the way. We can imagine the hot sun beating down on their already-worn-out bodies, and the dust as thick as fog. We can hear the children cry, "Mom, I'm so tired and hot, when can we stop for a rest?" The smell of fresh manure from the large number of animals adds to their discomfort. The hot wind drives sand into their

eyes, making it impossible to see more than a few feet ahead.

Rejecting God's Gift

But what was the worst part of their journey? The manna! "We detest this miserable food" they complained. Yahweh's provision to feed them was not enough. God's gracious gift from heaven, sent to nourish and satisfy those who were hungry, was detested. How like people today who reject Jesus, "the True Manna" (John 6:58) and prefer to feed on earthly things that do not satisfy. God's Word asks the Israelites of old and us today the same question: "Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare" (Isaiah 55:2).

In this context of the Israelites murmuring and complaining, God takes drastic measures to bring them to their knees in repentance. He sends fiery serpents among them. Suddenly the whole camp of the Israelites is a mass of confusion as people try to avoid the deadly serpents. A father calls on his child, attempting to shield him from an approaching viper. A young teenager runs desperately through the camp, his arms flailing at the two black snakes that have attached themselves to his legs. A helpless scream of despair erupts from an old woman as she helplessly watches a huge black and brown serpent approach her with fangs unveiled.

Prayers of Repentance

Death is everywhere. Cries of those yet dying fill the air. Suddenly, another noise is heard above the sobs of despair. It is a young father, "Moses, we sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Please, please pray for us. Maybe God will have mercy on us and remove the snakes." The shout is taken up by more people until it becomes a roar of prayers

mixed with tears.

Ah, the prayers that our God of love hears and never fails to answer. "I sinned. I'm sorry. I repent. My life is in a shambles, please help!"

God's Remedy

Notice the remedy! "The Lord said to Moses, 'Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.' So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived" (Numbers 21:8-9). What a strange cure for snakebite, an uplifted snake on a pole. Strange, yet simple. All they had to do was LOOK!

Shouts of joy now replace cries of despair. A mother of three who trusted God's Word to be true, turned and looked. Her skin, just a moment ago was turning a blackish yellow. Now it is returning to a pink color. The pain, which seemed to be in her very bloodstream is gone. An old woman, at the point of death from the wound inflicted by the huge viper, turns to the uplifted pole and is cured.

Suddenly, there is a great division in the camp. Those who have turned and looked are cured. They are up and moving about the camp, pleading with friends and family members to look. Others are still dying, refusing to obey God's Word to turn and look and live. Strange thing, to die of snakebite when a cure has been provided.

You see, this whole incident was designed by God to teach us the way of salvation. We, too have been bitten by a snake. It is the snake of sin and it is a deadly wound that will end in death. There is nothing we can do about it. Some tell us to look in a mirror and say to ourselves, "Every day in every way I am getting better and better." Yet we still feel the venom of sin running through our veins. Others tell us to go to a psychologist and get "professional help." Yet, we see that he is dying with the same disease. Others say to do good deeds, give to our favorite charity, help others and by so doing we will help ourselves. Wretched advice! Still others cry, "Just look at any pole. All poles lead to the same cure. You have your pole, I have mine and we need to be accepting of each others." Sadly disillusioned.

Look to the Son

Amidst all the competing voices comes one that says: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22).

Did you hear His voice? "Look unto me, and be saved." How simple. Why, even a child can look. The Hebrew word for "Look" is "NABAT," pronounced "naw-bat" and it means to "consider, look intently at or regard with pleasure." What specifically does God want us to look at intently? A few verses from the New Testament will answer the question. John 6:40: "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." Hebrews 12:2: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Just as the Israelites were told to look at the snake on the pole to be cured, so we turn to the cross in repentance. We look to the One dying there, and in that one look, find life abundant and eternal. There, at the cross, we find the sinner's cure.

What a God of love! He looked down from heaven, saw us dying from the Serpent's bite, and provided a cure — the uplifted, cross-like pole on which He hung our Savior.

One question remains. Jesus compared Himself to the uplifted snake on the pole. Why did God use a snake, which represents sin and Satan, to portray the sinless Jesus? Why didn't He use a lamb or a dove? What is God conveying to us in the choice of a snake to represent His Son? The answer is again in the New Testament: 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

He who had no sin was made sin for us, and what a better picture could there be of sin than a snake? So as we look to Jesus we see Him bearing our sin in His own body on the tree. Wonder of wonders that God would treat Jesus like the devil, that we who have been bitten by the devil might have life!

Friend, won't you turn and look right

now? Won't you see in Jesus your sin-bearer? Because Jesus bore your sin on the cross you no longer need to bear it yourself. Trust God's Word that speaks about the cross and says, "Anyone who is bitten can look to it and live." As you see the defeat of Satan at the cross, you'll see the defeat of sin in your own life. Right

now, won't you turn and look and live? "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." John 6:40 Thank you Lord for providing us a cure for the snakebite of sin.

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