Adventist Given a Life Sentence for Allegations of Personal Evangelism in Pakistan: Have you ever "texted" a friend or family member with messages of Christian faith? Doing so in Pakistan has reportedly led to an Adventist being sentenced to life in prison. Careful with those international texts....

Pastor Jennifer Scott is the New Senior Minister of the Keene (Texas) Adventist Church: Breaking stride with traditional Adventist practice, a woman has been called from the pulpit of a small Adventist congregation to serve as head pastor of a major Southern campus congregation....

Two Adventist Hospitals Rated High on Healthcare Equality Index (HEI): In the wake of a recent US ruling allowing same-sex marriage, two Adventist hospitals have been cited for exemplary compliance with the Healthcare Equality Index, which calls on healthcare providers to treat same-sex couples with the same privileges it affords other married couples and their families....

News Briefs July 19, 2013: Fire has damaged the facilities of Pine Ridge Ranch, a camp operated by the Southeastern California Conference; Pastor Ted Wilson was among honored speakers at a recent youth congress that attracted 18,000 in South Africa; the Adventist hospital system appears poised to enter the healthcare insurance business, and more....

Islam 2013: Challenging Encounters for Adventists: A long-time international Church leader, Borge Schantz, writes candidly of the enormity and complexity of reaching the Muslim world with the gospel—where Islam continues to narrow Christianity's numerical lead....

Daniel Revisited: The Anatomy of a Heresy: Some believe the Book of Daniel to be a "religious novel" that builds on and projects the outcome of civil and religious strife as it was in the mid-160s B.C. Opinion writer Andrew "Andy" Hanson analyzes why Desmond Ford (and the Church as a whole) have fallen short in their ability to put the "Little Book" in context of modern scholarship and our times....

Salvation by Doctrines?: Are we secure in Christ because we agree to the "right" doctrines and belong to the "right" church and keep the "right" commandments? Are these the primary requisites for salvation, or is there yet another...
### The "One Project" Gathering in Australia to be Live-streamed on the Internet:
This weekend a Christ-centered ("One"), cutting-edge event featuring international Christian presenters is being Web-broadcast throughout the world at [http://new.livestream.com/FindJesus/events/2213939](http://new.livestream.com/FindJesus/events/2213939).

### Compass of a Soul:
Devotional writer Debbonnaire Kovacs says she is "struck mute by the clarity and beauty of the first few paragraphs" of “A Listening Heart,” from the book *Monastery of the Heart*. Enjoy the thoughts as the Sabbath envelops us....

---

### FEATURES
*(available to AT subscribers - make sure you are signed in)*

**Talbingo Poem:** AT blogger and naturalist Chris Barrett breaks into verse as he ponders the dynamic pleasures of the senses in nature on a Sabbath afternoon....

**Standing Up to a Bully:** We often rise up in holy indignation against those who seem clueless to their own insensitive ways. Yet, even in the personalities of the most horribly abusive people, lie dormant gems of character that can spring forth from the stinking facade of cruelty, writes AT guest Patricia Sexton....

**Variety Show Helps Homeless:** Some say that a church must specialize either in proclamation or in socially-centered programs—one or the other. The Historic Manhattan Seventh-day Adventist Church is proving how false this urban legend actually is....

**Victory Over the Beast, Chapter 14—Babylon is Fallen!** Chapter 14 of Dr. Ervin Thomsen’s book looks at an expanded view of "Babylon, " a state of doctrinal confusion that may be more a state of mind than a state of Sunday-keeping Christianity....

---

This message was sent to ahc@andrews.edu from Adventist Today, Post Office Box 1135, Sandy, OR 97055-1135.  
[Edit profile / unsubscribe] - [Forward to a friend]
A member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Pakistan was sentenced to life in prison last Sabbath (July 13) for sending "blasphemous" mobile phone text messages to a Muslim named Malik Tariq Saleem. As originally reported by the Pakistan Christian Post it appeared that the offense was simply an attempt at personal evangelism on the part of Sajjad Masih, who was arrested December 28, 2011, in the city of Gojra and has been held in jail at Toba Tek Singh.

"The prosecution failed to produce any evidence," according to the Christian news Web site. The police investigators did not produce the cell phone that Masih is accused of using and could not produce any record of a purchase of such equipment or an account with the Zong mobile phone service. They did not provide an eye witness in court, reported the Pakistan Christian Post. The same report was published by The Christian Post in the United States and many of the same facts published in a story in Ahmadiyya Times.

A number of other sources have reported additional facts that place a different perspective on the story even if the life sentence is inappropriate and unjust. The Times of India, one of the most respected publications in a country that often has a critical view of Pakistan's government, reported Sunday (July 14) that Masih was engaged to a woman who married another man in the United Kingdom and wanted to get her in trouble "to teach her a lesson for her 'betrayal.' [He had] a mobile phone ... belonging to [the woman] and he sent blasphemous messages" to several Muslim clerics with this goal in mind.

"A forensic record of the accused's mobile phone messages was ... presented in court," The Times reported, and "several ulemas (clerics) of Gojra testified against him. ... The police initially registered a case against Masih under Section 25-B of the Telegraph Act but then added the controversial blasphemy law ... on the demand of the clerics."

The defense attorney, Javed Chaudry Sahotra, argued that the police had no authority to investigate a case under the blasphemy law, according to a report in the Ahmadiyya Times. The attorney stated that, in fact, what was presented in court was a defective investigation as defined in Section 156 of the Pakistan Criminal Code.

Despite the arguments of the defense attorney, Judge Main Shahzad Raza sentenced Masih to life in prison. An appeal is being filed with the High Court in Pakistan seeking an acquittal. The All Christian Communication Alliance (ACCA) and the Seventh-day Adventist Church members "have been praying for ... Masih, his defense counsel ... and his family," stated the Pakistan Christian Post.

Muslim leaders in Gojra "also pressured police to try [the woman] under the blasphemy law," The Times reported. "The police finally succumbed to their pressure and registered a case against her under the law." Because she is now resident in the U.K., the Pakistan government has filed a notice with Interpol declaring her a fugitive. A story similar to The Times of India report also appeared in The Indian Express newspaper, Zee News and on Free Republic.com.

"It is amazing to me that this judge was so insensitive to the issues in such a case that he held the sentencing on the Sabbath," an Adventist attorney with international experience told Adventist Today. "This is the kind of case that could be brought to international bodies if the High Court does not rule against it."
Pastor Jennifer Scott is the New Senior Minister of the Keene (Texas) Adventist Church

Submitted: Jul 18, 2013

By AT News Team
A woman has been appointed senior pastor at the Keene Church by the Texas Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a more conservative segment of the denomination. Pastor Jennifer Scott has accepted appointment as leader of the 3,000-member congregation on the campus of Southwestern Adventist University, according to an announcement by Steve Stafford, chairman of the search committee, in the Keene Star.

Scott was offered the position earlier this week by Pastor Carlos Craig, president of the conference, after a vote by the conference personnel committee supported the recommendation of the 25-member search committee. She is currently pastor of the Shelton (Washington) Adventist Church in the suburbs of Seattle.

A search for a new senior pastor has been underway since Pastor Mic Thurber left earlier this year after 10 years to become ministerial director for the denomination's Mid America Union Conference. The search committee looked at 50 candidates, according to Stafford, and Scott was their top choice.

Scott is a 1991 graduate of Washington Adventist University and earned a master's degree in theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, in 1997. She has served as an associate pastor at Loma Linda University Church in California and the Green Lake Church in Seattle. With her husband, Robert, she has two children: Camryn, 13, who will be in the eighth grade, and Caeden, 10, a sixth grader.

Scott is not the first woman to lead one of the largest congregations in the Adventist Church. Pastor Chris Oberg is senior minister at the 2,750-member La Sierra University Church in Riverside, California. Before Oberg began her tenure at La Sierra, Dr. Hyveth Williams, now a seminary homiletics professor at Andrews University, was senior pastor at the 1,400-member Campus Hill Church in Loma Linda.

"Not only is this good for the Keene Church, because Scott is a very gifted spiritual leader," a retired pastor told Adventist Today, "this is further evidence that the Adventist Church is coming to the end of an era of gender discrimination in the ministry that began in the 1920s." Neither the North Pacific Union Conference where Scott is now employed nor the Southwestern Union Conference where she will be employed have voted to issue ordained minister credentials to women serving as pastors. The Theology of Ordination Study Committee appointed by the General Conference meets again later this month.

Log In to Post a Comment. Log In| Register
Two Adventist Hospitals Rated High on Healthcare Equality Index (HEI)

Submitted: Jul 18, 2013

By AT New Team

Two hospitals operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Maryland received a "leader" rating by the Human Rights Campaign, a national nonprofit organization in the United States working for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights, in its Healthcare Equality Index. A key focus of the campaign is hospitals who refuse to extend to same-sex couples the rights and privileges that they extend to traditional families.

Shady Grove Adventist Hospital and Washington Adventist Hospital, both located in the Maryland suburbs of Washington DC, were given "HEI Leader" ratings in the 2013 index released this week. This means that the hospitals were evaluated by the campaign as meeting all eight of the standards in the index.

The campaign's Healthcare Equality Index asks if a hospital publishes and/or posts a non-discrimination policy or patient bill of rights and if that document includes the terms "sexual orientation" and "gender identity; if the hospital's visitation policy explicitly grants equal visitation to LGBT patients and their visitors and if that visitation policy is communicated to patients and employees; if the hospital has an employment non-discrimination policy that includes the terms "sexual orientation" and "gender identity;" and if hospital staff receive "training in LGBT patient-centered care."

The teaching of the denomination is that homosexual behavior is condemned in the Bible and church members are asked to refrain from such behavior whatever their sexual orientation or gender identity may be. The hospitals and other community services that Adventists provide are designed for the general public and only a small percentage of the patients and employees are church members.

Another example of the Adventist Church both maintaining its traditional standard on sexuality and establishing a positive relationship with the LGBT community was reported in July 13 issue of the Royal Gazette, the major newspaper in Bermuda. The Rainbow Alliance, an LGBT organization in the island nation, criticized a statement by Member of Parliament Marc Bean "that gay marriage would lead to moral disruption" in society during a discussion last week on the television station operated by the denomination.

In contrast to their negative comments about Bean, the organization issued a statement that "praised the 'respectful manner' [in which] the Seventh-day Adventist Church spoke on the issue," the newspaper reported. It quoted the statement as saying that the Church "offered open arms to all individuals, which is in line with the Rainbow Alliance's focus on providing safe spaces for the LGBT community."

"You can maintain a firm and strong position as to what is right for yourself without getting into criticism, verbal or nonverbal, of another person, or attempting to instruct another person how to live," a veteran pastor told Adventist Today. "I believe God asks me to live according to certain standards and one of them is to extend compassion and hospitality and friendship to all who cross my path, so that means a very 'narrow path' in the footsteps of Jesus when these volatile, sometimes painful issues come along as they have now."

Log In to Post a Comment. Log In| Register
Last week 18,000 young people from across Africa and around the world attended an International Adventist Youth Congress in Pretoria, South Africa. Speakers included Dr. Ben Carson, the famed pediatric neurosurgeon at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore; David Asscherick from the Light Bearers independent ministry in Oregon; and Pastor Ted Wilson, president of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The youth camp and retreat center operated by the Southeastern California Conference was damaged by a wild fire early this week. The home of one of the staff was destroyed as well as a workshop, a garage, several vehicles and a dozen out buildings. The facilities at Pine Springs Ranch have often been used for a number of meetings of denominational leaders from North America, as well as spiritual retreats, youth activities, summer camp for children and families, and training in personal evangelism and church ministries. As the fire came through the area, at least 20 homes were evacuated among neighbors. The "one place that escaped unscathed was the Zen Mountain Center, a Buddhist retreat," wrote Gail Wesson in The Press-Enterprise, the daily newspaper in Riverside, California.

An Adventist hospital system may get into the health insurance business, according to a report this week in Modern Healthcare, a respected industry journal. Adventist Health, the nonprofit that operates 18 hospitals in for the Pacific and North Pacific union conferences "is expected to seek" a license as an insurance provider from the State of California "before the end of the year." More and more hospital operators are moving into the health insurance field because of the changes in the American health care system, especially the pressure to reduce the cost of health care and find alternatives to fee-for-service payments.
The "One Project" Gathering in Australia to be Live-streamed on the Internet

Submitted: Jul 16, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

Hundreds of young adults and other Adventists across Australia and New Zealand are traveling to Newcastle this coming weekend (July 19-21) for an event organized by the One Project. Thanks to the Wahroonga Seventh-day Adventist Church media ministry, Adventists around the world will be able to hear the presentations over the Internet.

Leighton and Ali Heise, well known contemporary Christian music artists, will lead worship Sabbath morning at 9 a.m. and Sunday at 8:45 a.m. (Local time in New South Wales, Australia.) Speakers will include Pastor Eddie Hypolite, youth director for the South England Conference in the U.K.; Dilyis Brooks, a student chaplain at Loma Linda University in California; Pastor Brendan Pratt, discipleship coordinator for the Greater Sydney Conference in Australia; Pastor Sam Leonor, campus chaplain at La Sierra University in California; Joanna Darby, an artist based in Australia; Pastor Tim Gillespie, associate pastor for young adult ministries at the Loma Linda University Church; Pastor David Franklin, associate pastor at Berea Temple in Baltimore; Dr. Lisa Clark Diller, a historian on the faculty of Southern Adventist University in Tennessee; and Pastor Delroy Brooks, youth pastor for Valley Fellowship in Rialto, California.

Topics include "Gates and Ways" (Matthew 7:13-14), "Jesus as Rebel, Rabbi, Chronicler, Healer" (Luke 13:10-17), "Consuming Jesus" (Luke 12:22-34), "Jesus as the Heart of Adventist Evangelism" (John 6:35-42), "Thy Kingdom Come" (Matthew 6:10), "The Heresy Response" (1 John 1-4), "Phylacteries" (Matthew 23:5-7), and "Trusting God, Washing Feet" (John 12:44-13:17). The event will begin with small conversation groups on Friday evening and end with a communion service during the noon hour on Sunday.

The One Project is dedicated to the simple idea that Jesus Christ is the one who is most important to Adventists and the center of Adventist faith. The growing movement began in late 2010 when a number of pastors, campus chaplains and youth workers came together to create an informal network focusing on the core of what it means to be Adventist.

The location of the Newcastle gathering will be the City Hall, 290 King Street, Newcastle NSW 2300. Adventist Today readers can view and hear the live-streaming from this event at this web address: http://new.livestream.com/FindJesus/events/2213939

Share your thoughts about this article:
Islam 2013: Challenging Encounters for Adventists

Submitted: Jul 14, 2013

By Borge Schantz
Of the current world population of a little more than seven billion, it is estimated that about 33 percent (2.3 billion) are Christians while 21.5 percent (1.6 billion) are Muslims. Over the last century Christians have remained at one third of the world’s population, while Muslims have almost doubled their number and their percentage has increased from 12.5 percent in 1900 to 21.5 percent today. [1]

Before the mid-twentieth century, most Muslims lived in isolation from the “Christian” world on the other side of oceans and deserts. Although the discovery of vast oil deposits in the Middle East gradually gave them a growing economic clout on the world scene, they had minimal influence on world politics, culture, and religion. Today, however, Islamic nations have found their place and are very conspicuous. Their exposure has been further strengthened among us as about 50 million Muslims have, for various positive and negative reasons, left their homelands and settled in Europe, Australia, and the United States, where they now are neighbors to Christians. These new immigrant Muslim settlements have posed hitherto unexpected challenges to their new hosts. Their demand for respect, time and space to follow Islamic rules and lifestyles has, at times, brought them into conflict with Western “Christian” laws, culture and customs.

This steady growth of Muslim minorities in the Western world should alert Adventists as it does other Christians. Muslim neighbors could be potential candidates for Christian evangelism and consider themselves members of a “missionary” religion with ambitions to convert the whole world to Islam, using tools of persuasion as well as force being seen as legitimate.

Adventist mission to non-Christian religions has for more than a hundred years generally been a somewhat one-sided enterprise. Missionary activities have been aimed at people with a religion based on oral traditions without significant, defining Holy Scriptures. The missionary, on the other hand, based his/her persuasion on the Bible as a divinely inspired book which calls one to accept Jesus Christ as the Savior of all humankind and accept the Advent message as the guide for their new life.

In the effort to evangelize Muslims, however, Christian missionaries meet people who have their own “sacred” book—the Koran. This makes the undertaking completely different, with two groups of people, both devoted to the “uniqueness and sacredness” of their faith and both keen in their efforts to reach each other with their faith. The process, where two groups try to converts each other could work peacefully as long as both groups work in a spirit of tolerance, equality, and freedom. However, where Muslims are in the majority and have political power, logical arguments do not count. Christian witnessing is often threatened. Muslims will generally do all they can to stop religious and political activities that infringe on the position of Islam as the dominate, if not sole religion. The Koran and Islamic laws are detailed in not only obstructing foreign religions, they also promote the Islamic mission enterprise Dawah (Arabic for the call to bring people to Allah). Such a religious phenomenon is neither new nor unique to Islam. History tells us that when a majority religion sets out to convert or conquer adherents of a minority religion—armed particularly with the notion of divine right or authority—conflict, persecution and intolerance often develop.

Double encounters: Christian missionaries meet Allah’s apostles

Muslims have been exposed to Christian witnessing for 1,500 years. Still, all mission agencies have reluctantly had to admit that results have been extremely meager, often non-existent. Islam is still like an impregnable fortress against which Christians (including Adventists), have no persuasive power.

The important geographical change in evangelizing Muslim is that the mission field now is often next door. However, even with this obvious and inexpensive neighborhood witnessing, results are almost non-existent. Over the years, different mission societies and the Adventist Church have developed various ingenious evangelistic approaches. These strategies have generally been focused on attempts to meet Islamic people in their own geographic areas and local cultural environments (Middle East, Asia and Africa). But very few approaches have been designed for the “diapora” Muslims in areas where circumstances allow conversions.

The main reason for lack of success in these evangelistic programs is, no doubt, that in Islam there are warnings with severe threats against listening and converting to Christianity. Islamic laws, including the death penalty, could be put in practice for such transgressions. These rules are sometimes applied in liberal, Western settings. Families, Muslim groups and mosque leaders will at times carry out what authorities do in Islamic countries.

Evangelism to Muslims is an uphill, but not a one-sided battle. Today we in the West face locally a religious people who have the Dawah ambition to make converts among western people. Imams and Mullahs exhort immigrant Muslims to be active in promoting Islam. This call to Dawah remains central in Islamic writings, sermons, literature and a growing number of Islamic Web sites. Their strategies are not just to convert Christians but to defend, and sometimes even physically fight against, negative perceptions of Islam, Muhammad, and the Koran.
Exact data on Christian converts to Islam are hard to get, in part because they are not always correctly recorded. However, in the West the numbers of Christians who convert to Islam far surpass the numbers of Muslims turning to Christianity. There are reports of Adventist youth “converting” to Islam for various reasons. Among these converts are young women in relationships with Muslim men, including marriages. [2] Fortunately, we are not talking about large numbers. Still, Adventist Christians in a Western context who convert to Islam outnumber Muslims accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior.

To these discouraging facts must be added the fact that the few scattered Adventist minorities living in Islamic countries, often under constant heavy pressures to abandon their faith, are tempted to choose to live as “incognito Adventists.” A significant number of them immigrate to the West. The result is that an already weak minority of Christians is further diluted. The apparent negative results of the “Arab Spring” have made the Christian minorities in these countries very cautious, fearing that the future could be a time of less religious liberty and more persecution.

The General Conference has recently focused on reaching the main cultural and geographic areas of Islam, which is a welcome development. Such a move must be followed by a Bible-based strategy for Muslim evangelism to be pursued by administration, educational institutions, and people in the field. It should also take into consideration strategies for the 50 million Muslims living in countries with more freedom. Their conversion could provide important inroads to closed Islamic areas.

Religious liberty and freedom of expression

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers.” [3] This document is the basis for the existence and life of political parties, world religions and Christian denominations. Only 86 out of 194 countries have signed the declaration. This means that more than 2.5 billion people (35 percent of world’s population), the majority of whom are Muslims, do not enjoy these rights. The few Muslim countries that have signed the Declaration seem to interpret it to mean that Islamic nations (1) have the right to practice and proclaim Islam freely anywhere; (2) are protected in their areas from people who want to propagate non-Islamic beliefs; and (3) have the right to deal with apostates according to Islamic laws, which could mean execution.

In Western societies we take freedom of expression for granted. The question of religious liberty has always been a vital issue in Christian evangelism and missions. In pioneer situations, Adventists have often had to fight for religious liberty. These rights are still our basis for being able to proclaim the three angels’ messages and establish churches globally. The religious freedom to worship and proclaim which is denied Christians in Muslim countries are expected by immigrant Muslims in Western countries. Many Muslims interpret human rights to include that authorities will protect them from being ridiculed, criticized and questioned about their religion and lifestyle. This often includes the expectation that articles, news reports, drawings, pictures and other items that they interpret as blasphemous will be controlled. In situations where Muslims claim that the authorities did not protect them, they are known to have taken matters into their own hands.

One negative result of this is that, as a prophetic movement, Seventh-day Adventists with their warning message have become very careful in the way they deal with Islam. If even a fraction of the daily reports of bloody sectarian clashes, persecution, terrorism, infringement of the freedom of expression and the fight for religious privileges be attributed to the Roman Catholic Church, it would get headlines in Adventist publications. As Adventists, we believe in the soon coming of Christ and preach its nearness by pointing to “signs of the times” in the religious, political, environmental and criminal world. We are known for preaching about these signs of the end time. Is the Adventist reluctance to deal with Islamic religious/political news a question of self-censorship? Do the general threats of reprisals from Islamic sources keep us silent? [4]

Are we compromising faithfulness to our call? Has the time come for us to be ready to give satisfactory answers to the many faithful church members who today ask serious questions about the meaning of global events with religious overtones? They want to know whether there are answers in the Bible and what is the Adventist stand on the issues.

At times we hear pleas to “love the Muslims.” We must love all people, regardless of their religion. There are references to Islam and Muslims in Adventist periodicals and they are generally on uncontested topics and positive toward Islam. In my work as an administrator, teacher, pastor, and evangelist on five continents, my experience has been that church members are generally friendly and hospitable to Muslim neighbors and acquaintances. They want to be witnesses to Muslim neighbors. The problem is, however, that Muslims are discouraged from accepting Christian fellowship, and for that reason are reluctant and often skeptical of communication with people of other religions.

Personally, I know Muslims for whom I have high regard. Friendship was reciprocated. That does not mean agreement on doctrines. To love and respect a Muslim for whom Christ died does not mean to accept his or her unbiblical teachings, practices, and laws. The key to witnessing is to learn their ways and understand where they are coming from.

Where do we go from here?

The missionary call to “go and make disciples of all nations” includes Muslims, even if they are the most gospel-resistant people in modern mission history. The 1.5 billion Muslims can be divided into three groups.

1. About one billion live in Islamic nations where Christian approaches to Muslims are forbidden and conversion can mean execution. A few of these Islamic countries tolerate minority religious groups, but these groups are isolated and controlled.

2. Another 450 million Muslims reside in countries with limited religious freedom where there is a strong Islamic dominance. Local culture and laws are largely influenced by Islamic views.

3. Then about 50 million Muslims have emigrated to Western nations. They enjoy full religious liberty, but are under dominant family and cultural pressures.

Any plans for reaching Muslims in these three groups should take into account the late Donald McGavran’s excellent suggestion for evangelism and missionary approaches: Win the winnable while they are winnable. [5] We are called to witness to “all those who live on earth.” That certainly includes both receptive and resistant people. However, when people resist or governments forbid missionary activities, we should follow the counsel from Jesus to “shake the dust off your feet"
and move on to winnable people (Luke 9:5; 10:10). Then, continue to look for possible future openings in both world mission and neighborhood evangelism.

The Muslim next door

Fifty million Muslims live where they have complete freedom to change their religion. They are in a context where they are theoretically winnable. They also have meaningful contacts with families and friends in the many closed countries. A fair proportion of the church’s personnel and finances should be steered to this Western Muslim group. However we face the additional issue that Muslim immigrants generally have more problems with the way Christians live than with the tenets of the Christian faith. The moral degeneration in so-called “Christian” countries is interpreted by Muslims as proof that Christianity is a religion with little influence on the lives of its followers. Muslims observe the free and open conventions between men and women, the easy access to pornography, the use of alcohol, the abuse of drugs and the offensive television programs, and as a result do not see any particular reason to accept Christianity. They argue that Muslims are more faithful and dedicated to God as they openly follow strict Islamic laws and fight for their “rights” in opposition to local cultures and customs.

The Holy Spirit can and does work on people who do not understand the inner faith dynamic of the gospel. Public meetings are not a recommended means because Muslims are watched by other Muslims and are reluctant to attend Christian events. Suitable literature could be of great help especially if it is in appropriate languages. No doubt friendly personal contacts with an individual Muslim or preferably the whole family will be the best approach. Sharing a meal where consideration is made for their dietary principles is an excellent occasion for conversation. Knowledge of the linguistic, national, and cultural background of the Muslim immigrants will be of great value. [6]

Whatever approach we take in reaching Muslims, we need to be honest and faithful to our Christian standards. The increased number of Muslim residents in some areas should call for churches to further educate members about Muslim beliefs and lifestyle. Be intentional. Win the winnable while they are winnable.

------------

Log In to Post a Comment. Log In | Register
Daniel Revisited: The Anatomy of a Heresy

By Andrew Hanson Des Ford was defrocked by the Adventist Church because he didn’t believe that 1844 A.D. was the beginning of God’s Investigative Judgment in which Christ would eventually determine the fate of every human being, i.e., whether they would be saved or lost. (1) That date, according to official Adventist doctrine, was derived from a prophecy contained in the Old Testament book of Daniel. Furthermore, Ford believed that the notion of an investigative judgment undermined the Protestant belief in salvation by grace. (2)

The Desmond Ford Controversy has always fascinated me. It seemed to me that Des Ford could have made a much stronger defense of his position if he were not a “selective biblical literalist”. (3) When Ford made the decision to argue his case based on this hermeneutical assumption, he couldn’t win. In matters of interpreting “Daniel’s original intended meaning,” he was simply outgunned. What he “believed” didn’t stand a chance against the invested, published, foundational, and traditional belief of his church. In matters of belief, there can be no appeal to fact.

The following five paragraphs are taken from the “Statement on the Desmond Ford Document” from Ministry Magazine, October, 1980, Subhead 4, Year-Day Principle. Note the words “believe” and “believes.” (Page references are to Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement and the Investigative Judgment, Ford’s 900+ page defense of his position.)

Dr. Ford believes that the year-day tool became a providential discovery “after the Advent hope of the early church had faded away” (p. 294). But coupled with his uncertainty regarding the use of the year-day principle is his uncertainty regarding the dates for the beginning and ending of the time prophecies of Daniel (pp. 320, 321, 344).

Because Ford believes that the year-day principle was not God's original intent for Daniel's time prophecies, he believes its present use, in harmony with God's "providential" arrangement, should not be with punctiliar precision.

We believe, however, that the year-day principle is a valid hermeneutical tool and called for by the context containing the time prophecies. When the context relates to historical narrative with literal people, literal time periods are used in Daniel 1, 3, 5, and 6. In the apocalyptic passages, when time periods accompany symbolic figures, it is natural and appropriate to expect those time periods also to be symbolic in nature. Numerous other reasons help the prophetic interpreter to distinguish between literal and symbolic time.

We further believe that all of the apocalyptic prophecies in which time elements are found have stood the pragmatic test. That is, their predicted events did occur at the intervals expected, according to the application of the year-day principle. In reference to Daniel 8:13, 14, we believe that the context requires the use of the year-day principle, and thus a fulfillment beginning in 457 B.C. and ending in A.D. 1844.

We thus reject Dr. Ford’s assertion that Daniel 8:14 "applies also to every revival of true religion where the elements of the kingdom of God, mirrored in the sanctuary by the stone tablets and the mercy seat, are proclaimed afresh, as at 1844" (p. 356).

Des Ford could not marshal evidence using the historical-critical method (4) because that hermeneutical approach would be tantamount to proclaiming himself a non-Adventist theologian (5) and his wish was to inform and reform the church he loved. And even if Ford had been allowed to present arguments suggested by the historical-critical approach, there was no way “new light” could have penetrated the armor of traditional belief. (6)

One of the most extensive scholarly reviews of the Book of Daniel can be found in the Jewish Encyclopedia. The authors unanimously agree that Daniel was essentially an historical novel written between 164 and 167 B.C. (7)

I have included two critical reviews of the book to give the reader a taste of conservative scholarly reasoning.

Louis F. Hartman writes: "Having lost sight of these ancient modes of writing, until relatively recent years Jews and Christians have considered Daniel to be true history, containing genuine prophecy. Inasmuch as chapters 7-12 are written in the first person, it was natural to assume that Daniel in chapters 1-6 was a truly historical character and that he was the author of the whole book. There would be few modern biblical scholars, however, who would now seriously defend such an opinion. The arguments for a date shortly before the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 164 B.C. are overwhelming. An author living in the 6th century B.C. could hardly have written the late Hebrew used in Daniel, and its Aramaic is certainly later than the Aramaic of the Elephantine papyri, which date from the end of the 5th century B.C. The theological outlook of the author, with his interest in angelology, his apocalyptic rather than prophetic vision, and especially his belief in the resurrection of the dead, points unescapably to a period long after the Babylonian Exile. His historical perspective, often hazy for events in the time of the Babylonian and Persian kings but much clearer for the events during the Seleucid Dynasty, indicates the Hellenistic age. Finally, his detailed description of the profanation of the Temple of Jerusalem by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167 B.C. and the following persecution (9:27; 11:30-35) contrasted with his merely general reference to the evil end that would surely come to such a wicked man (11:45), indicates a composition date shortly before the death of this king in 164 B.C., therefore probably in 165 B.C." (The Jerome Biblical Commentary, vol. 1, p. 448)
W. Sibley Towner writes: "Daniel is one of the few OT books that can be given a fairly firm date. In the form in which we have it (perhaps without the additions of 12:11-12), the book must have been given its final form some time in the years 167-164 B.C. This dating is based upon two assumptions: first, that the authors lived at the later end of the historical surveys that characterize Daniel 7-12; and second, that prophecy is accurate only when it is given after the fact, whereas predictions about the future tend to run astray. Based upon these assumptions, the references to the desecration of the Temple and the 'abomination that makes desolate' in 8:9-12; 9:27; and 11:31 must refer to events known to the author. The best candidates for the historical referents of these events are the desecration of the Temple in Jerusalem and the erection in it of a pagan altar in the autumn of 167 B.C. by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The inaccurate description of the end of Antiochus' reign and his death in 11:40-45, on the other hand, suggests that the author did not know of those events, which occurred late in 164 or early in 163 B.C. The roots of the hagiographa (idealizing stories) about Daniel and his friends in chaps. 1-6 may date to an earlier time, but the entire work was given its final shape in 164 B.C."

(Harper's Bible Commentary, p. 696)

So Now What?

Can Adventism survive without the beasts of Daniel and a doctrine that places Jesus in a heavenly sanctuary in front of a celestial computer consigning some of us to Eternal Oblivion and some to Eternal Life? (As a kid I wondered if He worked eight-hour days.) At that time I was told that if my name came up during my lifetime, probation closed for me at that moment. So I better ask forgiveness for my sins at least daily. (The admonition to live a life of prayer seemed a good idea.)

A larger question presents itself: Is being a follower of Christ enough? Is it “safe” to be a Christian Adventist rather than an Adventist Christian? If some of the Adventist “Truth” I was taught as a child no longer seems reasonable; if I have trouble visualizing the God of the universe in front of a celestial computer in a heavenly tabernacle; if I believe the beasts described in Daniel are the product of human imagination, should I resign my church membership?

I wonder if Ted Wilson would grandfather me in today, in spite of my current doubts and unbelief. After all, I was baptized at 10, before there were 28 Fundamental Beliefs. I paid my dues with nightmares about being murdered by Catholics, in addition to worrying about my probation closing and the fate of my mother who sometimes watched the news after work on Friday night.

-----------------------------

(1) Fundamental Belief # 24

Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary: There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle which the Lord set up and not man. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry at the time of His ascension. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent. (Heb. 8:1-5; 4:14-16; 9:11-28; 10:19-22; 1:3; 2:16, 17; Dan. 7:9-27; 8:13, 14; 9:24-27; Num. 14:34; Eze. 4:6; Lev. 16; Rev. 14:6, 7; 20:12; 14:12; 22:12.)

http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/

(2) A detailed outline of Ford's heresy is outlined in the blog, Jesus is Wonderful, along with the moderator's refutation of his heresy.


(3) Selective literalism as the tendency to elevate certain biblical principles over others in order to best accommodate one's personal opinions. For example, most Christians do not believe that rebellious children should be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 21:18), but many support the death penalty as punishment for murder (Genesis 9:6).

http://rachelheldevans.com/blog/article-1206664116

A more common name for this method is hermeneutical-grammatical. It attempts to discover the author's original intended meaning in the text.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical-grammatical_method

(4) Historical criticism, also known as the historical-critical method or higher criticism, is a branch of literary criticism that investigates the origins of ancient text in order to understand "the world behind the text" [1].

The primary goal of historical criticism is to ascertain the text's primitive or original meaning in its original historical context and its literal sense or sensus literalis historicus. The secondary goal seeks to establish a reconstruction of the historical situation of the author and recipients of the text. This may be accomplished by reconstructing the true nature of the events which the text describes. An ancient text may also serve as a document, record or source for reconstructing the ancient past which may also serve as a chief interest to the historical critic.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_critical

(5) General Conference Sabbath Sermon - July 3, 2010

Go forward, not backward! Let Scripture be its own interpreter. Our church has long held to the Historical-Biblical method of understanding scripture, allowing the
Bible to interpret itself; line upon line, precept upon precept. However, one of the most sinister attacks against the Bible is from those who believe in the Historical-Critical method of explaining the Bible. This unbiblical approach of “higher criticism” is a deadly enemy of our theology and mission. This approach puts a scholar or individual above the plain approach of the scriptures and gives inappropriate license to decide what he or she perceives as truth based on the resources and education of the critic. Stay away from this type of approach because it leads people to distrust God and His Word. Selected Messages, Book 1, pp 17-18 speaks directly to this issue. “When men, in their finite judgment, find it necessary to go into an examination of scriptures to define that which is inspired and that which is not, they have stepped before Jesus to show Him a better way than He has led us……let not a mind or hand be engaged in criticizing the Bible……cling to your Bible, as it reads, and stop your criticisms in regard to its validity, and obey the Word, and not one of you will be lost.”

(6)
In 1955, according to Raymond Cottrell, the editors of the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary found it “hopelessly impossible” to combine both solid Bible scholarship with what Adventists believed and taught about Daniel 8 and 9. In 1958 when revising Bible Readings for republication, he sought the opinion of 27 North American Adventist theologians who knew Hebrew, and also heads of religion departments, concerning the interpretation of Daniel 8:14. Without exception, the scholars responded by acknowledging “that there is no valid linguistic or contextual basis for the traditional interpretation of Daniel 8:14.” (5)

After being notified, the General Conference appointed a secret “Committee on Problems in the Book of Daniel”, which met from 1961 to 1966 but was unable to reach a consensus. (29) (In 2001 Cottrell would publicly criticize the doctrine, yet remained an Adventist. He also wrote papers and a lengthy book on the subject – Eschatology of Daniel. It remained unpublished, and Cottrell stated, “the manuscript awaits a climate of openness and objectivity in the church, which is essential to a fair examination of the facts.”) (32)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Investigative_judgment

(7)
http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4874-daniel-book-of

Log In to Post a Comment. Log In Register
Salvation by Doctrines?

By Toby Joreteg

Could this really be true…?

"We Are Good"

"Isn’t it wonderful to be a member of God’s church? What an incredible benefit and joy it is to belong to the elect, the Remnant, and to have the truth! We keep all God’s commandments! We have the right lifestyle and the correct understanding of the prophecies. How special to really understand the texts concerning Jesus’ second coming, the state of the dead, etc. What a joy! It feels like we almost automatically will be saved, just by belonging to the right Church. All the above facts support that! God must have been exceptionally good to and pleased with us! “Thank you, dear Lord, that we are not like so many others.”

My friend, who had listened patiently to my somewhat strange proclamation, responded like this: “The reality seems, however, to be somewhat different. Have you ever considered the fact that today all churches in the westernized world combined, appear to have less spiritual power than what the twelve Apostles had after Pentecost! We often hear about how hard it is to reach people with our message and that people have very little interest in religion nowadays.”

“Oh, Just wait,” I told my friend. “Very soon the ‘latter rain’ will come and then everything will be different. It will be so wonderful, probably even better than Pentecost. Then we will be filled with Power from on High and have the victorious experiences that we long for. Just wait and everything will be great. THEN you will have nothing to say!”

Power at Pentecost

My friend is not satisfied and starts asking some probing questions. “I wonder when the Christians will start to live truly spiritual lives? When Jesus was asked when the kingdom of God would come, He answered that it is within you. He also said that this victorious power would come at Pentecost. My question to you is, when did God remove His Holy Spirit? It appears as if we all are so spiritually poor today. No one seems to have real faith. There are hardly any successful evangelistic series today in the western world. In most places, we at best see status quo but often declining membership. We say that we still are faithful, but things don’t look too good.”

My friend paused for a moment and then he continued. “Have you ever thought of what we are faithful to? It appears to me that we are still faithful to our Church, but…”

“But, what,” I asked my friend impatiently? “But…the question is if we really are faithful to God. Don’t misunderstand me,” said my friend. “I do not say that we should stop being committed to our Church, but…where do we see true faithfulness to God? Have you ever thought of what it means? Are we faithful to our Lord by paying tithe, keeping the doctrines of our Church, having the right lifestyle, accepting the right understanding of prophecies, etc., or is something more needed? What does God expect from us? Have you asked God about this?”

“Yes,” I said with some indignation. “I can guarantee you that we always ask God! We always pray to God for guidance when it comes to all bigger issues—in our board meetings, conferences, seminars, etc.—and we do it every time! This we have certainly fulfilled! In regard to this you have nothing to say,” I said with the slight irritation befitting a righteous saint.

My friend then said, “Well, that sounds good! Can you give me any examples where God has answered these prayers? What does He tell you when you ask Him for
advice? Does God usually tell you what you should do? Is it a one-way or a two-way communication?"

“No, we are not charismatic,” I exclaimed! “What do you think? After we have prayed, of course we continue our duties regardless…”

“Regardless of what?” my friend asked.

“Well, regardless if God answers our prayers or not. Honestly, I have never thought about that before. God has never spoken to me, and I don’t know whether He has spoken to anyone else either. I am not aware that God really does answer our prayers by speaking to us. It sounds almost scary! Would God really tell us what we ought to do?”

A Prayer Story

I continued despite being somewhat intimidated, “That reminds me of a story I heard recently. A pastor went to a hospital to visit an older church member who was very sick. The woman was unconscious and was getting worse and worse. She was obviously dying, so the pastor made a very short visit. He talked to her, but he wasn’t sure she heard him. No reaction was seen. He finished his visit by praying for the woman. He did not know why, but this time he was a little more bold than usual. At the end of his prayer, he even asked the Lord to heal the sick woman.

When the prayer was done, he sat back and just looked at her. Suddenly she opened her eyes and started to look around. Some moments later she sat up in bed, stretched her arms, pulled out the feeding tube, stood up, and walked to the bathroom, where she changed her hospital clothes to her own, packed her few belongings, and walked out of the unit.

The pastor could not believe his eyes! Totally astonished he just sat there and couldn’t say a word. He had never in his career experienced anything like this. Quite confused he left the hospital and walked to his car. There, as he came to his senses, he prayed to God, “Lord, let this never happen to me again!” That was all he could say! The pastor was in shock and could not grasp what had happened. Such a magnificent answer to prayer was more than he could handle.”

Real Followers

My friend then asked me, “Have you ever studied why the Israelites failed as God’s covenant people? What was the reason for this?” Since I didn’t know, I motioned to my friend to continue. He said, “In both the Old and New Testaments, we can find the reason for their failure. In Exodus 15:26 we read that they did not keep the Commandments of God, and secondly that they didn’t listen to His voice. To say it in more general terms, they didn’t obey the Word of God or the Spirit of God. We think that we are pretty good at following the Scriptures but honestly we are quite poor at listening to God’s voice, aren’t we?” I nodded slowly.

“This is not an isolated text,” my friend continued. “Read also from Deuteronomy 30:20, Psalm 95:7-8, Daniel 9:9-11, Jeremiah 6:10, etc. Jeremiah 7:13 says, “While you were doing all these things, declares the LORD, I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer” (all verses are from the NIV).

“This is the reason why they failed as God’s covenant people. The Israelites didn’t obey God’s written Word, nor did they listen when God spoke to them in various ways—neither through Spirit-filled kings, judges, priests, and prophets, nor directly to the individuals. Most frequently, however, God spoke to people in various leadership positions.”

A Prophet of God

My friend went on to say, “Those who proclaimed God’s will were scorned and spat on. Consider what happened when a king in Israel got the message that a big
army was heading for his country. The king had not heeded the message of the Lord, and therefore his kingdom faced this threat. He gathered the wise men together, and they bowed down before the king and gave him a pleasant message: ‘Everything will be fine. You will be victorious. You will defeat the enemy.’ Even if the king had been unfaithful to God, he sensed that they were not telling the truth” (1 King 22:1-18).

“Therefore, the king called a prophet of God and asked the same question. What shall I do and what will the outcome be? The man of God was usually alone against scores of so-called ‘Wise Men.’ The message from God was often very harsh like: ‘You will not succeed; you will lose this battle and your life as well. The reason is that you have not heeded the voice of God and not obeyed His Commandments.’"

My friend reminded me that because of the harsh messages, the men of God in the Old Testament were hated. “But please notice they were always right! If the king at that moment would change and obey God with all his heart, he would be saved. The big crowd or the multitude of counselors did not speak the truth. Therefore, it is critically important to ask God and wait for His answer before we do anything!”

The New Testament

I must admit that I was impressed by my friend’s exposition of the Bible and realized that he was right. If the Old Testament people failed due to disobedience to God’s Word and by not listening to His spoken voice, then I wonder if the same is true in the New Testament. Personally, I have not taken time to listen to God! I wonder if my life would be different if I had done that.

My friend could see the questions in my face and gave me texts from the New Testament. We read John 10:3-5, 16, 27, 8:47, 18:37, and more. The verse that made the biggest impression on me was one from Revelation. Here Jesus stands at the door to our hearts and obviously He has something to say. Revelation 3:20 reads:

*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*

Though the text hit my heart and probably would have been to my benefit, I was not ready to discuss the Laodicean message at this time. I didn’t feel spiritually strong enough. May the Lord have mercy on me, I thought.

My friend talked to me at length about God’s desire to have a dialogue with us. “We are so used to having a monologue! God wants to guide our lives in a personal and specific way. He is not like a clock maker who, when he has made the clock, lets it run by itself. God wants to guide us to the right path and helps us avoid the wrong ones. He strongly desires to walk by our side all the way! He wants to use His love and wisdom to help us in our daily lives. He truly wishes to have a relationship with us.”

It Starts to Sink in

I started to understand that nothing is wrong with God or with the people around me—but with me! Am I the reason why my church is so dead? I read my Bible for less than five minutes most days and then I pray a couple of minutes. The rest of the time I act completely after my own will, according to my own wisdom and inclinations. No wonder that my spiritual life had no power! All of a sudden it dawned on me that I was the Lord of my life and not Jesus. If He really were my Lord, I would like to listen to Him and follow His voice with all my heart.

But the biggest shock came when I realized that I had behaved exactly like the Old Covenant people. They were right in theological issues, had a correct lifestyle, honored the true Sabbath, and had received the prophecies, and yet they still did not recognize the Messiah when He came. They even resisted Him in their eagerness to do the right thing. They rejected the Son of God in spite of the fact that they were God’s denominated people!

Somewhere it says that their hearts were not circumcised. They had the knowledge but it didn’t help them. The devil actually knows more than all of us together, but that will not save him! I realized that we are not saved by our knowledge about God, but by our relationship to Him. The Old Covenant people kept the Sabbath better than I have ever done, but it didn’t save them. They knew the prophecies, but that didn’t save them. They had the right lifestyle, but it didn’t save them.

If God could not keep them as His Covenant People because they disobeyed His written Word and didn’t listen to His voice, what about me? What will happen to me when Jesus comes back? For me “truth” had always been to observe the right doctrines. You can have knowledge about God without a personal relationship with...
Him. Moreover, I realized that to belong to “the elect” was not identical with being saved. You are elected for a specific task, but saved if you let Jesus be Lord of your life (Matthew 7:21-23). Then for the first time in my life it became clear to me that:

*My church membership would not save me!*  

**Who Am I?**

Suddenly God had opened my eyes to see my hypocrisy. My first thoughts about how happy I was to have the **truth**, the right **lifestyle**, keep the **Sabbath**, belong to the elect, the **Remnant**, know all the **prophecies**, etc., now made me feel nauseated. I realized that all these things only had significance if I were led by the Spirit of God because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Romans 8:14).

This text was not true in my life because I had shaped my own life! Surely, I had always been a good Christian! But if I really wanted to be saved, I had to follow Romans 8:14 too! Next, God reminded me of 2 Chronicles 7:14. “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

I said above that “God reminded me of 2 Chronicles 7:14,” and for the first time, I realized that it was God who had spoken to me when this text came to my mind (John 14:26). That was a big eye-opener to me! God is interested in me personally!!

I now also realize that we are not really humble when we conduct evangelism because the whole point is to proclaim that WE are right, that WE know better, that WE have the truth! I call that “salvation by comparison.” That is, WE know and understand things better. At least that is what I perceive when I listen to our messages on TV, radio, and in public meetings. Is the little interest from the hearers a result of our poor relationship with God? When I thought about that, I knew that God had spoken to my heart again. I felt ashamed, and I thought about Matthew 23:12, “For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

I realized that it was time for me to humble myself before the Lord. My attitude had been far from meek, but now I understood that only when I humble myself am I interested in being led by His Spirit. Only when He is Lord of my life will I daily experience His victorious power, which I had been longing for. Only then will God successfully reach others through me! Only then will the “latter rain” fall on me! Only then will I belong to the saved when Jesus comes back!

My friend, who was very humble, was right. And I, who thought I had it all right, was wrong.

_________________________ Join in the discussion:

**Log In to Post a Comment.** Log In| Register
This week, in chapter 18 of *The Monastery of the Heart*, “A Listening Heart,” I am struck mute by the clarity and beauty of the first few paragraphs. I shall add nothing.

There is a magnet in a seeker’s heart whose true north is God. It bends towards the Voice of God with the ear of the heart and, like sunflowers in the sun, turns all of life toward the living of the Word.

This listening heart is pure of pride and free of arrogance. It seeks wisdom—everywhere, at all times—and know wisdom by the way it echoes the call of the scriptures.

The compass for God implanted in the seeker’s heart stretches toward truth and signals the way to justice.

It is attuned to the cries of the poor and oppressed with a timbre that allows no interruption, no smothering of the Voice of God on their behalf.

Share your thoughts about this article:
Adventist Today

Talbingo Poem

By Chris Barrett

This poem is the result of a Sabbath-day drive to our local Church camp yesterday. It was held in the beautiful Snowy Mountain town of Talbingo.

Worship was three tasks. We were to go outside, alone, in the bush and parkland around the facility and find a spot to sit quietly. I sat by a small creek, in a wooded gully, forested with trees, undergrowth, and blackberry vines. The creek flowed to Talbingo dam, part of the Snowy Mountains Hydro Scheme. The first 5 minutes were to be spent eyes shut just listening to nature's sounds. The second 5 were to be eyes open observing nature. We were to write down what we heard, saw, and then what we sensed God saying to us through the surroundings.

At the conclusion of this we went inside, formed small groups, and shared what we had experienced. This was followed by 20 minutes to write a psalm/poem about what we experienced in the first segment. Here is what I wrote and read out in the sharing that followed. The last line was hastily added to “save my soul” when I knew it could go public in the meeting. The leader had a rather puzzled look on his face after I read it, but another member later commented very positively on the poem. There are changes I would now make with more time, but I've shared it here as was, in the shape the experience and time permitted it to reach. Much of our life is like that, always room to improve, shaped by the pressures of time, circumstances, and what we are at the moment. Unlike this poem, much that we do allows no change or “editing” afterwards. I had not given it a title, nor have I yet! So, here it is:

I hear your sounds fill the air

Birds and breeze call from tree to tree

Breeze slides past and whispers everywhere

Natures form and shape in sound I see

Bird snaps up worm hunger sates

Life’ s cycle flows past my feet

Takes its journey to the lake

Rises to the air and falls as sleet

Nature's doing what nature does

Perfumed and beautiful in its green

Unforgiving harsh and cruel if crossed

It's path ahead its path we've seen...

Unless a God steps in with change!!

---

Log In to Post a Comment. Log In| Register
Standing Up to a Bully

Submitted: Jul 17, 2013
By Patricia Sexton

Note: Guest writer Patricia Sexton and her husband, Dale, run a business in which they buy from auctions and estate sales and then resell in their area. She first shared this amazing (and kind of scary) story on her facebook blog. We reprint it with permission. It reminds us of the incredible power of words—power to destroy, power to heal. DLK

It was going to be the best auction. We needed the items they were showing in the photo galleries of their website. So we headed out for Ashland, OH with high hopes.

The most direct route, the GPS route, brought trouble. Big ROAD CLOSED signs were everywhere due to the major flooding in areas north of us. All low lying ground was now a river running beside the road. But finally we found our way to the little town with the best auction.

There was very limited parking on the narrow street outside the auction. So Dale dropped me off and I waited in line for IDs and bid cards while he found a distant home for our big box truck.

The huge building was already jam-packed with people and goods. It was a large auction. Lots of Amish were there with their horses and buggies while others had hired vans with trailers hooked behind. We English came with our pickups and roomy cars, and one box truck.

The auction began. Two rings with separate auctioneers and sound systems kept us hopping as they raced through the rows and rows. Distant rumbles of thunder became a steady background noise as the afternoon proceeded. Dale and I glimpsed each other from time to time, over a sea of faces intent on buying tools, Italian pottery, pink Depression glass, and new kitchen cabinets.

Several hours later we were the proud owners of so much grand stuff that I had no idea how we were going to get all this finery into one modest-sized box truck. I’ve seen Dale work some packing genius in the past, but this would take MAGIC. If he carefully calculated every square inch and angled each trunk, dresser, and table j-u-s-t right, we might get most of it in.

I was already considering what we would need to leave at a loss. (I.e. those two seedy patio chairs, on which Dale had taken pity, could just stay behind.)

The auction finally ended in a flurry of activity. People were lining up their conveyances in the narrow street. Carts were piled head-high with all the treasures and rushed down the building’s sloping ramp into waiting arms of back seats and trunks. Amish buggies were bulging at the seams, long handles of shovels, rakes, and pick axes stuck out everywhere, like knitting needles in yarn balls.
One young man was hurrying his mother and wife as they struggled with the heavy boxes overflowing with their stuff. He cursed at them as they misstepped and nearly dropped one of his treasures. Lots of us were standing nearby and heard every insult that came so steadily. This was common “conversation”, it would seem, and made me sick at my stomach.

It was finally our turn to park on the narrow street and begin our lengthy loading. It was going to be a long one. As I was carefully arranging boxes of fragile items into our truck cab, I once again heard this young man’s diatribe and cursing coming from the opposite side of the narrow street. I couldn’t see him, but I sure could hear him, humiliating and berating his wife.

I quickly stepped outside my door. “Stop It!” I yelled as loudly as I could. “Stop that right now!” I shouted into the air. “That is abusive language! Stop it!” And he did stop. Lots of others had also heard his language but we were all a little shocked at my outcry. I half expected the young man to round the corner of my truck and land a punch on my interfering mouth. Instead, everyone just kept on packing.

And then, with a loud crack of thunder, the sky split in two and rain poured on everything and everyone. Bad behaviors and meddling moments were instantly tabled as water threatened to ruin everyone’s merchandise. It was like stirring up an anthill - such a rushing and thrusting.

Within our truck, it soon became apparent that Dale was in a losing battle. It was going to take more than magic tricks to get all of our things through that pouring rain and safely arranged inside. Nearly everyone else was gone by that time. The rain had melted the crowd, simply washed them away. I appealed for help from the men in charge of the auction, and read their reluctance to get soaked helping.

And then I spied the rain spattered, abusive young man and his friend as they were carrying forth the last of their bounty. They hesitated as they overheard my request for help. “What do you need?” asked the young man politely. “I need help getting all these heavy things up to my husband so he can dry them off and pack them. I would be happy to pay you,” I appealed. “Would you two help me?” They looked at each other. And did.

While his wife and mother took their little girl to get something to eat, he and his friend carried dressers, beds, cedar chests, tables and chairs, boxes and baskets, and on and on. Dale gave instructions through the curtain of rain from inside the box bed and we were his feet – bringing him the next best-fitting thing. The young men got soaked. I got soaked. But the merchandise did not. Dale’s packing magic even included the pitiful patio chairs. And with a huge sigh of relief, he finally rolled down and locked the back door.

I gratefully paid the boys, Jason and Daniel, thanking them over and over. Jason was well aware that I was the loud voice who demanded he stop his tantrums. And yet, he willingly became one of my benefactors. Oh, the irony of it all! "There is a little good in the worst; a little bad in the best." I’m not sure which category this young man falls into. I saw both his sides this night.
Variety Show Helps Homeless

Submitted: Jul 17, 2013
By AT Staff

Tony Romeo, pastor of the Historic Manhattan Seventh-day Adventist Church, is used to controversy. Adventist Today reported on him and his willingness to use unconventional methods to catch the attention of people who might be interested in what his church has to offer. [June 8, 2012] Unconventional, that is, to “church people”—very conventional in the world Romeo comes from. He worked for many years in marketing and public relations before becoming a pastor, and is often frustrated at the unwillingness of many in the church to use the skills of people like him in outreach ministry. “If they don’t know you’re there, you’re not there!”

We thought it was time for an update. Especially since his latest event seems likely to bring him some more controversy from some in the church. This Sunday, July 21, in partnership with Pathways to Housing, NY, the Manhattan church will be hosting a Variety Show. The poster (sent in Reach-NYC’s email newsletter) says, “Join us for a terrific afternoon of entertainment! Musicians, comics, poets, artists, exceptional talents!”

Here is an excerpt of Romeo’s description, both of the event and of the reason for it:

One of the goals of REACH-NYC, is to connect with members of the community, who are doing good things for others. One such group is called "Pathways To Housing NY” a non-profit organization providing housing and services here in New York City. The connection was made via one of the talented and local individuals who shared their music at a 911 Memorial Service that was held at Historic Manhattan Seventh-day Adventist Church last year.

Pathways To Housing NY, is having their Variety Show this year on Sunday, July 21, 2013, at 4:00 p.m. in the community room of Historic Manhattan Seventh-day Adventist Church, 232 West 11th Street, NYC, and it would be great if you could help make this event special, by attending.

This is a group that is helping individuals find affordable housing in the most unaffordable cities in the world, New York City. The work they do is needed and a vital part of helping people. . . .

In a city with so many needs, Historic Manhattan Seventh-day Adventist Church is happy to support their work.

Romeo goes on to delineate some of the other offerings of the church and invite people to join in. This particular letter mentions Wednesday night Bible studies and five separate AA groups, as well as weekend services. The church also has small discussion groups, vegetarian cooking classes (received with acclaim in a city whose mayor, Michael Bloomberg, is controversially active on health issues). Romeo’s “bandwidth” on the liberal/conservative spectrum may be exemplified by two recent events: This spring, the church hosted an evangelistic series by Ted Wilson, President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Romeo also took part in
a Blessing of the Animals ceremony with an ecumenical group nearby, including a Native American, a Buddhist, and a New Age spiritual leader. For his part, Tony explained the creation story as he sees it, and said that God made the animals for us to love and be loved by.

It may be that Romeo and the church will come under fire—again—for this variety show, which is likely to include jazz and tap dancing. And it is true that he sometimes feels discouraged. However, those who are drawn to Christ through this ministry, including artists and musicians who are often underserved by traditional “talking-head” church services, will cause rejoicing in heaven. AT salutes Reach-NYC and all who volunteer their time and effort in this attempt to reach hearts for the Kingdom of God.

More info:
www.reach-nyc.com (You can also sign up for email newsletters here.)
www.pathwaystohousing.org/ny/
Victory Over the Beast, Chapter 14--Babylon is Fallen!

Submitted: Jul 18, 2013
By Ervin Thomsen

Looking for Love in the Wrong Places

“And another angel followed, saying, ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication’” (Revelation 14:8).

In our journey so far through the experiential truths of the three angels’ messages, do you find that the Lord is continually stretching you? Are there perhaps times when you have been troubled by some new application of Bible truth, and said to yourself, that a certain insight just can’t be so because you never saw it that way before? Then remember that the pioneers of the Adventist church, in its early formative years, were committed to a continual searching for truth, no matter where it would lead them. Here they followed the great Expositor of all truth, Jesus Christ, who in the Sermon on the Mount stated, “You heard it said…but I say unto you” (Matthew 5:21).

In commenting on Christ’s teaching style, Ellen G. White wrote that...

“Christ in His teaching presented old truths of which He Himself was the originator, truths which He had spoken through patriarchs and prophets; but He now shed upon them a new light…And He promised that the Holy Spirit should enlighten the disciples, that the word of God should be ever unfolding to them. They would be able to present its truths in new beauty…In every age there is a new development of truth, a message of God to the people of that generation. The old truths are all essential; new truth is not independent of the old, but an unfolding of it. It is only as the old truths are understood that we can comprehend the new…He who rejects or neglects the new does not really possess the old. For him it loses its vital power and becomes but a lifeless form” [1]

So as we continue on this journey in letting the experiential truths of Babylon stretch us, let this be our prayer, “Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths” (Psalm 25:4).

The Identity of Babylon

In my personal understanding of Revelation, I was for many years absolutely sure that my personal understanding of the symbol of Babylon was totally correct. But did this knowledge help me overcome the traits of Babylon in my own life? It rather gave me a self-justifying assurance that I was not in Babylon – organizationally speaking. It developed within me a self-deceptive attitude of salvation-by-comparison, through which I could pray and thank God, just like the Pharisee in the temple, that I was not like those who were in Babylon and who were confused in holding on to wrong doctrines. But the more I studied about Babylon, I also discovered that many of its traits were present internally within me. So, rather than glorying in that I was not in Babylon, I had to realize that the Babylon mindset was solidly embedded within me, and worst of all, it had been there for a long time without my knowledge. Why? Because I
had identified Babylon only with other churches, or with certain religious or political movements, and I had, therefore, closed my mind to further investigation. In this book we will primarily study the origin, the history, and the traits of Babylon more on the experiential level, remembering the words of the old spiritual, “It’s me, it’s me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.”

For years, we have looked at the historical applications to the book of Revelation as one of its primary interpretative principles. Similarly, we have often looked at ‘sin’ as a legal matter, typified by the text of 1st John 3:4 KJV, “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” But the Scriptures also speak of sin in terms of disease. “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores” (Isaiah 1:5, 6). In our study about Babylon, you will discover that Babylon is a Biblical symbol describing sin from multiple perspectives – historical, legal, experiential and medical (the disease model). This means that in addition to your prior beliefs about the meaning of Babylon, would you also be willing to consider where the traits of Babylon may occur in your own life and experience? Is it possible that we are sometimes very outspoken in urging others to come out of Babylon, without realizing that the Babylon on the inside of us also needs to come out?

The Origin and Meaning of Babylon

The term “Babylon,” as it occurs in the book of Revelation, is a Biblical symbol describing mankind’s sin disease of rebellion, independence and separation from God. The sins of Babylon are all rooted in unbelief. Before the flood God declared that there would be a flood, and the inhabitants of earth, except for the eight persons who entered the ark, did not believe Him. Following the flood God declared there would never again be another worldwide flood, and people still did not believe Him. In defiance against His word, they built the giant tower of Babel in order to escape another flood. “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves…” (Genesis 11:4). The Babel or Babylon style of living works like this:

1. Do not believe what God says about His judgment on sin.
2. You can escape God’s judgment on sin by your own works, in this case the building of a tower to escape another flood.

To be in Babylon is to live in denial about the reality of God’s judgments. Compare this to the statement of the harlot, Babylon, who defiantly says, “‘I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.’ Therefore, her plagues will come in one day – death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord who judges her” (Revelation 18:7, 8). Babylon is really a prophetic code-word describing humanity’s defiance, rebellion and unbelief against God. It is do-it-yourself religion at its best, which really is do-it-yourself religion at its worst.

Babylon – a symbol of spiritual adultery
In the scriptures, God describes His relationship to His people in terms of a marriage covenant initiated by Himself, and when His people break that relationship, God calls this adultery, fornication, and harlotry. Before the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, God predicted their apostasy. “And the Lord said to Moses: ‘Behold you will rest with your fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. Then my anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them…And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, ‘Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?’” (Deuteronomy 31:16, 17).

The primary work of the Old Testament prophets was to warn God’s people against idolatry, the spiritual adultery of going after other gods. Our God is a jealous God, not because He is personally threatened by the competition of other gods, for all such gods are not real; they are base illusions manufactured by the lies we tell ourselves about God. God’s jealousy occurs because of His immense love for His people. He knows how we damage and destroy ourselves when we seek to find love and fulfillment in sources other than in Himself. To deal with the unfaithfulness of His very own people, God brings a “covenant lawsuit” against them. “Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; for she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband…I will not have mercy on her children, for they are the children of harlotry…she went after her lovers, but Me she forgot,” says the Lord” (Hosea 2:2, 4, 13). Then listen to the heartbreak of our relentlessly pursuing God who yearns for His own people to return to a covenant relationship with Him.

“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her…In that day I will make a covenant for them…I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord” (Hosea 2:14, 18, 19, 20).

“O Israel, return to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity; take words with you, and return to the Lord. Say to Him, ‘Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips.’ Assyria shall not save us, we will not ride on horses, nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands, ‘You are our gods.’ For in You the fatherless finds mercy. I will heal their backsliding. I will love them freely, For My anger has turned away from him. I will be like the dew to Israel; He shall grow like the lily.” (Hosea 14:1, 2, 4, 5).

**God judged His people for their idolatry by a nation of idolaters**

After centuries of unheeded warnings by His prophets, God permitted the kingdom of Babylon to invade Palestine and carry many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem into a 70-year period of captivity in Babylon. It was as if God was saying, if idolatry is your choice, then I will honor your choice by teaching you all about idolatry though a nation, Babylon, excelling in idolatry. There you will learn all about idolatry first-hand. Thus, the Bible symbol ‘Babylon’ became a description of the core sin of idolatry, a fitting symbol of bondage. This is often referred to as the **Babylonian captivity**. It is of interest to note, however, that **prior** to their deportation to Babylon, the
Israelites had already been in heavy bondage to their pet idols for hundreds of years.

**Babylon and Jerusalem Contrasted**

In the book of Revelation, God symbolically contrasts the ways of Babylon with those of Jerusalem. In the second angel’s message of Revelation 14:8, as well as in the loud cry of the mighty angel of Revelation 18:1-4, God declares His judgment on Babylon, and He appeals for His people to come out of Babylon. He invites His people to abandon their Babylon-like lifestyle of idolatry (spiritual adultery), and join His new community of faith, symbolized by the New Jerusalem. Spiritual adultery and idolatry are very closely related, like two sides of the same coin. Notice how Babylon in Revelation 17:3 rides a “beast” (an idol, a god-replacement) in an attempt to fill her “love cup.” And Paul warns the believers in Ephesus, “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (Ephesians 5:5).

**The apostasy of Babylon is worldwide.**

The apostasy and unfaithfulness of symbolic Babylon is not confined to any specific group, nation, movement, or people. Notice that the Bible says that “…she [Babylon] has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (Revelation 14:8). People everywhere have been seduced by Babylon’s offers to improve their lives. Because this apostasy is worldwide, Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 commissions His apostles to “make disciples of all nations.” This is the reason for the worldwide proclamation of the three angels’ messages “to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (Revelation 14:6).

Babylon-like living did not end with the return of God’s people from Babylonian exile. You would think that centuries of backsliding, combined with their 70-year captivity in Babylon, would have permanently cured them of the sin of idolatry. It did cure them to a great extent of external idolatry, the worship of the deities of pagan nations, but the sin of idolatry had now subtly infiltrated the religion of the Jewish people. The outward adherence to external performances of rules, rites, and ceremonies replaced the genuine worship of Jehovah. So much so that they did not recognize and receive the Savior. Hence John wrote that “He [Jesus] came to His own, and His own received Him not” (John 1:11). To those who yearned for a return to the “good old days,” the golden age of David and Solomon, and to those who exalted the current religious establishment, Jesus once said that someone greater than the temple, someone greater than Jonah, and someone greater than Solomon is here (Matthew 12:6, 41, 42). That someone greater is Jesus!

This is the same Jesus who at the Feast of Tabernacles observed how His own people were all caught up in the external round of ceremonialism. Just think of the intense emotional pain Jesus must have experienced, when, at the Feast of Tabernacles, He “stood and cried out, if anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart [innermost being – KJV] will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37, 38). To be in Babylon is to depend on other sources than Jesus Christ to fill our empty or leaking cups.
The symptoms of Babylon-like living

The sin-disease of Babylon has affected all of us, for all nations have drunk of the wine of the cup of her fornication (Revelation 14:8). Wine intoxicates, which means that partakers thereof become confused, unable to think and act rationally because they have become intoxicated by and addicted to their pet idols. The sin-disease of Babylon can even infiltrate local congregations. It happened in the early Christian church and James wrote about it, “Where do wars and fighting come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have…you fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?” (James 4:1-4). Is it still happening today? So many believers are silently asking, why is there so much internal warfare among church members? Why do they engage in behaviors destructive to genuine love and fellowship? If we know so much Bible truth, why can’t we get along with each other?

Personally, I used to believe and teach with fervor that to “come out of Babylon” was simply to come out of “doctrinal confusion” by joining a church with pure and correct Bible doctrines. But as I allowed the spotlight of the Bible to shed its light on myself and my own congregations, I started to see the root problem of spiritual adultery embedded in the worship of our pet religious idols. “It is not necessary to bow down to a stock or a stone to serve idols. Whatever takes possession of the heart, commanding its service, that is not the dictation of the Holy Spirit, assumes the form of an idol. How many hearts through a wrong course of allowing the mind to become concentrated upon a certain course of action to distinguish self, will come under the head of covetousness, which is idolatry!”[2]

Searching more deeply in the Scriptures, I started to realize that “Babylon” also stood for bondage, a captivity that took away the ability of people to respond with all their hearts, minds, and souls to the God who loves them with an unfathomable love. Often, I had referred to the confusion of languages at the tower of Babylon as meaning doctrinal confusion, and then urging people to come out of such confusion. It is of interest to notice that the confusion at the tower of Babel was ordained by God. Is it possible that to “come out of confusion” is also to come out of the bondage caused by our intoxication to our pet idols, god-replacements, whom we serve even though we from Scripture know (or rather should know) “that those who practice such things are deserving of death, [who] not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:32). To bring people out of Babylon all the way is really the work of both justification and sanctification. It is to tell people that because of the everlasting gospel and Christ’s redemption, they are now under new ownership. And sanctification is to teach them how to program their lives according to their new identity and ownership.

The Babylon Virus

Babylon-living, the universal sin-disease of all humanity, can be compared to a deadly virus, which can destroy your life. A virus, according to the dictionary, is “the causative agent of an infectious disease.” Viruses are always present in the human body, but few of those viruses pose any threat. A virus does not become a threat until two things happen: First, when the virus gets aggressive, and second, when a cell provides the virus “room and board.” It is a scientific fact
that a virus cannot grow on its own. It must have the cooperation of a host cell in our body. When a virus gains entrance into a host cell, it finds the shelter and nourishment it needs to multiply itself, and then invade other cells.

There are five characteristics of a virus that help us understand why a virus is so destructive:

1. *A virus is absolutely selfish.* It cares nothing for the rest of the body. In fact, “a virus does not have the forethought to realize it is going to kill the host that is keeping it alive.”
2. *A virus is a parasite.* It depends on the complicity of a host. It can only survive if it is enabled by something outside of itself.
3. *A virus has no self-control.* Once it has found a host cell it multiplies itself uncontrollably.
4. *A virus has no boundaries* and it does not respect the boundaries of others. It is invasive and aggressive.
5. *A virus can be a master of disguise.* Some viruses can disguise themselves so well that the immune system will not recognize and destroy them.

To understand the sin-disease of Babylon as a deadly virus will be of immense help to us in overcoming its most subtle infiltrations into our own life and experience.

**The sin-disease of Babylon**

Look for a moment at some of the symptoms of Babylon-living, and then notice that these traits are not confined any particular religious or national group. Ask yourself, how many of these occur in your own life? your own family? or your own church?

- **Self-exaltation** - “And they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make name for our ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the earth’” (Genesis 11:4) Because God in advance knew about the dangers of this attitude, He came down in judgment and confused their languages to prevent the consolidation of a conspiracy of evil and rebellion.
- **Pride and arrogance** – as king Nebuchadnezzar in self-congratulation said, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30)
- **Control** – of the minds and consciences of others. Nebuchadnezzar attempted to control the lifestyles of God’s people, their religion, their diet and their worship. The king employed a variety of control devices – threats, ultimatums, intimidation, fear, and ultimately a death decree – to strengthen the security of his kingdom through control of others. Idolatry is all about control; it is about what we do to control our lives, and even the lives of others, when we do not believe that God is doing a good job.
- **Captivity and bondage.** Idolatry always leads us into bondage to our idol. We have to sacrifice to our idol in order for the idol to do its work. Far too often the sacrifices to our idol become the people who will not give their allegiance to *our* idol.
- Rebellion – exhibited in the defiant conduct of Belshazzar in desecrating the vessels of the Jerusalem temple.
- Addictive behaviors as we become addicted to and dependent on our idols, rather than trusting God to do His work for us and in us.
- Confusion arising from the blindness (and other sensory distortions) of our addiction to our idols. For more about this, read Psalm 115.
- Seduction and deceit. As truth-telling disappears for the convenience of the pragmatism of making things work, we settle for almost anything that will give us our desired outcomes. Sometimes we equate our work with God’s work. Certainly, God wants His work to succeed. If the truth were told, far too often such work may be motivated by our need to impress others with our successes in our doing of God’s work.
- Enmity against God as we become the tormentors and persecutors of others made in the image of God.
- Defacing the image of God in man as we make gods/idols in the image of our unhealed wounds, hurts, and unfulfilled expectations.

Our Bondage to Religious Idols

What is a religious idol? It can be our attachment to a certain doctrine, or style of worship, our methodology of evangelism, standards – anything to which we cling to give us the assurance that we are on God’s side, and which will earn the applause of other church members whose opinions we value. Of all idols, religious idols are the most subtle and deceptive of all. They are so hard to detect because they often operate under the guise of doing God’s work, or helping God getting His work done. Here are some examples of such religious bondage:

- We are in slavery if we still long for the good old days of operating churches, as if the pioneers were closer to God than we are, and their methodologies of work and worship are the norm for all time.
- We are in bondage if we want the security of depending on predictable rules rather than by living in adventure with the Holy Spirit.
- We are in bondage if we think that we can impress God, and others, with our law-keeping.
- We are in bondage when we base our identity on what we do, rather than on who we are as revealed in the gospel of Christ.
- We are in bondage if we think that God loves us more because we have “the truth.”
- We are in bondage if we think that we can earn merit with God by keeping the law.
- We are in bondage if we think that we are more special to Him because we keep the Sabbath.
- We are in bondage if we believe that we can overcome sin, self, and Satan by our own works.
- We are in bondage when we want Egypt more than the Promised Land.
- We are in bondage if we do things that look and sound religious because we want to be accepted by others, and we fear their rejection.
• We are in bondage when we look down on others with contempt and disdain because they don’t have the truth that we have.

The problem with Self

The core of Babylon’s sin, whether at the tower of Babel, or in the kingdom of Babylon, or in modern day times, is self-salvation, trying to make life work without God in it. Thus Babylon may be anything which seduces us away from Jesus Christ and the good news of His salvation. The instruments of this seduction are the lies of Satan and the only cure are the truths of God. Just as the symbol of Babylon stands for captivity and bondage, so self-reliance and self-salvation leads us to bondage. Babylon is a description of life without a relationship with God, whereas the symbol of Jerusalem describes life as a relationship with God. Babylon is all about do-it-yourself religion.

“Symbolic Babylon is that attitude of heart that makes us think we can solve all of our problems and meet all our needs without God. We look to government, politics, science, technology, psychology, sociology, economics, entertainment and religion for our help – things mankind has invented. Therefore, we look to ourselves to save ourselves. Self-centered living is making ourselves out to be god; therefore, it is idolatry, which is spiritual harlotry…We become spiritual prostitutes when we create something and give our hearts to it rather than the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever appeals to Self is not of God. Self is in love with Self. It seeks its own. It is vain, prideful, arrogant, self-exalting, self-indulging, self-absorbed, power-hungry, and lustful. It strives for independence, self-reliance, and self-management. It uses and abuses others, if necessary, to achieve its own ambitions. It lies, steals, cheats, murders, covets, blames, justifies, and does whatever seems necessary to save itself. It goes to any end to protect itself. It is addicted to more. It can never be satisfied…Because the Self is centered upon itself, it is a black hole upon the space where it stands, forever suctioning itself inward as a vacuum. Self consumes itself, is self-destructive, and has death as its final reward. Self lives and dies for Self.” [3]

The above analysis can serve as a reminder of Ellen G. White’s statement that “the warfare against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought.” [4] There are no doubt truths still to be learned from traditional applications of the symbols of Babylon and beast. We have correctly had a great deal to say about the separation of church and state, but why not first start with the separation of church and hate. Do not overlook the unholy alliance between man and Satan, with the arch-enemy masquerading as an “angel of light”? Ultimately, the success of any deception is rooted in our prior self-deception.

Do-it-yourself Religion.

Do-it-yourself religion has been present in the world ever since the fall of humankind in the Garden of Eden. For all its alluring appeals, such religion is essentially bankrupt, because it cannot deliver what it promises.
• **The bondage of self-salvation:** “The principle that man can save himself by his own works lay at the foundation of every heathen religion…Satan had implanted this principle. Wherever it is held, men have no barrier against sin” [5]

• **The bondage of self-reliance:** “There are conscientious souls that trust partly to God and partly to themselves. They do not look to God, to be kept by His power, but depend upon watchfulness against temptation and the performance of certain duties for acceptance with Him. There are no victories in this kind of faith. Such persons toil to no purpose; their souls are in continual bondage, and they find no rest until their burdens are laid at the feet of Jesus.” [6]

“All nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication”

When we worship idols, we become intoxicated with the possibilities and expectations of what our idol can accomplish for us. We place all our trust, not in our Creator God, but in the god-replacing strategies of our idols, made in our own image, somehow believing that these idols can fix our problems, including our sin-disease. Your intense desire to escape pain can cause you to believe that your painful circumstances are the source of your pain. One of the seductions of Babylon is to believe that your happiness is dependent on others. This leads to the fracturing of relationships, for if people do not serve your needs, they are no longer useful to you, and you might as well discard them.

Intoxicated people are always confused. Imbibing the wine of Babylon leads to the intoxicating illusion of make-believe freedom, which is like the bondage of addiction. “Babylon” is thus the bondage of our own attempts to fill our own cups from fountains that do not satisfy, described by the prophet Jeremiah: “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13).

Never forget that sin is really an addiction, imbedded deeply in our nature because of Adam’s sin. What is an addiction? It is a pathological relationship to any substance, activity, or relationship for the purpose of escaping or dulling of pain, which has life-damaging consequences. To come out of Babylon is to let go of our dependence (addiction), to *people, places, position, possessions*, and *power* to satisfy our deepest needs. We cannot control people, and when it comes to position, we can never climb high enough. Our escape to other places for a change of scenery will not change the desires of our sinful hearts. And possessions cannot provide us the peace of Jesus, for it is truly amazing how we will buy things we don’t need, with money we don’t have, to impress people we don’t like.

**The antidote to the wine of Babylon** is the water of life, the gift of the Holy Spirit, placed in our hearts as a gift by Jesus Himself (*John 7:37-39*). When you drink from this fountain, you will always find satisfaction, because you will know that you are loved by Someone who, though He knows all about you, even the worst, will never reject anyone who comes to Him just as they are.
Babylon has forsaken the only solid and secure basis for genuine and lasting love, namely the new identity that is God’s gift to us, rooted in His covenant faithfulness. Being guilty of “adultery” and “fornication,” Babylon, like a harlot, has to “buy and sell” to obtain love. She is managing her life according to a contract – pay for what you get, and receive what you have coming. But in her intoxication she forgets God’s covenant offer of salvation, or else she lives in denial that God’s judgments are sure.

**Fear – a root cause of idolatry**

Fear of rejection by others can often be a strong motivation for a Babylon-like lifestyle. Our need for acceptance may cause us to depend on the very people whose rejection we fear. Consider these perspectives from these well-known Christian writers.

“I am afraid to tell you who I am, for if I tell you who I am, and you do not like what I am, then that’s all I’ve got.” [7]

“If I must seek an identity outside of myself, when the accumulation of wealth, power, and honors allures me…When belonging to an elite group eclipses the love of God, when I draw life and meaning from any source other than my belovedness, I am spiritually dead. Then God gets relegated to second place behind.” [8]

We can even become addicted to relationships with people in the hope that their presence in our lives will somehow fill our empty cups. Anthony DeMello succinctly describes the process and the results of this pursuit.

“Look at your life and see how you have filled its emptiness with people. As a result they have a strangle hold on you. See how they control your behavior by their approval and disapproval. They hold the power to ease your loneliness with their company, to send your spirits soaring with their praise, to bring you down to the depths with their criticism and rejection. Take a look at yourself spending almost every waking moment of your day placating and pleasing people. You live by their norms, conform to their standards, seek their company, desire their love, dread their ridicule, long for their applause, meekly submit to the guilt they lay on you; you are terrified to go against the fashion in the way you dress or speak or act or even think. And observe how even when you control them you depend on them and are enslaved by them. People have become so much a part of your being that you cannot even imagine living a life that is unaffected or uncontrolled by them.” [9]

**The Origin of the Sins of Babylon: Satan’s Lies**

The intoxicating wine of Babylon is made in the devil’s distillery, utilizing lies about himself, yourself, and God. Ever since the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden, Satan has been marketing his wares under the disguise of wanting to help you to help yourself to fill your cup of personal self-worth and significance. If he cannot get us hooked on the more obviously sinful activities, he will lure us into seemingly harmless and good activities and relationships to accomplish his purposes, which is to separate us from God and from what God wants to give us.
He can cleverly use *anything* to accomplish His purposes, even your religion, or your church, even the truth of Bible doctrines intellectually held, to lead you away from Jesus. As long as the source of your significance is found in anything other than, or less than, Jesus Christ, he can accomplish his purposes.

In the Genesis 3 account of Eve’s temptation by the serpent, you’ll discover the following lies or half-truths:

- **“Do not trust God.”** The question, “Has God said?” implies that God is not trustworthy.

- **Your life is incomplete.”** Satan suggested that Eve lacked something, and that the lack was God’s fault in withholding something from her, “You shall not eat the fruit…”

- **“Your life can be better without God.”** Why trust a God who restricts you? Why trust a God who isn’t doing his job, and who prevents you from reaching your full potential by withholding special knowledge and special experiences which should be available to anyone?

- **You can be your own god.”** Go ahead and eat the fruit, for by so doing you will be like god, and master endless opportunities for self-fulfillment.

The truth of God was that there was nothing about Eve at that moment that needed fixing. God was supplying all her needs, but she somehow believed the lie that this was not so. Satan tempted her to fix what was not broken. The appeal of this temptation rests in the false hope that you can fix yourself, and you can in your own power meet all your own needs. Satan does not want sin to appear sinful. Instead he disguises sin as something desirable. The ultimate aim of temptation is to induce us to substitute something else for God, to obscure God, while subtly working to undermine our identity in Christ.

**Life Applications**

**Questions to Ponder:**

- Previous to your study of this chapter, what were your beliefs about the meaning of Babylon? Were those beliefs wrong, or were they just incomplete?
What was your belief about the meaning of ‘coming out of Babylon’? Had you really come ‘out of Babylon’ – all the way?

**Jesus’ Cure for Looking for Love in the Wrong Places**

We need to continually ask ourselves, what is truth and what are the subtle lies or half-truths that we may have built our lives upon? Look upon this chart, and ask yourself if any of these situations apply to you. Where are you now living – in experiential Babylon or in experiential Jerusalem?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The lies or half-truths of Satan – the foundation of Babylon.</th>
<th>Replace the lies of Satan with God’s truths: the foundation of Jerusalem.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One God is <em>not</em> enough. You need multiple gods, each one custom-designed to fill a special need in an area of your life where you experience discontent and resulting covetousness. Babylon seeks to find her identity through <em>many</em> lovers.</td>
<td>The all-sufficient Creator-God, the <em>One</em> God, who is all you need, expresses His sufficiency through His many glorious names. Jerusalem has only <em>one</em> Lover – the Lord Jesus Christ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Babylon-living</em> is to break the covenant of God and live under a contract, buying and selling, in order to obtain salvation—contract salvation, believing that somehow your good works will facilitate your entrance into heaven.</td>
<td><em>Jerusalem-living</em> is to receive the everlasting gospel as a gift, and with it the gift of the Holy Spirit, through which God pours His love into our lives. For your salvation you depend on God’s covenant faithfulness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The lie about your identity:</em> “What you do determines who you are.”</td>
<td><em>The truth about your identity:</em> “Who you are determines what you do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Babylon</em>: Your self-worth is determined by your own works and the approval by others of your performance.</td>
<td><em>Jerusalem-living</em>: Your self-worth is determined by the gospel and what God says about you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work to fill your love-cup. Salvation is an accomplishment.</td>
<td>Let Jesus fill your love-cup. Salvation is a gift.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lives in denial</em>: there is no judgment, or I can pass the judgment through my own works.</td>
<td><em>Faces reality</em>: there is a judgment and through the gospel God has provided a way to face the judgment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bondage and captivity to our pet idols</em></td>
<td><em>Freedom</em> in Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion caused by the intoxication and addiction to our pet idols.</td>
<td>Freedom from fear of the judgment, fear of man, fear of exposure, fear of shame.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Endnotes:


Note: If you are enjoying these chapters and wish to have Dr. Thomsen come to do a seminar at your church or organization, please visit www.streamofhealing.org.