

# TEACHING GOD'S WORD TO OUR CHILDREN

Daniel Botkin

*"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart : And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."*  
*Deut. 6:6f*

This passage makes it clear that the primary responsibility for the spiritual training of children belongs to the parents. Many parents neglect this God-given duty. They think that teaching God's Word to their children is the job of the Sunday-school teacher or rabbi or parochial school teacher. The instruction these teachers give can supplement and reinforce the spiritual training a child gets at home, but it should never be used as a substitute for instruction from the parents.

Most parents who let others take the responsibility of teaching their children do not do so out of rebellion or defiance. Many parents honestly believe that they are unqualified and incapable of teaching God's Word to their children. They have believed the world's lie that says only specially gifted and trained people can teach their children. But God would not command parents to teach their children if the average parent is incapable of doing it.

One part of the problem stems from the word "teach." Some parents, when they hear this word, think that teaching their children the Bible will entail lengthy, complex theological discussions, complete with historical background, cross references, and insights from the original Hebrew or Greek. Teaching children is not that involved, of course, especially when they are young. The commandment in Deuteronomy suggests that teaching our children involves simply *talking* about the things of God on a regular, consistent basis — when we sit at home, as we travel, when we lie down, and when we rise up.

Some parents might say, "But I don't

know the Bible well enough to even talk about it. What can I do?"

The obvious answer for these parents is to simply read the Bible to their children. Of course it should be a translation that is understandable to the child. As much as I love reading the King James Version to myself, I don't recommend it for preschoolers.

There are also various children's Bibles available. These are not actual translations, but Bible stories told in a way that is understandable to children. I highly recommend Arthur S. Maxwell's *The Bible Story* (Review & Herald Publ., Washington DC), a ten-volume set that has been around since the 1950s. It stays close to the Bible text, and children of all ages find the stories interesting and exciting. It also has lots of color pictures. It is an expanded version of the one-volume condensed version that is often seen in waiting rooms of doctors and dentists.

Whether parents read to their children from a Bible or from a children's Bible, it is important to have set times for family devotions on a regular basis. Irregular, haphazard doses of God's Word will produce irregular, haphazard fruit in our children. Consistent teaching on a regular basis will produce consistent fruit on a regular basis.

When my children were very young (2-3 years old), I began by simply telling them very short Bible stories every day in simple language they could understand, and then prayed a short prayer for them. A few years later we began reading from Maxwell's *Bible Story*, and had each child say a short prayer. Then when our two oldest were 9 and 10, they read through the entire Bible on their own and summarized each chapter in writing. We still read *The Bible Story* for the young children, and our three older ones read and memorize Bible passages as part of their home-school curriculum.

Family devotions do not have to stretch into a one-hour "church service." It is amazing how much a small child's mind can accumulate and retain as the result of just 10 or 15 minutes' teaching per day. When our two oldest children were about 6 and 7 years old, many Christians we knew marveled at how much Scripture our children knew. On more than one occasion, older Christians felt embarrassed and ashamed (and perhaps rightly so!) when our children could answer a "Bible Trivia" question that had the adults stumped. People were surprised to hear our 7-year-old son casually mention how old Joshua was when he died; they were surprised that our 6-year-old daughter knew the names of the two men who conspired to kill King Ahasuerus.

Our children have good minds, but I do not believe they are exceptionally brilliant or have photographic memories. I believe that their knowledge of the Scriptures is just the result of constant, repeated exposure to the Bible stories from a very young, tender age, and from reading through the Bible on their own. I am convinced that saturating any young child's mind with the Scriptures and prayer will yield similar results. Try it with your children and see what happens. It's never too late to start!

This article originally appeared in the Spring 1991 *Messianic Outreach*, where it was entitled "A Visit to the Island of Dr. Moreau."

In 1896, H.G. Wells wrote *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, a science-fiction story about a mad scientist who conducted experiments on animals on a remote island in the Pacific. Using his knowledge of genetics, medicine, and surgery, Dr. Moreau attempted to transform various species of animals into human beings.

The success of the experiments was limited. Outwardly, Dr. Moreau's "Beast People" resembled creatures that were no longer completely animal, yet certainly not completely human. Though extremely dull-witted, they had limited reasoning power and language-learning abilities. After recovering from surgery, new creatures were sent to live with other Beast People in huts and caves, where they learned "man's ways."

As part of the humanizing process, the Beast Folk were required to learn and obey a set of laws which Moreau taught them. One of the more intelligent of the creatures was appointed to be the Sayer of the Law. His job was to lead the rest of Moreau's creatures in frequent chanting of Moreau's laws:

"Not to go on all-Fours; *that is the Law.*"

"Not to suck up Drink; *that is the Law.*"

"Not to eat Flesh or Fish; *that is the Law.*"

"Not to claw Bark of Trees; *that is the Law.*"

"Not to chase other men; *that is the Law.*"

These laws would be chanted in unison as the Beast People swayed from side to side. After reciting each prohibition, the creatures added, "Are we not Men?" to further convince themselves of their own humanity. The chanting of the Law was followed by the chanting of facts about Dr. Moreau and his laboratory:

"His is the House of Pain."

"His is the Hand that makes."

"His is the Hand that wounds."

"His is the Hand that heals."

Most of the conversation of the Beast People consisted of these chants, along with frequent reminders to each other:

"Evil are the punishments of those who break the Law. None escape."

"None escape."

If Moreau discovered that one of the Laws had been broken, he would visit the Beast Folk with his whip. Cracking the whip, he would ask, "What is the Law?" After the creatures recited the law that had been broken, Moreau would find the guilty party and take him "back to the House of Pain" (the laboratory) for further treatment to eradicate the beast nature.

*The Island of Dr. Moreau* is more than just a bizarre, fascinating story. It is an excellent illustration of a profound theological truth: It demonstrates the fact that God's Law cannot change fallen, disobedient sinners into holy, obedient saints.

Though Dr. Moreau imparted the ability to understand *what the Law required*, he could not impart *an inherent desire to obey the Law*. This was the source of his frustration. He knew his creatures understood the requirements of the Law - they could recite it on demand! And, as long as Moreau made frequent visits with his whip, and reminded them of the House of Pain, there was a limited measure of obedience. But left to themselves, Moreau's creatures inevitably reverted back to their animal instincts. Moreau could make them look and act some-thing like humans, but he could not

impart a genuine human nature that would eradicate the beast nature.

Many people, in their sincere attempt to live a Christian life, find themselves in a position similar to that of Moreau's creatures. They understand the requirements of God's Law. They can recite the Ten Commandments and are familiar with the Sermon on the Mount. They spend their time talking about the things of God and continually remind one another, "Are we not Christians?" And, as long as they are reminded of God's whip and His House of Pain (chastisement for disobedience), they obey God to some degree. But left to themselves, they inevitably revert back to following their sinful nature.

Dr. Moreau failed in his effort to impart a human nature powerful enough to overcome the beast nature. God, however, never fails. God is able to impart to His creatures His own divine nature, thus enabling man to overcome his sinful nature, the *yetser ha-ra*. The Apostle Paul tells us that God accomplishes this not by the Law, but by His Son:

"For what the *Torah* [Law] could not do by itself, because it lacked the power to make the old nature cooperate, God did by sending his own Son as a human being with a nature like our own sinful one. God did this in order to deal with sin, and in so doing he executed the punishment against sin in human nature, so that the just requirement of the *Torah* might be fulfilled in us who do not run our lives according to what our old nature wants but according to what the Spirit wants" (Rom.8:3f, Jewish New Testament).

God's solution for the problem of sin is not memorizing and chanting His Laws, then trying to force our sinful nature to cooperate so we can avoid the House of Pain. God does not improve our *yetser ha-ra*; He does not merely tame the beast in our nature -- He kills it:

"We know that our old self was put to death on the execution stake with him [Yeshua/Jesus], so that the entire body of our sinful propensities might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin" (Rom.6:6, JNT).

Through the sacrifice of Yeshua, God takes away our heart of stone and

gives us a heart of flesh (Ezk. 36:26f). As sons begotten of God's Spirit, we are "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). For such people, obedience to God's Law is no longer dependent on the crack of God's whip, the chanting of the Law, and the House of Pain. That kind of obedience is "in the old way of outwardly following the letter of the law" (Rom. 7:6, JNT). In other words, obedience was imposed upon the old nature from outside, as was the case with Moreau's creatures. Those with a new heart obey "in the new way provided by the Spirit" (Rom. 7:6, JNT). In other words, obedience results from the inward desire of the new heart. "And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep My laws" (Ezk. 36:27).

Under the Old Covenant, God's Laws were outside the person, written on tablets of stone. Under the New Covenant, God's Laws are internalized and written on the "fleshly tablets of the heart" (2 Cor. 3:3) as Jeremiah prophesied:

"Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah ... I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jer. 31:31,33).

This is something neither the Law nor Dr. Moreau could do.

The crack of God's whip and the House of Pain still exist for law-breakers. But those who view obedience as a privilege, and joyfully obey God's commandments from the heart are not law-breakers. And because the Torah is internalized, it does not threaten them from the outside. Such people are not "under the law"; rather they *embody* the Law!

To be "under" something requires that the something be outside the person. If the Law is *inside*, written on the heart, this excludes the possibility of that person being "under" the Law. On the contrary, it is those who do *not* obey the Torah who are in danger of finding themselves "under the Law."

Like Dr. Moreau's Beast People, unregenerated and unenlightened people account their Creator's Laws as little more than rules which urge them to live contrary to their natural instincts. But to those who have been born of the Spirit, the Law is not looked at as just a list of rules; the Law is seen as a list of *opportunities*, a moral guide that reveals how a child of God should conduct himself. Obeying the Torah is

more of a privilege than a duty.

Some readers may object at this point and ask, "Aren't you just attaching different labels to the same thing? You can call them 'privileges' or 'opportunities' if you wish, but they are still laws, rules, commandments. Just because a person desires to do them doesn't change the fact that they are still rules."

This is true. But it is irrelevant to the person who delights in obedience. Perhaps a comparison of physical laws of nature will clarify the subject. In the physical realm, we do many things from a spontaneous, inward desire or compulsion. We eat, drink, and sleep. There are physical laws of nature ("rules") that say we must do these things. That does not mean we are in legalistic bondage. It is irrelevant to us that there are laws of nature concerning these actions; we simply do them because we have been equipped with the capacity to feel hunger, thirst, and weariness -- an inward *desire* to eat, drink, and sleep. We perform these actions because we *want* to, not because a law or rule tells us we *have* to. In like manner, the person who has been born of the Spirit will begin obeying God's Laws as naturally as a newborn babe drinks its mother's milk.

God created the universe (including man) to operate in harmony with His physical and spiritual Laws. If we want a healthy body, it is necessary to eat food. This is why God equips us at birth with an inborn appetite for food. When we are born of the Spirit, we are equipped with an inborn desire to obey God's Laws. This new birth gives us the power to "not run our lives according to what the old nature wants but according to what the Spirit wants" (Rom. 8:4, JNT).

Dr. Moreau's Beast People had difficulty understanding and consistently practicing Moreau's laws. Some believers seem to have a similar difficulty with God's Laws. Many people mistakenly believe that having God's Laws written on the heart means that we need nothing more than an inward law of "conscience" or "personal convictions" for moral guidance. This belief results in the same kind of moral anarchy we read about in the book of Judges, when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

When the Lord speaks of writing the Law on the hearts of His people, He makes it very clear that it is *His* laws (Jer. 31:33) and *His* statutes and ordinances (Ezk. 36:27), not arbitrary

laws based on man's opinions or convenience. God's laws, statutes, and ordinances are recorded in the Scriptures. Therefore, the Law we obey from the heart must line up with the laws, statutes, and ordinances of the Bible.

A person does not need to be a theological wizard to see that some of the laws, statutes, and ordinances of the Bible are ignored by the great majority of believers. Of course animal sacrifices and other practices revolving around the Temple and the Levitical priesthood cannot be practiced, since there is no longer a Temple or a functioning Levitical priesthood. But why are some of God's Laws which *could* be practiced not practiced? Are these particular laws *not* written on the hearts of God's people?

My answer is that these laws *are* written on the heart of every true believer. Some believers, however, do not take the time to read and learn that which God has written on their heart. Simply having something written on one's heart is no guarantee the person will read it. Some do read the Law written on their heart, but they do not read it closely and carefully enough, and thus misread it.

Some people will forever struggle with their Creator's Laws, as Dr. Moreau's creatures did. Hearing the crack of the whip and threatened with the House of Pain, they will obey God's Law to some degree, then later find some excuse to justify breaking it. But the believer who has been enlightened to see the blazing glory of the Torah written on his heart by the Holy Spirit will joyfully practice the Law of God all the days of his life.

# THE WAY OF CAIN

Daniel Botkin

*"For there are certain men crept in unnoticed, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into licentiousness ... Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain." (Jude 4,11)*

In Jude's day, those who had gone the way of Cain were not outside the Church, but inside, where they had "crept in unnoticed." So it is today. Those who would lead God's people into the way of Cain are not the atheists and agnostics of the non-religious world, for Cain was a religious man.

On the surface, the religious beliefs and practices of Cain and Abel appeared to be very similar. Both of these men came from the same parents, and both believed in their parents' God, the true Creator. Cain and Abel both prayed and talked to the same God, and both wanted to be accepted by God. Neither Cain nor Abel used graven images in their worship, and both men brought an offering to YHWH. To the casual observer, Cain and Abel probably would have appeared to belong to the same faith. However, Cain's brutal murder of his brother Abel made it obvious that there was a profound difference in the religion of these two sons of Adam and Eve.

The thing that made Cain's religion different from Abel's was its source. Abel's beliefs and practices came from heaven above; Cain's came from the earth beneath. God was the Author of Abel's method of worship; the way of Cain was polluted by man's ideas. So it is in Christendom today. There is nothing new under the sun.

The Scripture says that Cain, a tiller of the soil, brought the fruit of the ground as an offering to the Lord. Abel, a shepherd, brought the firstlings of his flock. Abel's offering was accepted by God, but Cain's was not. Why? "By *faith* Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" (Heb. 11:4).

If Abel offered his sacrifice "by faith," this implies some previous instruction from God concerning offerings. We know from the Bible that "it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11) and that "without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). This primal truth was vividly demonstrated for Adam and Eve when an animal was slain so that the Lord God could make coats of skin for them (Gen. 3:21). Thus the need for a blood sacrifice was known before man was driven out of Eden, and it was this knowledge of God's requirement that was the object of Abel's faith.

Why did Cain bring the fruit of the ground as an offering, instead of the blood sacrifice that God required? Cain's reasoning probably ran something like this:

"I know God requires a blood sacrifice. He made that very clear. That's easy for my brother Abel. He's a shepherd! All he has to do is take a lamb from his flock and offer it up. But I'm not a shepherd; I'm a tiller of the soil. It's not so convenient for me to offer up an animal, so I'll offer the first fruits of the ground that I work, just like Abel offers the firstlings of his flock. I won't *ignore* God's commandment, I'll just *modify* it to make it more conve-

nient for myself! God will surely understand and still be pleased with my worship."

The above reasoning may make sense to the unregenerate, natural mind, but God rejects it. The thing about Cain that should sober us is the fact that *he wanted to be accepted by God*. Some Christians seem to think that if worshippers' motives are right, God will accept their worship and service. Purity of motives is very important, but it is no guarantee that God will accept our offerings of worship and service. Cain no doubt had good intentions in wanting to worship YHWH, as did Nadab and Abihu when they offered strange fire, and as did Uzzah when he put forth his hand to steady the ark when the oxen stumbled. But the worship and service that God accepts is the worship that He Himself originates and ordains.

Near the end of the First Century, Jude exhorted believers to "earnestly contend ['agonize'] for the faith which was once delivered to the saints." The reason for this exhortation was because false teachers were leading the Church into the way of Cain.

Paul had warned the Thessalonians some years earlier that the Church-wide apostasy, described as "the secret power of lawlessness," was "already at work" (2 Thes. 2:7, NIV). By the time Jude penned his epistle, many teachers of lawlessness were "turning the grace of our God into licentiousness." *Licentiousness* is defined as "a lack of legal or moral restraints; a disregard for strict rules of correctness."

Do we not hear licentiousness encouraged from many church pulpits today? "We can disregard God's Laws; we're under grace now! We don't need those old rules and legal restraints any more, so just ignore those Old Testament commandments."

Even sadder is the fact that among those who know that God's grace does not give us a license to disobey God's Laws, we often hear the echo of Cain's reasoning:

"I know how God wants His people to worship. I know what He says in the Torah. That's easy for Pastor X, Brother Y, and Sister Z. But I'm just not like that! It's an inconvenient lifestyle for me. Of course I don't want to *ignore* God's commandments, so I'll just *modify* them to make things more convenient for myself. Instead of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), I'll go to church for an hour or two on Sunday. Instead of celebrating the Biblical Feasts of YHWH, I'll celebrate the Church's man-made holidays. Instead of following the dietary guidelines God gives in the Bible, I'll decide for myself what to eat. God will surely understand and still be pleased with my worship and service."

The person who goes in the way of Cain does not ignore God's commandments. Rather, he modifies them, redefines them, and readjusts them so that his worship bears a slight resemblance to the real thing, just as Cain's worship bore a resemblance to Abel's. The world may gaze at this arrangement, nod its head in approval, and say "Oh!" But God says "Woe!" to the architects of such a system of worship.

# הַן שְׁבִיעִית

## THE FEAST OF SHAVUOT

### Daniel Botkin

*"Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it...And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave-offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meal-offering unto the Lord"*  
Leviticus 23:10f, 15-17

In the above verses we see the firstfruits of two separate harvests, and these two harvests are separated by a period of fifty days. The first harvest mentioned in this passage refers to the firstfruits of the barley harvest, which always took place on the first Sunday ("the morrow after the sabbath") following Passover. On this day the priest waved the firstfruits of the barley harvest before the Lord, in anticipation of the remainder of the harvest yet to come. The Apostle Paul, when writing about the resurrection of the Messiah, and the anticipation of the final resurrection of the dead, refers to this feast day:

"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the *firstfruits* of them that slept... But every man in his own order: Christ the *firstfruits*; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming" (1 Cor. 15:20, 23).

It was on Firstfruits, the first Sunday after Passover, when the empty tomb of Yeshua was discovered. While Israel's risen Messiah was walking the streets of Jerusalem that day as the firstfruits of the resurrection, Israel's priests were in the Temple waving the firstfruits of the barley harvest before a torn veil that now represented access to the Presence of God through the death of the Messiah. (See Mt. 27:51 and Heb. 10:19-22). Biblically speaking,

the anniversary of the Resurrection should be called "First Fruits," not "Easter," a word derived from the name of the Anglo-Saxon pagan fertility goddess.

The Lord instructed His people to count off fifty days (seven sabbaths plus a day) from Firstfruits to the Feast of Shavuot ("weeks"), a day which the New Testament calls Pentecost (Greek for "the fiftieth day"). This is the second harvest mentioned in our passage from Leviticus 23.

On this day there was to be "a new meal offering," two loaves of bread baked with the firstfruits of the wheat harvest. In addition to wheat, the Israelites brought the firstfruits of six other products of the Promised Land. The seven products are listed in Deuteronomy 8:8, where the Lord describes Israel as "a land of wheat and barley and vines and fig trees and pomegranates; a land of olive oil and date-honey." The Mishnah (in Bikkurim ch.3) describes how the Israelites brought the firstfruits to the Temple in an elaborate procession that included flute-playing, oxen with their horns overlaid with gold and wearing olive-leaf wreathes, and gold- and silver-covered baskets to hold the fruits.

According to Jewish tradition, Shavuot is the anniversary of the giving of the Torah. It is also the anniversary of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the first Messianic believers in Jerusalem:

"And when the day of Pentecost [Shavuot] was fully come, they were

all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:1-4)

Yeshua remained on earth for forty days after His Resurrection. On the day of His ascension, He instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for this baptism of the Holy Spirit. Ten days later, on Shavuot, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah, Yahweh came again in blazing glory as He had done at Mount Sinai. But this time He wrote His commandments not upon tablets of stone, but upon the fleshly tablets of men's hearts, as the prophets had foretold. (See Jer. 31:31-34; Ezk. 11:19, 20 and 36:26f.)

It is no coincidence that the giving of the Spirit took place on the anniversary of the giving of the Torah. On the day the Torah was given, the sin of the golden calf caused "about 3,000 men" to be killed (Ex. 32:28). On the day the Spirit was given, the preaching of Peter caused "about 3,000 souls" to find new life in the Messiah (Acts 2:41). This is an excellent illustration of the fact that "the letter [of the Law] kills, but the spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6).

As believers in Israel's Messiah, we are expected to obey the Torah. However, we are to obey "in the new way provided by the Spirit and not in the old way of outwardly following the letter of the law" (Rom. 7:6, Jewish NT). "The new way" does not mean a different set of laws. It means obeying the Torah from the heart. The Holy Spirit has written the Torah on our hearts and given us an inward desire to walk in obedience to our Heavenly Father's will. This is "the new way provided by the Spirit," and this is the blessing of Shavuot/Pentecost. ■

# GUARDIANS OF THE SACRED FIRE

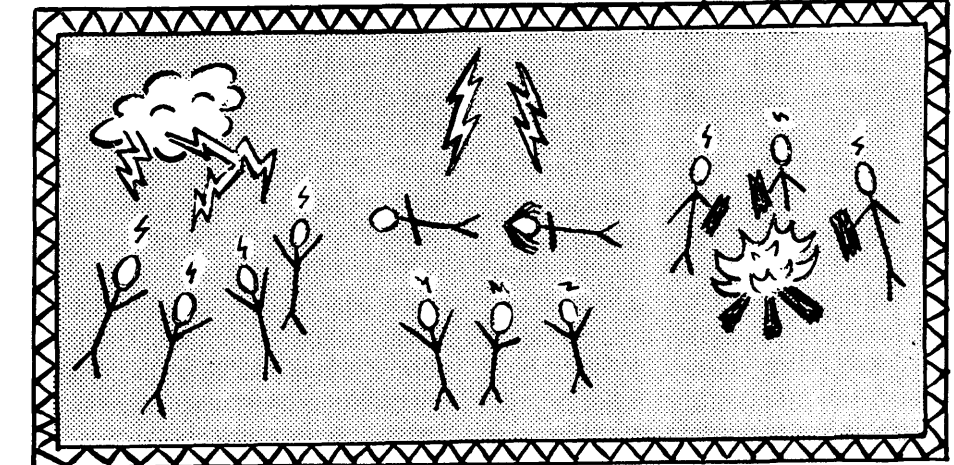
A Short Story by Daniel Botkin

Ebed-esh, a young man with curly hair as dark as the black goatskin wrapped round his loins, sat cross-legged on the earthen floor and stared at the steadily-burning Fire in the center of the dark cave. Across from him sat his father, Or-esh, an older man with long gray whiskers that covered his bare chest. Patches of light danced on the walls and low ceiling of the grotto, revealing quick flashes of paintings that looked as fresh as they did the day the picture-makers had painted them onto the hard surface.

As Ebed-esh looked around at the walls and ceiling and caught glimpses of the colored images, he meditated on the exploits of the ancients which were depicted in these paintings. The earliest event that had been recorded by the picture-makers was the event which had first given meaning and purpose to Ebed-esh's tribe long ago. This event was The Receiving of Fire. The Fire had fallen from the heavens during a mighty wind storm, and Ebed-esh's ancestors had somehow managed to capture the Fire. Fire had fallen from heaven before this, of course, but this was the first time men had been able to contain it, keep it going, and utilize it.

As the young man's dark eyes now moved from one picture to another, the chapters of the familiar story were once again called up from his memory. Ebed-esh recalled how the ancients had immediately learned the benefits of the Fire. It gave them warmth and light, and, as a fringe benefit, provided a great deal of excitement. The tribe also quickly learned to revere and fear the Fire for its consuming nature when a foolish man and his woman were careless and died in the Fire.

Some who feared and hated the Fire wanted to quench it, but once the people had tasted the benefits of the Fire, it was too late to go back to the former ways. Indeed, after only a few



months of living with the Fire, the thought of returning to a Fireless existence grieved and frightened those who had come to appreciate this heaven-sent gift.

All of that generation who first saw The Coming of the Fire were fascinated by it, but there were certain men of the tribe who seemed to be possessed by the Fire. The Coming of the Fire had so completely changed these men that they, unlike others, were unable to return to normal activities such as hunting, fishing, and tending the flocks and herds. The only thing they wished to tend was the Fire. Some accused these men of laziness; others simply said they were mad. Their main concern in life seemed to be providing fuel to preserve the Fire, lest it die out and be lost forever.

The men who had this obsession were eventually tolerated even by those who considered them eccentric. In time these men came to be known as the Guardians of the Fire. Before the original Guardians died, the responsibility of tending the Sacred Fire had been passed down to men of the next generation, and so it had been from generation to generation.

The Fire had blazed more brightly in some generations, and less brightly in others, as the appointed Guardians learned which materials worked best to keep the Fire burning. Later

generations, who had never experienced the darkness and coldness of a Fireless existence, did not value the Fire like those first Guardians had treasured it. In their search for ways to reduce the work of tending the Fire, these irresponsible Guardians had foolishly experimented with materials that proved to be noncombustible. As a result of these foolhardy experiments, the Fire had nearly gone out a few times. But somehow it had always blazed up again with the assistance of faithful Guardians who used the right materials and proven methods to keep it burning.

Now the Fire burned steadily in the painted cave where Ebed-esh sat with his father, Or-esh. It was a solemn occasion for both father and son. Ebed-esh was a man now, and it was time for his father to formally bestow upon him the honor and duty of becoming one of the Guardians of the Sacred Fire. Before old Or-esh laid his hands on his son to impart the guardianship, he would once more recite the story of how the Fire had first come to the ancients, centuries before The Final War that destroyed the world that man had built.

"Hear my words, O my son," Or-esh began. "It was thousands of years ago when the Fire first fell, in a place called Jerusalem, on a day the ancient Hebrews called Shavuot, a day the Greeks called Pentecost...."



## OBSOLETE RELIGIOUS TRACTS AND THE CHURCH'S MORAL DECLINE

# Daniel Botkin



I am fascinated by religious tracts that were written decades ago. In addition to the samples pictured above, I have seen tracts that condemn make-up ("Face Paint"), short hair on women ("Bobbed Hair, The Mark of the World"), all TV shows (even "The Lone Ranger"), and other things which most Bible-believing Christians now consider perfectly acceptable.

Some of these tract writers had quite a way of expressing their convictions. Don Lonie, for example, in "What About The Dance?" states, "You will find that a dancing foot and a praying knee do not grow on the same limb." The anonymous writer of another tract informs us that "The Methodist church was raised for the purpose of counteracting the dance." (Any readers from a Methodist background who can confirm that statement?) Mrs. J. Remmerde, in the tract "Death In Cards," gives this ominous warning: "I do hope that the next time you touch them [a deck of cards] that God will smite you in your conscience with such conviction of your sin that you will fall on your face crying out, 'What must I do to be saved?'"

I think my favorite lines are found in "The Horrid Cigarette," a hymn written in 1907: "There's a horrid little tempter/ Who seeks the heart and hand/ Of all the little boys about/ To kill them from the land./ 'Tis the cigarette, the horrid cigarette!.../ O many a manly fellow/ Who sought him for

a pet/ Has walked away to prison/ Led by  
Mister Cigarette."<sup>1</sup>

It is somewhat amusing to think about these things that were considered such grave concerns by Christians of a bygone era. Playing a game of cards or using minced oaths (words like "gee," "golly," "darn," etc.) seem perfectly harmless. Why did Christians preach and write against such things? John White, in his book *Flirting With the World*, relates his experience growing up as a boy in the 1950s. He tells us that his church knew what worldliness was back then: lipstick, make-up, short skirts, bobbed hair, wedding rings and jewelry, movies, and church kitchens. Then he makes this statement: "Church leaders who fought the liberalizing trends of education, affluence, mobility, and urbanization may have pitched the battle in the wrong places, but you can't fault their instincts. They knew that something vital was at stake: *the maintenance of a distinct identity*."<sup>2</sup>

Of course the liberalizing trends won the battle, and now very few Christians have a "distinct identity." Most Christians today are indistinguishable from the worldly non-Christians around them. White writes, "The church gave in, and many leaders hailed this as progress. Now the enemy was not 'the world' but 'legalism,' and we praised the move from narrow rules to 'personal convictions.'"<sup>3</sup>

Most readers have probably seen statistics which compare problems in public schools today to problems of a few decades ago.

## Top Problems in Public Schools

<u>1940</u>	<u>1990</u>
Talking	Drug Abuse
Chewing gum	Alcohol
Making noise	Pregnancy
Running in halls	Suicide
Cutting in line	Rape
Dress code infraction	Robbery
Littering	Assault <sup>4</sup>

Using obsolete religious tracts, we could make a similar comparison between problems in the Church of the 1990s and problems in the Church of the 1940s and 50s. Our chart might look something like this:

## Top Problems in the Church

<u>1940s/50s</u>	<u>1990s</u>
Smoking	Ordination of sodomites
Dancing	Adultery
Movies/TV	Divorce and remarriage
Make-up, dress	Financial scandals
Card playing	Fallen televangelists
Minced oaths	Drug abuse

The above chart is based on personal observation, not on a scientific study, but I do not believe it is too far off. The picture is even bleaker if we consider how



relatively tame the so-called "worldly" movies and TV programs were in past decades. I do not believe it is wrong for God's people to watch movies. But it is wrong to watch *some* movies.

When my children were young, they asked me what the G, PG, R, and X movie ratings meant. I told them the letters stood for Good, Pretty Good, Rotten, and Xtra Rotten.

Some of my friends, including Bible-believing Christians, think I am "too legalistic" because I refuse to watch R-rated movies. I have been rethinking my position, and now I am wondering if perhaps I should refuse to watch even PG-13 films. My friends will no doubt think I am becoming even more prudish, but this decision is not due to a rise in my own moral standards; it is due to the decline in the moral standards of our culture.

I recently became aware of how far the standards have fallen in the movie industry. I had heard a lot about the movie *Forrest Gump*. I knew it was a very popular film that had won several Academy Awards. A co-worker of mine told me it was a great film, and she recommended that I see it. I asked her if it was suitable for children. She assured me that there was nothing really bad in it to make it unsuitable for kids, so I decided to rent the video and watch it with my family. However, when I got to the video store, I noticed it was rated PG-13, so I was reluctant to let my children see it without first previewing it myself. Our kids were going to be away at camp the following week, so I decided to wait and watch the movie while they were gone.

When I watched *Forrest Gump*, I was surprised that the film contained so much nudity, violence, foul language, and verbal and visual references to sex. I was surprised because "PG-13" means that parental guidance is suggested only for children under 13. The PG-13-rated movie is supposedly fine for teenage viewers, mom and pop are told. I was also surprised by *Forrest Gump* because the person who recommended the film for my family's viewing was a lady who attends church regularly and appears to have fairly normal Christian moral standards.

After viewing *Forrest Gump*, I told my wife that in 1969 I had seen one X-rated motion picture, *Midnight Cowboy*. I have a good memory for details, and from what I could remember of *Midnight Cowboy*, I didn't think it was much worse, morally speaking, than *Forrest Gump*. For the purpose of this article, I watched both movies again and kept a careful count of the offensive elements in each film. Here are the results:

	Midnight Cowboy	Forrest Gump
uses of profanity	53	47
acts of violence	2	7
scenes with partial nudity	6	5
verbal references to sex	3	2
visual references to sex	5	3
scenes with drug use	1	3

As the above figures show, the two films probably deserve about the same rating. I shared my thoughts on this with a friend, and my friend said that he was certain *Midnight Cowboy* was rated R, not X. I went to the library to find out, and discovered this revealing information in *The Motion Picture Guide*:

"Midnight Cowboy was the only 'X'-rated picture to ever win the Oscar as Best Picture of the year. They lowered the rating to an 'R' later and, by today's standards, it's almost a 'PG-13.'"<sup>5</sup>

In other words, what was considered pornography in 1969 is now acceptable for teenagers. What does this tell us about today's standards? It is even more pathetic when one considers the fact that the above quote about "today's standards" was written in 1986.

The real issue at stake here is not *Midnight Cowboy* or *Forrest Gump* or the motion picture industry. The issue for us believers is how the moral decline in our culture affects our own moral standards. God's people have always held up a moral standard higher than that of the unbelieving world around them. But as the unbelieving, godless world continues to lower its moral standards, it is tempting for believers to lower their standards at the same rate.

We still hold up a moral standard that is higher than that of the unbelievers, and we congratulate ourselves for being such pious, moral people. But all we are doing is maintaining the same distance between our standard and the world's. Eventually the Church's moral standard will decline to the moral standard which the unbelieving world holds to today. The sins that the non-Christian world deems acceptable today will be deemed acceptable by the Church in a few years.

The only way to prevent this trend is for God's people to prayerfully search the Scriptures, determine God's standards, and hold to those standards regardless of what the rest of the world says and does. Then maybe we can bring back some of those obsolete religious tracts. □

<sup>1</sup>Inspiring Temperance Songs No. 1 (Chicago: Meyer & Brother, 1907), 24.

<sup>2</sup>John White, *Flirting With the World* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press), 10.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Church History (Pensacola, FL: ABeka Book), 179.

<sup>5</sup>The Motion Picture Guide (Chicago: Cinebooks, Inc., 1986), Vol. V.

# TISHA B'AV AND THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

Daniel Botkin

~~THE PEOPLE MOURNING OVER THE RUINS OF JERUSALEM~~  
~~"How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she~~  
~~become as a widow! she that was great among the nations..."~~

Lamentations 1:1

Tisha B'Av (the 9th day of the lunar month of Av) falls on July 25 this year. Among observant Jews, Tisha B'Av is a day of fasting and mourning. On this date, the first Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC, and on this same date the second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. Throughout history other significant tragedies have befallen the Jewish people on this date.

For this reason the 9th of Av is a solemn day, and pleasures are avoided. Even the study of Torah is forbidden by the rabbis on this day, because the study of Torah brings joy, as it is written, "The precepts of Yahweh are right, *rejoicing the heart*" (Psalm 19:8); and again it is written, "Thy Torah is my *delight*" (Psalm 119:174). Instead of joyfully studying Torah, observant Jews read the Book of Lamentations on Tisha B'Av.

In my 24 years as a follower of Yeshua/Jesus, I have heard and read countless Christian sermons from church pulpits, on cassette tapes, on Christian radio programs, and in Christian books and magazines. I do not recall having ever heard or read a sermon based on the Book of Lamentations. I'm sure there are Christian preachers who have spoken on Lamentations, but such preachers seem to be

quite rare.

I suppose Lamentations is avoided by most of the Christian world because it is a dirge, a poem of sorrow and mourning over Jerusalem's destruction, and most Christians assume that such a book has little or nothing in it that is relevant to them. I, however, have always found Lamentations to be a very profound and powerful book which moves something deep in my inward parts. My Bible still bears the pencil marks from my days as a young believer when, during a period of deep depression, I found solace in several verses in Lamentations which expressed exactly how I felt. Even now as I look at these verses before me, I feel a melancholy stirring in my heart. "Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me."

In a way that I cannot fully explain, this lament over Jerusalem stirs my emotions, and I sense a mingling of grief and glory. The rabbis say that when God created glory, He created it in ten parts, and gave nine parts to Jerusalem and one part to the rest of the world, and when He created suffering, He did the same -- nine parts to Jerusalem and one part to the rest of the world. This rabbinic observation of Jerusalem's glory and suffering also seems to describe the destiny for those Christians who will stop playing church and take up the cross of Yeshua of Nazareth and follow Him. Perhaps Lamentations would be a more popular book in the Christian world if more Christians would begin to really follow the One they sing and talk and sermonize about. Following the Master always entails suffering in some form, and those who have not suffered will probably not be able to appreciate the Book of Lamentations, for it is a book about suffering.

The Book of Lamentations is poetry, written in what is called acrostic form.<sup>1</sup> Even in its English translation, Lamentations is a masterpiece. Some of the most powerful poetry, art, and music the world has known has come from artists who underwent some sort of intense personal suffering. The paintings of Van Gogh, the hymns of William Cowper, and the works of the blind poet John Milton come to mind. However, Lamentations is more than mere human poetry expressing Jeremiah's grief over the destruction of his city. Lamentations is Scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit, therefore it also expresses the grief of the Holy One Himself as He mourns over the destruction of His children. God's grief over Israel is like that of a parent who loved his children, gave them the best of everything ("What more could have been done for My vineyard, that I have not done for it?" Isa. 5:4), yet they rebelled and brought destruction upon themselves.

"How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people!" the Lament begins. "How is she become a widow! She that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!" In the midst of her

misery, Jerusalem remembered "all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old" (1:7).

The reign of King Solomon was certainly a time of "pleasant things," but Solomon's reign was not the most glorious period of Israel's history. "Behold!" Yeshua said to His generation. "A greater than Solomon is here." Israel's most glorious period of history was when King Messiah walked among them, conquered death through His Resurrection, ascended to the right hand of the Father, and sent the Holy Spirit to His disciples, resulting in a Messianic Community that manifested the glory of God like no generation has done since. The holiness and glory manifested in the Book of Acts is unmatched in history.

What does all this have to do with Tisha B'Av and lamenting the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem? There is another Temple we should mourn, a Temple made of living stones: "You also, as *living stones*, are being built up as a *spiritual house* for a holy priesthood," Peter tells us (1 Pet. 2:5). Paul, in speaking of the Community of believers, says, "The whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a *holy temple* in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21).

When I read the Book of Acts, I yearn for the rebuilding and restoration of that Temple of living stones, that Messianic Community whose exploits are chronicled in the Book of Acts. When I read Acts, I can relate to the grief Jeremiah felt over his Temple's destruction. "*Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me*" (Lam 1:12). When I see Christians who are content with the Church in its present state of ruins, I want to shake them and say, "*Is it nothing to you?? How can you pass by the Book of Acts and not yearn to recover that?*"

Jeremiah's deepest sorrow came from seeing Jerusalem's once-glorious Temple reduced to rubble. I have both joy and sorrow in my life, and my deepest sorrow comes from seeing Jerusalem's once-glorious Temple of living stones, that Messianic Community of Acts, once filled with the glorious Presence of God, now reduced to the churches and synagogues of today, where the Presence of God is conspicuously absent.

What accounts for the absence of the Living God in today's temples of living stones? The answer is in Lamentations: "The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things: for she hath seen that the heathen entered into her sanctuary, whom Thou didst command that they should not enter into Thy congregation" (1:10). Both church and synagogue have compromised to please the heathen. The synagogue compromises by assimilating into the heathen culture around it, and the church compromises by letting the heathen bring their heathen customs into the church and incorporate them into Christian worship. This is why the adversary is allowed to "spread out his hands upon all her pleasant things," and rob God's people of the glory and the power He bestowed upon the first generation of Messianic believers.

The adversary's gleeful victory song appears in Lamentations 2:16: "*We have swallowed her up*: certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it."

The synagogue and church have both been "swallowed up," assimilated by a world system that is at enmity with God. And neither the church nor the synagogue is producing prophets to remedy the situation, as it is written: "Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee: and they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment" (Lam.2:14). Another translation, *Today's English Version*, renders the above verse this way: "Your prophets had nothing to tell you but lies; their preaching deceived you by never exposing your sin. They made you think you did not need to repent."

These are the things that should be mourned by Christians. Disciples of Yeshua can also mourn the 70 AD destruction of the literal Temple, because the absence of that Temple is a continual reminder that the Jewish people have not yet recognized their Messiah. When Yeshua wept over Jerusalem, He said, "For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, *because you did not recognize the time of your visitation*" (Luke 19:43f). Earlier, He mourned over the city with these words: "Behold, your house [Temple] is left unto you desolate. And verily I say unto you, You shall not see Me, until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Luke 13:35).

Mourning and lamentation are mingled with hope. Even in Yeshua's lament we see hope, for the day *will come* when the Jewish people will say to Yeshua, "Baruch HaBa!" ["Blessed is he who comes," the Hebrew idiom for "Welcome!"] And at the same time, Christians will have to welcome Him as the Jewish Torah teacher that He was and is. With the rise of the Messianic movement among Jews on the one hand, and the Torah movement among Christians on the other hand, we are seeing the rays break over the horizon to signal the dawning of the day when the Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing in His wings.

We see hope mingled with Yeshua's lament over Jerusalem, and we see hope in Jeremiah's Lamentation: "This I recall to mind, therefore I have hope: It is of Yahweh's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness. Yahweh is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him ... It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of Yahweh" (3:21-26).

With this hope in mind, may our prayers echo these words of Jeremiah's Lamentation (3:40f): "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to Yahweh. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens." Amen.

1 The 22 verses of each chapter begin with the corresponding 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The third chapter, which contains 66 verses, is written in triplets: three consecutive verses begin with the same corresponding Hebrew letter. The last chapter is the only part not written in acrostic form.

# KNOWING THE WILL OF GOD

## Daniel Botkin

"Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." -Ephesians 5:15-17

Over the years I have met many believers who struggle over knowing the will of God for their lives. This is especially common among young people, who still have most of their adult life ahead of them. Important decisions have to be made. What is God's will for me? Am I supposed to get a job or go to school? If a job, what kind? Where? If school, where? What does the Lord want me to study? Should I marry? Who? When? Where should I live? Should I rent or buy a home? Which congregation does God want me to join?

These are important questions to a person who really wants to do the will of God, and is afraid he might make a wrong decision and find himself outside the will of God. As the above verses from Ephesians show, the wise understand what the will of the Lord is, but the foolish do not.

In my early 30s, I went through a difficult time of confusion and depression as the result of my uncertainty about God's will for my life. I had just returned home from a seven-month stay in Israel. I had a wife and two children to support, no job, almost no money, no home, no ministry, no church home, no plans, and absolutely no direction. I had no idea what the Lord wanted me to do. One thing I did have was a desperate, earnest desire to find and do the will of God, coupled with a fear that I might make a wrong decision and miss the will of God.

With these thoughts in mind, I was walking along the road one night (I didn't have a car, either), grieving over how difficult it was for me to discern the will of God.

"Father," I prayed, "why is it so hard to know your will? It wasn't always this difficult."

My mind went back to my years as a new believer, when knowing God's will didn't seem to be a problem. "Why is it so hard now?" I wondered. "I'm ten years older now, and hopefully wiser. It ought to be *easier* for me to know God's will." Proverbs 4:18 came to mind: "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

"I've been walking the path of the just for ten years," I thought. "The light should make things clearer, not more confusing."

Then I recalled one of the very first Bible studies I had ever taught. I had been walking with the Lord for about two years at that time, and I was teaching on the so-called "Lord's Prayer" ("Our Father which art in heaven,"

etc.). "Thy will be done," I quoted. I then proceeded to comment on the fact that so many Christians seemed to be in a constant state of uncertainty and confusion about knowing God's will for them.

"I've never had that problem," I informed my audience. "For me, knowing God's will seems simple."

I then quoted Proverbs 3:5. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." I also quoted Proverbs 16:3. "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established."

I then pointed out to my listeners that if we meet each of the conditions specified in these Scriptures, then we have no reason to doubt the promise that "He shall direct thy paths," and no cause to fear that it is not by our Heavenly Father that our "thoughts shall be established."

As I thought back on that study I had given about eight years earlier, I prayed, "Lord, was I just naive and immature and simple-minded back then? Or is it really that simple?"

Immediately the answer came to me like the sun rising over the horizon at daybreak. "Yes. It's really that simple."

I realized then that my confusion and doubt was due to the fact that I had let myself fall into a trap. I had allowed myself to become afraid to do anything for the Kingdom for fear that "it might not be God's will." I had let fear find a foothold in my mind by listening to the enemy say things like "Maybe it's not God's will. Maybe you're being too hasty and creating an Ishmael. Don't get ahead of the Lord. This is a *good* thing you want to do, but maybe it's just something sent to distract you from God's *perfect* will. You'd better wait."

Of course there is an element of truth in all the above statements, but I had become overly-cautious, and had let fear rob me of my vision to do anything for the Lord. I had, in effect, become like the unprofitable servant who said to his lord, "I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth."

Although we walk a narrow path, I believe the will of God is broader than many Christians think it is. God said to Joshua, "Every place where the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you" (Josh. 1:3). The Lord then proceeded to delineate the borders of the Land, so Joshua would understand that "every place" meant every place within the boundaries that God had decreed.

We, like Joshua, are given promises that suggest a wide variety of places to go and things to do for the Kingdom, a broad range

of opportunities: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do..." (Eccl. 9:10); "...*whatsoever* he doeth shall prosper" (Ps. 1:3); "Go ye into *all the world*..." (Mk. 16:15).

And like Joshua, we must stay within the boundaries that God has decreed for His people. Our "boundaries" are the commandments of God. "Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" is promised only to the man of whom it is said "his delight is in the Torah of Yahweh, and in His Torah doth he meditate day and night." Augustine said, "Love God, and do what you will." This is a Biblical principle, provided one truly knows what it means to love God: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3).

If we want to do something for our Father's Kingdom, we need to ask some questions to determine if it is His will. 1) Am I seeking His glory, or my own? 2) Do my goals and the methods I plan to use line up with Scripture, or do they violate Torah? 3) Have I met the conditions of His promises? 4) Am I willing to let the Holy Spirit redirect me if I am off-course?

Once we have honestly dealt with these questions, we can begin to move out. Even if we are slightly off-course, it is better to go forward than to stay stuck in the mud and go nowhere. Anyone who has ever driven a car in the mud knows that it is easier to steer a moving vehicle, even if it's not pointed exactly the right direction, than it is to try to straighten the wheels when the car is motionless.

If our plans are a little off-course, our Heavenly Father loves us enough to somehow redirect us into His perfect will. We see this wonderful truth demonstrated in Acts 16:6-10, where Paul and his team tried to preach in one place, but were "forbidden by the Holy Spirit," then in another place, "but the Spirit did not let them." Finally Paul had a vision which assured them they were to go to Macedonia.

Years ago I might have said that Paul and his team were too hasty in their attempts to go to these other places, and they should have just waited for the Macedonian vision. Now, however, I am more inclined to believe that Macedonian visions are given only to people who are at least attempting to go forward and do *something* for the Kingdom.

So often we are like the frantic sailor lost at sea, who cries out to God to help him find his way. God replies, "You have a map and a compass. Hoist up your anchor and use them!" God's reply to our cries for the knowledge of His will is "You have a Bible and the Holy Spirit. Gird up your loins and use them!"

# A CALL TO REPENTANCE, REVIVAL, AND REBUILDING

Daniel Botkin

When I studied Hebrew in Israel in 1981, one of the Hebrew textbooks we used in class told about the *chalutsim*, those Jewish pioneers who forsook all to begin a new life in the land of Israel in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Inspired by the example of the *chalutsim*, I wrote this article in 1988. I made about a dozen copies of the article and shared it with a few friends. This is the first time it has appeared in any publication. -DB

There was a move of God's Spirit in our nation that began in the late 1960s, blossomed in the 70s, and faded sometime in the 80s. What happened to that generation of young people who found the Lord during that time? You may remember them. They were often called "Jesus Freaks" or "Jesus People" and their subculture was referred to as "The Jesus Movement" or "The Jesus Revolution."

Those of us who were a part of that revival have aged a few years since those exciting times, and I'm sure we have gained some wisdom and maturity along the way. Unfortunately, we have also lost some things along the way, things that are still essential to a lifestyle that pleases God: zeal, devotion, self-denial, separation, humility, simplicity, modesty -- in short, we have left our first love and we need to remember from where we have fallen, and repent and do the first works.

When I look at brothers and sisters with whom I had sweet fellowship years ago, I see very few who have the same measure of zeal and devotion that they once had. The fire has died down in most hearts. It is barely smoldering in many hearts, and seems to be completely extinguished in some.

In my memory I still see these people as they were years ago: diligently seeking God in prayer, searching the Scriptures daily, fasting in secret, fervently testifying to others of the goodness and the severity of God. Tearfully, I remember them that way, and so does the Lord: "I remem-



Jewish prisoners in Buchenwald

ber thee, the devotion of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown" (Jer. 2:2).

The Lord remembers when our generation loved him as deeply as a young bride loves her husband. He remembers when we had that bridal love and devotion, and He requires that we also remember, as it is written: "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works" (Rev. 2:4f).

The Holocaust suffered by the Jewish people is an illustration of what has happened, in a spiritual sense and on a smaller scale, to our generation. Many of the Jews of Europe lost their lives in the fires of Auschwitz, Dachau, and other concentration camps. Many believers in our generation have lost their first love in a spiritual holocaust. The fires that have ruined the faith of our generation are the same fires that saints of all ages have had to contend with: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16).

Some of our generation abandoned their first love for the fiery *lust of the flesh*. They went back to gratifying their fleshly desires with such things as sexual immorality, drugs, or drunkenness. They failed to stand in the full armour of God. They failed to watch and pray. They became careless, flirted with the lust of the flesh, and were captured by it. Now they are enslaved to it.

Others were seduced by the fiery *lust of the eyes*. They were bewitched by the thought of having nice homes, nice cars, and other material possessions that are pleasing to the eyes. In order to acquire all the luxuries necessary to live the lifestyle they craved, they sold themselves into voluntary slavery. Many of these people still go to church, but their lives are now ruled more by their career and work schedule than by the Lord. Instead of existing to serve the Lord, they exist to pay their bills. The purpose of their existence is to perpetuate their existence.

There is a third category of Christians, those whose first love perished in the fires of *the pride of life*. It is

especially sad to hear these people talk, because they are deceived by the subtlest, most devilish lie of all. If you mention the zeal and devotion that our generation had several years ago, their response is something like this: "We were young and immature and naive back then. I've grown up a lot since those days of youthful idealism. That kind of enthusiasm was okay for us as young people, but now I realize God doesn't really care about all that heavy-duty devotion stuff. I've mellowed with age and outgrown that kid stuff. I've learned to just be myself."

Instead of being ashamed, they are actually *proud* of the fact that they no longer have their first love. Their minds have been so twisted by the pride of life that they now consider their lack of devotion and zeal to be a mark of maturity. How tragic it is to see people so deceived and blinded by the pride of life.

The pride of life whispered to them, "You're too legalistic; you're being too strict with yourself. The Lord doesn't expect that kind of commitment from people." The enemy even used Scripture. Reminding them that "His yoke is *easy* and His burden is *light*," he went on to suggest that the yoke and the burden are nonexistent. The Christians who believed this lie have allowed the enemy to rob them of eternal blessings.

Let the facts be stated: At the end of the age, there will be very few of our generation to whom the Lord will say, "You were too strict with yourself. I didn't expect you to be so deeply committed to Me." Far better to hear Him say those words than to hear Him say, "You were too easy on yourself. Your commitment to Me was too shallow."

Some of us have survived the spiritual holocaust of our generation. For some reason, our first love has not been destroyed by the fires of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. We cannot take credit for the survival of our first love any more than the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust could take credit for their survival. But it is not enough to merely survive. We must realize we have survived for a purpose. Just as the

Jewish survivors of the Holocaust left Europe to return and rebuild their Promised Land, we too must rise up out of the ashes of self-pity and return to our "Promised Land," a land which I describe as *the realm of discipleship and obedience to the commandments of God*.

Discipleship and obedience to the commandments is a subject which we need to closely re-examine. The "Great Commission" is to go to the nations, the *goyim*, and "make disciples," Yeshua said, by "teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19f). This is our job, to make disciples. Yet the conditions Yeshua laid down as requirements to be a disciple are among *the most neglected verses of the Bible*. Those who have the courage to examine the demands of Yeshua, and change their lives accordingly, will be pioneers. God is looking for pioneers to return to the realm of discipleship.

The Jews who returned to rebuild the Promised Land are called, in Hebrew, *chalutsim* ("pioneers"). The deeds of the *chalutsim* provide some excellent illustrations for our learning and admonition. Even though the modern Zionist movement began primarily as a secular movement, it nonetheless provides some spiritual parallels that we should note. What happens among the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is often a reflection of events that will happen among those who are the spiritual descendants of Abraham by faith in the Messiah. Let us look at the deeds of the *chalutsim* and consider what lessons we can learn from their examples.

In the late 1800s the Jewish people were seeking a solution to the prejudice and persecution they constantly suffered at the hands of the Gentiles. Many Jews were convinced that the answer to their problem was *hitbolelut*, "assimilation": look, dress, and behave in public as the Gentiles around you do. Remain a Jew, but a "secret" one. Keep your Judaism as private and low-key as possible. Then the anti-Semitism will cease. (Many Christians follow this same philosophy



Theodore Herzl

of world-conformity.)

One man who believed in assimilation was a Jewish reporter named Theodore Herzl. But an event occurred which changed both Herzl's mind and Jewish history. Herzl was in France covering the trial of Alfred Dreyfus, an assimilated Jew accused of treason. During the trial, Herzl heard the crowds shout their demand for justice. Their demand was not "Death to Dreyfus!" nor "Death to traitors!" It was "Death to Jews!" Dreyfus's assimilation, complete as it was, had done nothing to protect him from anti-Semitism.

After this, Herzl devoted his energy and abilities to seek a different solution to the Jews' dilemma. He soon envisioned and encouraged a mass return of Jews to rebuild their ancient homeland and to re-establish a Jewish state in Palestine. Today Herzl is called the Father of modern Zionism, but in his lifetime he was bitterly opposed by many of his own Jewish kinsmen. The religious Jews said it was blasphemous to suggest doing such a thing before the Messiah arrived to lead them. The secular Jews said it was a foolish and foolhardy fantasy, an impossible dream.

When a follower of Yeshua suggests a return to the realm of discipleship and the "old paths" in which Yeshua and the Apostles walked, he is often met with the same kind of opposition. There are religious people who oppose it for "spiritual" reasons: "That's not for today. Those verses don't apply to us." The more secular-minded Christians oppose it by simply saying it can't be done.



In Herzl's time there were some Jews who were able to receive his vision. These were mostly young, naive idealists who were not content with Diaspora Judaism. Throughout the Jewish world, small groups began to organize and to promote Herzl's vision to return and rebuild the Promised Land.

In our generation, God is looking for people who are idealistic and naive enough to believe that Yeshua meant what He said about discipleship and obedience to the commandments. Most of those who respond to this call will be young idealists who are not content with American Christianity in its present state. They will settle for nothing less than a return to the realm of discipleship, though the world or the Church will offer a substitute. The Jews in Herzl's time were offered land in Uganda to use for the re-establishing of a Jewish state. "It will be easier for you there," they were told. Of course they could not accept this offer, regardless of the good intentions of those who offered it. We likewise must refuse the offer of any substitute that is a diluted form of discipleship.

Herzl's vision began to materialize when the young Zionists decided to do more than just talk about returning to the Promised Land. "A dream cometh through the multitude of busy-ness" (Eccl. 5:3). The chalutsim realized that they would have to forsake all and make sacrifices if they wanted to see their vision come to pass.

Our vision to dwell in a Promised Land in the spiritual realm requires more than just talking about it. It is fun to sit and discuss ideas for the future. But ideas don't work unless we do. "In all labor there is profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty" (Prov. 14:23). A return to the realm of discipleship is impossible without embracing the cross of discipleship. "If any man will come after Me," Yeshua said, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

The chalutsim encountered many difficulties upon their arrival in the Promised Land. They were unaccustomed to the climate. Most of the land was either desert that had to be irrigated or swamps that had to be



Chalutsim in Israel around the turn of the century

drained. Some died of malaria; others were wounded or killed during raids by the enemy. Most of the chalutsim were former students, with soft hands. Working the Land resulted in painful blisters. But as they persevered, the blisters turned into callouses and the weak muscles became strong.

If we desire to return to the realm of discipleship and obedience, we must be willing to endure similar inconveniences and suffering. The realm of discipleship and obedience has a climate that is new and different to people who are accustomed to the typical American lifestyle. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore" (Josh. 3:4). The arrival of disciples in the Promised Land will provoke attacks from the enemy. Some disciples will be wounded. Some may be martyred. Those who survive and persevere in the realm of discipleship will see their spiritual blisters turn into callouses. They will learn to "endure hardness as good soldiers of Yeshua." Spiritual exercise and work will develop the spiritual muscles of those who persevere.

The difficult conditions in Palestine made it necessary for the chalutsim to live and work closely together. The concept of the Israeli kibbutz first developed from these early bands of chalutsim. Like the Jews in Nehemiah's time, the chalutsim had to "set a watch" because of enemy

opposition. In the mornings the night watchmen would give their shoes to the chalutsim who worked the day shift. At the end of the day, the shoes would be returned to the night watchmen.

Living in the realm of discipleship necessitates living and working more closely together than most believers presently do. "The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another" (Neh. 4:19). Successful rebuilding requires spiritual, emotional, and geographical closeness. We must learn by experience Acts 2:44: "And all that believed were together, and had all things common."

This does not necessarily mean that all disciples must live out of a common purse and dwell together under one roof, dormitory style. But it does mean the free sharing of our material goods with one another, "that there may be equality: As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that gathered little had no lack" (2 Cor. 8:14f). It means more than meeting together for two hours on the Sabbath and singing "I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God." It means *being* a close-knit spiritual family with shared experiences, shared emotions, and shared possessions.

What steps can we take to return to the realm of discipleship? First we





Israeli pioneers going to work in the fields

must realize, as Herzl did, that world-conformity is not the solution. Even church-conformity is not the solution. We must closely examine the things Yeshua said about discipleship and obedience to Torah. Many people alter the meaning of Yeshua's demands to justify the lifestyle they wish to live. We must be willing to alter our lifestyles to conform to His demands.

The next step is to encourage a mass return of all believers to this realm of discipleship, though it will bring opposition from many of our Christian brethren. Like the early Zionists, we must form small groups across our nation and encourage one another. I am not advocating the formation of a new denomination. I am simply advocating the formation of congregations of disciples who are serious enough to forsake all and make the sacrifices that are necessary to return to the realm of discipleship.

We must seek out others who have both a desire to return to the old paths, and a willingness to do more than just talk about it. Begin as a group by studying the teachings of Yeshua. A good little book that challenges believers to a deeper commitment is *True Discipleship* by William

McDonald, Walterick Publishers, Kansas City, Kansas.

Seek the Lord fervently and earnestly for wisdom and direction. Ask Him to show you what practical steps to take. Ask Him to raise up men of God in your midst to function as elders to guide the flock.

Be prepared for changes in living conditions. Be ready for Satanic attacks. Prepare yourselves to endure hardness. Ask God to give you a holy determination to persevere in the realm of discipleship. And refuse to accept any offer that is a diluted form of discipleship.

The Jewish chalutsim, who were mostly agnostics, or at least nonreligious, forsook all and endured hardness for what they believed would be a secular, earthly nation. How much more should we, as believers in the Messiah, be willing to do the same for an eternal, heavenly kingdom?

The deeds of the chalutsim were accomplished with human zeal, by people who were, for the most part, nonreligious and/or agnostic. How much more can we accomplish in our Promised Land of discipleship with the zeal of the Lord of Hosts? "Let us rise up and build!" (Neh. 2:18)

## WHO SAID THAT?

1. The first duty of the Gospel preacher is to declare God's Law and show the nature of sin.
2. Before I preach love, mercy and grace, I must preach sin, Law and judgment.
3. Preach 90% Law and 10% grace.
4. They will never accept grace until they tremble before a just and holy Law.
5. Evermore the Law must prepare the way for the Gospel; to overlook this in instructing souls is almost certain to result in false hope, the introduction of a false standard of Christian experience, and to fill the church with false converts.
6. The highest service to which a man may attain on earth is to preach the Law of God.
7. God being a perfect God, had to give a perfect Law, and the Law was given not to save men, but to measure them.

*Who made the above statements? Heretics? Legalists? Judaizers? Answers are at end of this column.*

1. Martin Luther
2. John Wesley
3. John Wesley
4. Charles Spurgeon
5. Charles Finney
6. John Wycliffe
7. D. L. Moody

Source: Ron Moseley, *The Spirit of the Law*, page 21.

# SHOWING HOSPITALITY

Daniel Botkin

*"And Yahweh appeared unto him [Abraham] in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day. And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him. And when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, and said, 'My Lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant.'" -Gen. 18:1-5*

*"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it." -Heb. 13:2*

*"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me." -Matt. 25:40*

The Bible tells us that "Yahweh appeared (אָפֿגַּב, *vayera*)" unto Abraham, and that Abraham looked and saw (אָפֿגַּב, *vayar*) three men. The first verse tells *what* happened ("Yahweh appeared") and the following verses explain *how* it happened: the Lord appeared in the three men who approached Abraham's tent. By showing hospitality to these strangers, Abraham "entertained angels without knowing it," in the same way that we can show kindness to Yeshua Himself whenever we do it unto the least of His brethren.

One day in the winter of 1987-88, I was working on an oil painting and listening to some Keith Green music when I heard a knock at the door. I opened the door, and there stood a young lady trying to sell Avon products. She looked very down and depressed as she stood there in the cold, grey, damp weather and asked if

we would be interested in buying anything. She was not real well-dressed, and she was not smiling. Her face and her demeanor said that she had already resigned herself to the disappointment of another "no sale." She did not look at all like the typical Avon lady one sees in ads.

I was not about to buy any Avon products. I had no job, no regular income, and almost no money. We could not even afford a phone at that time. Besides, my wife, Teresa, did not wear any kind of make-up (nor did I), so I politely said, "No thanks" and went back to my painting, slightly annoyed by the fact that my work had been momentarily interrupted by a door-to-door salesgirl.

As I thought of the Avon girl's sad face, though, I began to feel sorry for her. "She's just a poor soul trying to make a living," I thought to myself. "It must be especially hard and discouraging on a cold, rainy day like this. Maybe I should have invited her in, offered her a cup of hot tea, and introduced her to Teresa. We could have given her some words of encouragement and invited her to come to our home Bible study meeting this week. Oh well, it's too late now..."

My music tape was still playing, and at the exact moment when I finished the above thought, Keith Green's voice sang these words:

*He sends people to your door  
And you turn them away*

*As you smile and say,  
"God bless you; be at peace"  
And all heaven just weeps,  
'Cause Jesus came to your door  
And you've left Him out in the street*

The words of the song were like a sword in my heart as I realized that I had, indeed, "left Jesus out in the street." I immediately ran outside, praying that the Avon girl would still be in the neighborhood so I could invite her into our home. To my great disappointment, I was too late. She was nowhere to be found. I returned to my house, went into the bedroom, and wept bitterly over my insensitivity and the opportunity I had missed.

Nearly ten years later, I am still haunted by the sad face of that Avon salesgirl, because her face was one of the faces Yeshua wears - the faces of sad, needy people that He sends to us. I was so wrapped up in my artwork that I missed an opportunity to show hospitality to a stranger whose life might have been changed. What makes this episode even more tragic and ironic is the fact that the painting I was doing was a painting of *Abraham*, the one who showed kindness and hospitality to strangers! I never was able to finish that painting to my satisfaction, and ended up destroying it.

It is so easy to get wrapped up in our own lives, our own pursuits, our own interests. If we are too busy to show hospitality and brotherly love, we are too busy. It was a hot day when the three strangers approached Abraham's tent. If Abraham had chosen to remain in the cool shade and comfort of his tent, rather than show kindness and hospitality to three strangers, he would have missed the blessing of the Lord. Only eternity will reveal how many blessings we have missed by not taking opportunities to show hospitality and brotherly love to people who are sent our way by Divine appointment. □

# THE BLESSED VIRGIN

Daniel Botkin

*And the angel came in unto her, and said, "Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women."*

*Luke 1:28*

Roman Catholicism has elevated Mary to a position which God never intended her to occupy. Catholicism declares Mary to be Queen of Heaven and a Mediator between man and the Messiah she gave birth to. In addition, the Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception states that Mary was not born with a sinful nature like other folks.

Non-Catholic Bible-believers rightly reject these extra-Biblical notions about Mary. However, if we react by going to the opposite extreme, we can miss the fact that Mary was, indeed, "blessed among women" and that Scripture really does say that all generations shall call her blessed (Lk. 1:28, 48).

This humble Jewish girl, known to her neighbors in Nazareth by her Hebrew name, Miriam, is an example to men and women of all generations. Her godly character is summed up in her reply to Gabriel's announcement of what was about to take place in her life: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it unto me according to thy word" (Lk. 1:31). This statement by Miriam reveals four things about her: her humility, her availability to the Lord, her submission to God's plan for her, and her faith that the Lord would do exactly as He said He would do. These qualities are far more important than worldly education, natural talents, material wealth, and worldly status. We can have our PhDs, and we may be gifted orators or natural leaders

with great worldly influence and power. But if we lack the qualities Miriam had - humility, availability, submission, faith - we will be of little or no use to God. He will leave us to our own devices and find someone else to be a "Miriam" who will bear the image of His Son.

The New Testament speaks of "the reproach of Christ." Miriam of Nazareth bore the reproach of Messiah before the Messiah was even born. She was a single girl, engaged to Joseph, whom the Bible calls "a righteous man." To everyone's shock and disgrace, Miriam is found to be pregnant out of wedlock, and Joseph decides to quietly break off the engagement. What a scandal!

The thing that amazes me is that Miriam apparently did not even bother to explain to her family and friends what had really happened. Even Joseph, her betrothed, had to be informed by the angel of the Lord that "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."

Why didn't Miriam explain her

situation to her family and to her betrothed? Did she think that there was absolutely no possibility that they might believe her? Perhaps this was the reason, but I am inclined to think there was something deeper at work. After Gabriel made his announcement, Miriam realized that she, of all people in the 4,000 years of history since Adam and Eve, *she* was the one and only woman chosen to give birth to the Messiah, the "Seed of the Woman" who had been promised in the Garden of Eden.

I believe that from the time of that realization, and especially after her pregnancy confirmed it, Miriam was so overwhelmed and numbed by the wonder and marvel of it all, that she felt no need to explain her situation to anyone. Everything was in God's hands, including her reputation, and God would vindicate her in His time. Only one thing mattered to Miriam now: the Child who had been conceived and was growing inside her. Her destiny, the one purpose for her existence on earth, was to give birth to this Child and raise Him to adulthood.

Miriam alone, of all women in history, had the honor of conceiving, bearing, and raising the Messiah Yeshua. However, there is a similar privilege given to all those who believe in the Messiah that Miriam brought into the world. Just as the Holy Spirit deposited the divine Messianic Seed into Miriam's womb, so the Holy Spirit deposits that same Seed into our hearts. The New Testament speaks about believers being born from above (John 3:3), born of God (John 1:12; 1 John 3:9), born again (or "regenerated") by incorruptible

seed (1 Peter 1:23).

Like Nicodemus and like Miriam, we might wonder how this conception and birth can take place in our life. "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" Miriam asked. The answer Gabriel gave to Miriam is a wonderful description of what takes place in our life when we receive the Messianic Seed into our heart: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Lk. 1:35).

When we experience in our heart what Miriam experienced in her body - when the Holy Spirit comes upon us and the power of the Most High overshadows us - it should cause us to be, like Miriam, so overwhelmed and numbed with wonder that only one thing matters to us now: the Messianic Seed that has been conceived and is growing in our heart.

When we receive the Messianic Seed into our heart, a divine conception takes place, and we become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Paul describes this conception as "Messiah in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). Like a hope-filled, pregnant mother, we should nurture, cherish, and protect this new life we have inside us. Just as a pregnant woman prepares for the day of arrival, so we should be preparing for the full manifestation of the Person inside us.

Sometimes when people observe an expectant mother, it seems to them that she is obsessed with the baby she is carrying. It seems like her every thought and action is somehow related to the new life that is growing inside her. Unbelievers

who observe us may think that we are obsessed with the Messianic Seed we carry in our heart, but that is okay. We know the importance of this Life we bear.

If anything threatens to harm or take away that new life in us, we should, like an expectant mother, immediately and instinctively react to protect it. If something threatens the health and well-being of our spiritual life, we should avoid that danger in order to protect and preserve the spiritual life that is growing inside us. Our careers, our homes, our possessions, our hobbies, even our human relationships all must take second place to the care and protection of the Messianic Seed that lives and grows in our heart. Without neglecting our God-given earthly duties, we should spend our lives as Miriam did, and thereby manifest the Messiah, Yeshua of Nazareth, to the world. □

*"For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."*

Matt. 12:50

# WHERE HAVE ALL THE "FLORAS" GONE?

## THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A NAME FOR YOUR CHILD

Daniel Botkin

When Gary Hart and Walter Mondale were both hoping to be the Democratic presidential candidate in 1984, columnist Mike Royko predicted that Hart would beat Mondale because the name *Gary* sounds more up-to-date and sharper than *Walter*, a dull, old-fashioned name (and, because Hart had "the dry look").

Royko's prediction was incorrect, but it illustrates a tendency people have to associate certain names with such things as age, intelligence, appearance, and personality. Most Americans today consider *Jennifer* and *Amy* nice names for little girls. But try naming a baby *Blanche* or *Gertrude* and watch people's reactions. When my sister gave birth to twins some years ago, my suggestion of *Maude* and *Claude* was not even taken seriously (nor was my brother's jocular suggestion of *Frick* and *Frack*).

"Names make impressions," states Professor Albert Mehrbian of UCLA. "They raise certain expectations." Professor Mehrbian conducted extensive studies to determine exactly what kind of impressions and expectations certain names elicit. The studies show that many names elicit remarkably similar reactions from people. For example, most Americans expect a woman with the name *Prudence* to have high morals; they also expect her to be among the least cheerful of people. The name *Rock* elicits the thought of a macho man with very low morals.

Mehrbian's studies have also discovered that even the length of a name can make a difference. Longer names make a person sound more important and respectable than he might actually be. Nicknames and shortened names tend to make a person popular. Perhaps this is why we are given the choice of voting for "Bill" Clinton or "Bob" Dole this election year. Maybe Mondale would have won the Presidential election in 1984 if he had shortened his name to "Walt."

Many names go out of circulation after generations of popularity. If people today are asked to rank *Heather*, *Debbie*, and *Beulah* according to age, there will most likely be a high consensus. I know of six *Heathers*, all of them adolescents; twelve *Debbies*, all of them young to middle-aged adults; and no living person named *Beulah*.

Why do parents avoid some names and choose others? In some cultures children's names are based on either an event surrounding their birth, or some noticed (or imagined) characteristic of the child's personality. Readers of the Scriptures know that this certainly held true in Biblical times. At nearly every birth described in any detail in the Bible, we are told why the child was given his or her particular name. Given names were not chosen arbitrarily or because they "sounded nice"; there was a significant reason for choosing a particular name, at least in the births that are recorded in detail.

The first child ever born, Cain (Heb., "acquisition"), was so named because Eve said, "I have *acquired* a man from the Lord." After Abel's death, Eve called her next son *Seth* ("appointed") "for God has *appointed* me another seed instead of Abel whom Cain slew." Many other given names in the Bible were either prophetic or based on circumstances at the birth. Parents had reasons for naming their children *Noah*, *Isaac*, *Jacob*, *Esau*, *Reuben*, *Simeon*, *Levi*, *Judah*, etc.

Most Americans do not take such things into consideration when choosing a name. They base their decision on other factors, and this is not necessarily wrong. Professor Mehrbian and other psychologists who have studied the effects of names claim that the *meaning* of a name is not nearly as important as *how it sounds*. (This may be true; nonetheless, I would not want to name my

daughter *Delilah* or *Jezebel*, even though both these names sound pretty.) Mehrbian's statement does not explain why *Jennifer*, *Amy*, *Michael*, and *Christopher* "sound nice" to this generation of Americans, while *Jethro*, *Alma*, *Mildred*, and *Clem* are no longer popular. The unpopularity of some names, though, can be explained. Writer Basil Cottle, in an article written a number of years ago, claimed that *Gertrude* had been "eroded by the tag 'dirty Gertie.'" The expression "a Plain Jane" may very well account for the quickly-disappearing *Jane*. For obvious reasons, few people nowadays name their daughters *Fannie* (a name my younger sister was almost given so that my mother would have children with rhyming names, "Danny and Fannie.")

The media can ruin the popularity of a name. I remember a radio advertisement from my childhood for Carling Black Label beer. A man's whistle was followed by his demanding voice singing, "Mabel! Black Label! Carling Black Label beer!" Both of my grandmothers were named *Mabel*, and both grew tired of hearing people sing the Black Label jingle.

The decline of *Clarence* can be traced to the days of vaudeville, when the name was often used to refer to the buffoon in stage productions. In 1922 the Clarence-Anti-Defamation League was formed to stop actors from making fun of the name. Some years later, when a man named *Clarence* became a World War 2 hero, the *New York Times* ran an editorial to proclaim that honor had been restored to the name *Clarence*. Judging from the scarcity of *Clarences* today (I know only one, who goes by the name "Buddy"), it is probably safe to assume that the Clarence-Anti-Defamation League is now defunct.

*Melvin* was probably ruined by Jerry Lewis' use of that name to portray a fool several years ago. Lewis apologized on television to the

hundreds of *Melvins* who wrote him angry letters, but the name has not yet made a come-back.

Often people who dislike their given name will identify themselves with a nickname such as *Butch*. If someone tells you his (or her) name is *Butch*, he (or she) most likely has an uncommon or funny-sounding name. The *Butches* that I knew were not given that name at birth. Their parents had really named them *Adrian*, *Emerson*, *Dewey*, *Lyle*, and *Roland*. (No offense to any guys with these names - I think I would prefer *any* of these names to "Butch"!)

Professor Herbert Barry III of the University of Pittsburgh advises giving a child a name that is traditional and popular, yet unique - not an easy task if you have a common surname like *Smith* or *Jones*. Above all, the name should "not subject the child to ridicule," says the Professor. An article in a recent *Readers Digest* tells about actual people with names which probably still subject them to ridicule: Frank N. Stein, Robin Banks, M. T. Head, Minnie Vann, Phil Harmonic, and Lance Boyle (a doctor, maybe?) Some of the names invite laughter only when viewed in the telephone directory, with last name first:

Cracker, Jack; Dollar, Bill; Wise, Guy; West, Virginia; North, Carolina. The vast storehouse of names makes it relatively easy to come up with such combinations. I'm glad my last name isn't spelled *Bodkin* instead of *Botkin*; otherwise, my parents might have been tempted to name me *Ods*.

The great number of acceptable names for English-speaking people is a fairly recent phenomenon, as is the rapid pace at which changes in popularity take place. In earlier years, Anglo-Saxon men bore names like *Egbert*, *Leofwine*, *Randwulf*, and *Thurstan*. The first event to bring about a major change in names was the Norman Conquest of England in 1066. Anglo-Saxon names, with a few exceptions, disappeared within two or three generations, though some reappeared in later centuries.

By the end of the Twelfth Century, *William* was the most common male name. A hundred years later, *John*

was in first place, accounting for 25% of all the males, while *William* took second place. Common names for women after the Norman Conquest were *Emma*, *Anne*, and *Margaret*.

The Protestant Reformation brought about a second major change in English names. As Catholic influence declined and Protestant influence grew in England, people ceased naming their children after extra-Biblical saints. The names of the Apostles were also avoided because of the popularity of these names among Roman Catholics. *Peter* was especially avoided because it "smacked of popery." People in Protestant England began using some of the more obscure and seldom-used Biblical names, especially those from the Old Testament.

As English parents began making almost exclusive use of Biblical names, the Puritans wanted to do something to distinguish their children from the children of the im-Puritans. So instead of giving their children the names of Biblical *people*, the Puritans gave them the names of Biblical *principles* or *virtues*, such as *Faith*, *Hope*, and *Charity*, names which are still acceptable for girls today.

*Amiable*, *Blessed*, *Chaste*, and many other descriptive words were used for names by the Puritans at this time. *Increase* Mather is a name which students of American history should recognize. Often names like *No-merit*, *Humiliation*, *Dust*, and *Ashes* were given as reminders of the importance of humility before God. Phrases such as *Sorry-for-Sin* and *Search-the-Scriptures* were also used as names.

Occasionally an extremely long name would be shortened in actual usage. For example, *Through-Much-Tribulation-We-Enter-the-Kingdom-of-Heaven*, a sea captain, called himself *Tribby* for short. *If-Christ-had-not-died-for-thee-thou-would-have-been-damned* Barebone, the brother of Praise-God Barebone, was known as *Damned* Barebone. This trend continued among the Puritans until about 1640, though some cases are recorded as late as the Eighteenth Century.

It is not difficult to understand why the many colorful Puritan names are no longer in use. We can also give reasons for the demise of *Gertrude*, *Jane*, *Fannie*, *Clarence*, and *Melvin*. But the recent disappearance of many names in our lifetime remains a mystery. Where have all the "*Floras*" gone - all the *Floyds*, *Lloyds*, *Owens*, *Wendells*, *Emmas*, *Rubys*, and *Selmas*? In the words of folksinger Pete Seeger, they have, like all the soldiers, "gone to graveyards, every one." Some of these obsolete names may be resurrected to new popularity by some future generation. Others will probably remain buried in eternal obscurity. □



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# THE LORD'S DAY

Daniel Botkin

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" -Rev.1:10

John's mention of "the Lord's day" is often quoted by Christians who worship on the first day of the week, Sunday, instead of on Saturday, the Sabbath. These well-meaning Christians sincerely believe that John was referring to Sunday when he wrote "the Lord's day." However, there is absolutely nothing in John's text, or in the entire Bible, to indicate that "the Lord's day" refers to Sunday. As a matter of fact, this three-word phrase "the Lord's day" does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament. In spite of the absence of any Biblical evidence whatsoever, Christians assume that by the time John wrote Revelation, the seventh-day Sabbath had been changed to Sunday and dubbed "the Lord's day" by the Apostles.

New Testaments with cross references in the margin usually refer the reader of Revelation 1:10 ("the Lord's day") to Acts 20:7, where the disciples came together "on the first day of the week" - although this is a mistranslation of Acts 20:7: the Greek text actually says "on the first of the sabbaths." (See *Gates of Eden* Vol. 2 No. 2.) Cross references in Bibles can be helpful, but cross references are neither inspired nor infallible. In this case, the cross references cause Christians to erroneously assume that there is some connection between John's "Lord's day" and an imagined Sunday meeting in Acts 20.

It is true that later in history, some post-Apostolic Gentile church leaders referred to Sunday as "the Lord's day" in their writings. However, this is not proof of an earlier Biblical or Apostolic mandate to abolish the Sabbath and replace it with Sunday worship. As David Stern remarks, "This only shows how quickly the Jewish roots of the New Testament were forgotten or ignored" (*Jewish New Testament Commentary*, Rev. 1:10).

If "the Lord's day" of Rev. 1:10

does not refer to Sunday, what did John mean by the expression? One possible explanation is that John was simply referring to the seventh-day Sabbath. I do not believe we can say that this is so with absolute certainty, but it is certainly a more plausible explanation than the Sunday theory. The conclusion that "the Lord's day" refers to the seventh-day Sabbath is arrived at by asking a few questions:

The possessive form ("Lord's") is used to tell us that the day belongs to the Lord. So, which day of the week, according to the Bible, belongs to the Lord in a special way? Which day of the week did the Messiah declare Himself to be Lord of? Using the Bible alone as our only authoritative guide, which day of the week is most likely to have been called "the Lord's day" by a First-Century Jew like John? To those familiar with the Scriptures, the answer should be obvious: the seventh day, not the first day of the week.

Of course the above explanation is valid only if John was referring to a literal 24-hour day of the week. Some people, including many Bible scholars, believe that "the Lord's day" does not refer to any particular 24-hour day of the week, be it Saturday or Sunday. Rather, it refers to the end-time "Day of the Lord" of which the Prophets wrote - that period of history when God's wrath and judgments will be poured out upon the earth, followed by the arrival of the Messiah and the setting up of the Messianic kingdom. One only needs to read the rest of the Book of Revelation to see that the end-time Day of the Lord is certainly the major theme of John's Revelation. Those who accept this interpretation, then, would understand "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" to mean "I was transported in vision, by the Spirit, to behold the events that will take place during the period of history known as the great Day of the Lord."

Some people have raised a legitimate question about the above view. If John meant "the Day of the Lord,"

why did he write "the Lord's day"? In the Septuagint, the Hebrew יְהוָה (yom YHWH, "day of YHWH") was rendered by the Greek expression ημερα του κυριου ("day of the Lord"), but John rearranges the words and uses a different form, η κυριακη ημερα ("the Lord's day"). Why does John translate "the Day of the Lord" in a slightly different way than the translators of the Septuagint did?

There is no difference in the meaning of the two expressions; there is only a difference in emphasis. "The wife of the President" and "the President's wife" is the same person. If I use the first form, I am emphasizing whose wife she is ("the wife of THE PRESIDENT"). If I use the second form, I am emphasizing her role as a wife ("the President's WIFE"). This same rule holds true in Greek. The Prophets who wrote about the Day of the Lord were emphasizing who the Day belongs to (THE LORD); John was emphasizing THE DAY more than the Lord to whom the day belongs. (See E. W. Bullinger.)

John's use of "the Lord's day," then, refers to either the seventh-day Sabbath or to the end-time period of history known as the Day of YHWH, or perhaps to both - it is possible that John was given his Revelation of the Day of YHWH on a Sabbath day. Whichever is the case, one thing is certain: Revelation 1:10 cannot be used to support the false notion that the seventh-day Sabbath was abolished and replaced with Sunday. The only place one can find Sunday referred to as "the Lord's day" is in the anti-Semitic writings of the post-Apostolic Gentile church leaders who led the Church, a step at a time, away from the Torah. □



"...all His commandments are sure. They stand fast forever and ever." Psalm 111:7, 8