

# *Forerunner*

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 6, Number 4

April 1997



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Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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- 3    **PERSONAL FROM JOHN W. RITENBAUGH:**  
The Fourth Commandment
- 8    Contend Earnestly  
—John Reid
- 11   **A READY ANSWER:**  
Why Did Jesus Have to Die by Crucifixion?  
—Staff
- 14   **PROPHECY WATCH / WORLD WATCH:**  
Israel: *Future*  
—Richard T. Ritenbaugh
- 20   **BIBLE STUDY:**  
The Third Commandment

## About Our Cover:

What lies ahead for the modern nations of Israel? Unfortunately, these nations must first endure the terrible horrors of "the time of Jacob's Trouble" before they experience the peace, security and prosperity that God promises them in the Millennium. Can they avoid the purging fires of the Great Tribulation? Yes, if they repent and turn back to the God of their fathers! Will they? Sadly, probably not! (Corel and Parsons Technology Photos)

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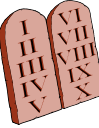
# THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Is the Sabbath commandment done away? Has it been tossed into the dustbin as a relic of theological debate? Is it no longer part of the great spiritual law of God because men have the power to declare it null and void by saying it is merely ceremonial? Is man free to choose another day on which he will worship God, declaring it is not immoral to break the fourth commandment?

None of the Ten Commandments has been so argued over and suffered such scorn and abuse as the fourth. Surely it is considered the least of the commandments. When considering the other nine, theologians have little to argue over except variations on what they might consider as breaking their spirit. Nearly all “churchianity” claims that we should obey the other nine, but they almost universally ignore the fourth as irrelevant, having been replaced by Sunday.

This article will not explore much of the “whys” of this, but rather will show what the Bible says about the Sabbath. Doing this will show why the Sabbath commandment fits perfectly with the other commandments and God’s purpose.

## The Sabbath in Context

 In examining the central issue in each of the first several commandments, we find that the first concerns **what we worship**. Romans 1:24-25 summarizes this well: “Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature [creation] rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen”

Worship is the devoted service one gives to what he regards most highly. As these verses show, we can give devoted service to created things as well as the Creator. Additionally, the tenth commandment says covetousness is idolatry too (Colossians 3:5), clearly amplifying that we can give our devotion to things other than the true God.

It is popular to think that “all religions are good,” but that is simply not true. Paul argues that God gave them up or abandoned such idolaters to uncleanness. Therefore any religion other than the true one—the one that gives its undivided loyalty to the Creator—is a creation of man, a curse and merits punishment.

How good can it be to exchange the truth for the lie? In this context “the lie” is that one can profitably worship someone or something other than the true God. Worshiping things other than the Creator turns the thrust and direction of our lives off the true path of God’s purpose. Though those objects may be otherwise harmless in themselves, it is sin to give them the devotion that rightly belongs to the Creator.

John 4:24 proclaims that those who worship God *must* worship Him in spirit and truth. The worship of God involves the totality of our life, and therefore it cannot be confined to a particular location or a mere hour or two on a given day. Our worship must be guided, motivated and empowered by His Spirit. Further, it cannot merely be sincere, but it must also be true. Attitude is extremely important, but it alone does not replace truth.

Our focus must be on imitating God. He commands us not to use any material aids in this because no one can capture what God is in a work of art. Besides, God wants us to concentrate on what He is, not what He looks like. Thus, the second commandment covers **the way we worship God**, in spirit and in truth.

It is not easy for human nature to surrender its dominance over a person’s life. It first tries to regain its dominance by only grudgingly sharing time and energy with God. But when Jesus was asked what the first and great commandment of the law is, He said, “To love God with all your heart, all your mind, and all your soul.” Anything less will affect the quality of our worship.

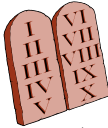
The third commandment involves the **quality** of our personal witness of everything God’s name implies. His name represents His position as Creator, Lifegiver, Provider, Ruler and Sustainer, as well as His character, power and promises. As Matthew 28:19-20 shows, “God” became our spiritual Family name upon regeneration by His Spirit, and thus we have a responsibility to grow and uphold that name’s reputation by bringing honor upon it by our words, deeds and attitudes.

The church is not a great nation, military power or cultural institution organized to change this world. It exists solely to prepare its members for the Kingdom of God and to glorify Him by our witness. The primary witness is with our lives. Each believer witnesses before the world of the worth of his Lord, Jesus Christ. This third commandment thus covers hypocrisy. Even though men

*The fourth commandment provides a means of unified instruction and is therefore a major factor in the conversion process.*

may not discern the hypocrisy, God does, and He will not hold such a person guiltless for abuses done to His name.


## Purposes of the Sabbath

 In making our witness, we carry God's purpose to the world through personal conduct and preaching. But how can we witness well unless we know what to do? How can we know what to do unless we are taught? This is a major purpose of the fourth commandment. It provides a means of unified instruction and is therefore a major factor in the conversion process.

Mark 2:27-28 notes a number of things critical to Sabbath keeping: "And He said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.'"

1. Jesus refers to the Sabbath as a specific day; it is *the* Sabbath, not *a* Sabbath.
2. The Sabbath was not made for its own sake as were the other six days, but as a service to mankind. An alternate translation would be that it "was made on account of man." Jesus presents it as the Creator's specific and thoughtful gift to man.
3. It was not made just for the Jews, but for *mankind*. When God created the Sabbath, He intended it from the beginning as a UNIVERSAL blessing to benefit mankind. He made it to help ensure man's physical and spiritual well-being.
4. The broader context reveals a disagreement over how to keep it. Jesus claims to be its Lord, its Owner or Master, and He thus lays claim to His right to show by His example and verbal instruction how to keep it, not whether to keep it. Since He expresses no disagreement with keeping it, He implies that He expects man—not just Jews—to keep it. He has a perfect opportunity here to reply that it does not matter if men keep it, but He gives no such indication.

## A Memorial of the Creator

 We honor men and women who have made significant contributions to mankind by setting apart a day as a memorial to them so others will remember their deeds and strive to emulate them. Hence, men celebrate the birthdays of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King. The Sabbath memorializes God. Compared to any man, God's contributions are beyond compare, but one stands out above all: He is Creator.

What an awesome contribution to consider! Everything in this fantastic floating greenhouse we call Earth is a tribute to His genius, power and love. Mankind has yet to develop his first flea! Men can impart life only within the narrow parameters God has created. Yet if a man did

develop even one flea, how much publicity would he seek? What would he demand as remuneration?

Genesis 2:1-3 is a series of verses that lays the foundation for keeping the Sabbath:

Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

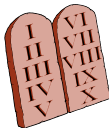
Because the Sabbath is from creation—and the Creator Himself set the pattern for man by resting on it—it has universal validity. It is not from one of the patriarchs or Moses or from the Jews because none of these existed when it was created. The Bible shows three times in two verses that GOD very clearly inspired *the* seventh day, not *a* seventh day.

God could have ended His creative work at the end of the sixth day because it seemed at that point as though He had provided everything man needed for life. But He did not complete it then because all man needed was *not* yet created! The Sabbath is, in fact, THE VERY CROWN of the creation week. It is vital to man's well-being. So God created a period of rest and holy time—a very specific period, as the context shows.

God draws our attention to four things He did on that first Sabbath. He 1) ended His work, 2) rested, 3) blessed the seventh day and 4) sanctified it. He created something just as surely as He created physical things on the other six days. He is instructing us that, on the Sabbath, creation continued but in a different form, one not outwardly visible. To those with understanding, the Sabbath symbolizes that God is *still* creating. Jesus confirms this in John 5:17, when a dispute arises over how to keep the Sabbath. He replies, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."

The Sabbath is an integral part of the process of creation. God finished the physical part at the end of the sixth day. The spiritual aspect began with the creation of the Sabbath and continues to this day. Through the sequence of events on the first six days, God created an environment for man and life. But God shows through the creation of the Sabbath that the life-producing process is not complete with just the physical environment.

## A Holy Day

 The Sabbath provides an important part in producing spiritual life—life with a dimension the physical cannot supply. The Sabbath is not an afterthought of a tremendous creation, but a deliberate memorializing of the most enduring thing

man knows: time. Time plays a key role in God's spiritual creation. It is as if God says, "Look at what I have made and consider that I am not yet finished creating. I am reproducing Myself, and you can be a part of my spiritual creation."

The fourth commandment, as stated in Exodus 20:8-11, again links the Sabbath to creation:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

God did not rest as a result of tiredness because He does not get weary (Isaiah 40:28). In this, man is unlike God. We need to rest this physical body on the Sabbath. This ties the rhythm of our bodies to the rhythm in which God made the world. God rested from the achievement of the physical creation, but that does not indicate His rest means inactivity because God nurtures what He creates. This is why Jesus said that His Father is working. The Sabbath is especially a time of *spiritual* activity that the Father spends preparing His children for His Kingdom.

The Bible says He blessed the Sabbath day. To bless is to favor. According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, the Hebrew word means "to endue with power for success, prosperity, fecundity, longevity, etc." Does God point out the fact that the proper observance of the Sabbath will go a long way toward promoting success in those who keep it? Yes, because He also sanctified it, consecrated it, hallowed it. He made it HOLY TIME!

It takes a holy God to make holy time, and this holy God made no time holy other than His Sabbaths. God can make man holy, but man cannot make anything holy. All of this is seen within the context of *the* seventh day, a specific day following the first six days of creation. Using any day other than *the* seventh day, the Sabbath, for the normal weekly worship of God is man-directed, and is neither blessed nor holy.

That the Sabbath is holy means it is worthy of respect, deference, even devotion not given other periods of time. It is set apart for sacred use because it is derived from God's own acts of creation and command. The overall idea of the word *holy* is "different." Its root word means "cut," indicating "cut out," "separate," or in more modern terms, "a cut above." When it applies to God or those persons or objects He declares holy, a thing that is holy is

different from the common. It is thus separate from others, cut out from the ordinary, or a cut above, indicating transcendence.

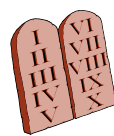
Exodus 3:2-5 shows a principle regarding the making of something holy:

And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burned with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn." So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground."

Because God was present, the ground itself was holy and could not be approached in the ordinary fashion. God commanded Moses to treat it with a respect, a deference, that he would not give to something common. Interestingly, even though Moses knew there was something unusual about what he was observing, God had to tell him that he was on holy ground. Its holiness was something spiritual; it was not physically discernable.

The same presence of God makes the Sabbath holy, a cut above, transcendent, as compared to the other days not declared holy by God. God puts His presence into the Sabbath day for the sake of His people and His spiritual creation. The other six days are common and given to the pursuit of the mundane activities of life. Since God commands us to keep the Sabbath holy, we must strive to avoid those mundane things that make the Sabbath—or promote making it—into an ordinary day.

## A Weekly Appointment



Amos 3:3, "Can two walk together unless they are agreed?" is a scripture familiar to us all. Applying this principle to the Sabbath, if we want to be in God's presence in this special way, no other day will do. God has set a weekly appointment with His people to meet with Him for purposes pertaining to His spiritual creation. It is largely on this day that we are blessed, empowered by Him with His Spirit to promote our success in His way. The keeping of the Sabbath also functions to identify the two parties involved in the covenant.

In addition, the placement of God's instruction regarding His special Sabbath covenant also shows how important keeping it is in the eyes of God. In Exodus 31:17 God says, "It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was re-

**G**od puts His presence into the Sabbath day for the sake of His people and His spiritual creation.

# God created the Sabbath because it enhances and protects our relationship with Him.

freshed.”

This special covenant—strategically placed by Moses between information on the building of the Tabernacle (a type of the church) and the Golden Calf incident (brazen idolatry)—creates a special sign of the Sabbath between God and His people. Generally, a sign identifies. It communicates the purpose of or gives directions to a person or place. Signs bring people together with shared interests and common goals. A sign can function as a pledge of mutual fidelity and commitment. Organizations use signs to designate membership, allowing members to recognize each other.

The Sabbath serves as an external and visible bond that unites God’s people, and at the same time it sanctifies them from almost everyone else. Almost everyone in the Western world keeps Sunday or nothing. By the Sabbath, the true covenant keeper knows that God is sanctifying him. Anybody who has kept both Sunday and Sabbath knows this: Sunday sets no one apart from this world.

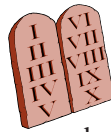
If He created the Sabbath only because we need to rest physically, any old time would do, but ultimately, how and why we keep the Sabbath is what becomes the real sign. God is working out a purpose. He has invested a tremendous amount in us in the creation and in the death of His Son. The Sabbath serves as a major means by which He protects that investment. He made a specific period of time special so He can meet with His people and take major steps to make them different.

On the Sabbath He educates us in His way. The Sabbath plays an integral part in preparing His people to witness for Him. Suppose a basketball coach told His players, “Come to the gym at noon,” but some of the players decided to go to a different gym at a different time with a different coach. The coach would have a difficult time training his players in his style of basketball.

Even though players on a team will retain their own distinctive personalities, they also absorb some of the qualities and the philosophy of their coach. People deeply involved in athletics say they can always tell whether a player has been trained by a certain coach. They say the player has the “John Wooden” or “John Thompson” way about him. The athlete has unconsciously taken on some of the attributes of his coach, and doing so has sanctified him from other players who were not coached by that particular person.

This same process accounts for passing on speech dialects to children. When born, we begin to absorb the dominant local dialect while making no conscious effort to do so. In some cases, the dialect is so obvious people can immediately tell where we grew up. God, His Spirit, the Sabbath and our fellowship with Him go together in much the same manner.

## A Celebration of Life and Freedom



God does not specifically identify Himself with any other day of the week, and He commands His people to meet with Him on no other day. These truths are so strong that God includes the Sabbath in the ten foundational laws governing morality. How much plainer can it get? In addition, the apostle Paul says this body of laws is spiritual (Romans 7:14). This has universal and eternal ramifications, further enhanced by the fact that Jesus kept it (and we are to follow His example, I John 2:4-6), as did the apostles.

God created the Sabbath because it enhances and protects our relationship with Him. It provides a witness to God, to ourselves and to the world. It keeps us in a proper frame of mind and furnishes us with the right knowledge of our part of the pilgrimage to God’s Kingdom.

We live in a grubby, grasping, materially oriented world, where a built-in bias exists toward materialism and the exercise of carnality. If we follow it, we can find it is not hard at all to avoid spiritual things. But keeping the Sabbath almost forces us to think about God, the spiritual side of life and His creation. It presents us with opportunities to consider the **WHYS** of life, to get ourselves correctly oriented to use our time properly the other six days. Keeping the Sabbath correctly is the kernel, the nucleus, from which grows appropriate worship (our response to God).

Existentialist philosophers tell us that life is absurd. They say that all life is but a prelude to death. The Sabbath celebrates just the opposite! It reminds us that God’s creative process is continuing. God is creating us in His image so that physical life is not absurd but a prelude to life on an infinitely higher, spiritual level. As we grow more like Him, we become more sanctified from this world. In experiencing, refreshing and elevating the mind in the realm of the spirit, we get a foretaste of what is to come.

In preparation for Israel to enter the Promised Land, Moses repeats the commandments in Deuteronomy 5. The Sabbath command has a significant change from its wording in Exodus 20:

“And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (verse 15).

The emphasis here is to remember our slavery and, by implication, being free. “Remember that you were once a slave. Observe this day to remain free.” The Sabbath draws us to remember the past and consider where we are

headed. We do this by remembering that the Sabbath is a memorial of creation and a type of the Millennium. The ministry enhances this through the messages they preach about the world today and the world tomorrow. In some way, most sermons involve sin, which can bring us into slavery. James, though, calls the Ten Commandments “the law of liberty” (James 2:12). By keeping them, we remain free of enslavement to Satan and this world. On the Sabbath, God instructs His people through His Word about how to keep His commandments and thus remain free.

The chronological context of Exodus 16 helps us to see how Moses understood this idea of remaining free through the Sabbath. Chapter 12 instructs about keeping the Passover, the Israelites observing the first Passover and taking the first steps out of Egypt. Chapter 13 instructs about the firstborn and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and God leading Israel into the wilderness toward the Promised Land. In chapter 14, Israel is at the Red Sea, and Pharaoh is chasing them. God parts the waters, and Israel is baptized into Moses as the people cross. In chapter 15 Israel celebrates its liberty, and God gives His promise of healing. Chapter 16 opens with God providing manna for the Israelites, and within this context He reveals the Sabbath to them.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not.” . . . Then [Moses] said to them, “This is what the LORD has said: ‘Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake today, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.’” So they laid it up till morning, as Moses commanded; and it did not stink, nor were there any worms in it. Then Moses said, “Eat that today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.” . . . So the people rested on the seventh day. (Exodus 16:4, 23-26, 30)

The first of the Ten Commandments revealed after God freed Israel from slavery is the one intended to keep them free—the Sabbath. It is a wonderful gift.

### The Sabbath and Idolatry



Perhaps no other chapter in the Bible shows as clearly as Ezekiel 20 the critical importance for the people of God to keep the Sabbath. Verses

3-8 set the stage:

Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, “Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Have you come to inquire of Me? As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I will not be inquired of by you.’ Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Then make known to them the abominations of their fathers. Say to them, “Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘On the day when I chose Israel and lifted My hand in an oath to the descendants of the house of Jacob, and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, I lifted My hand in an oath to them saying, “I am the LORD your God.” On that day I lifted My hand in an oath to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, flowing with milk and honey, the glory of all lands. Then I said to them, “Each of you, throw away the abominations which are before his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” But they rebelled against Me and would not obey Me. They did not all cast away the abominations which were before their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I said, “I will pour out My fury on them and fulfill My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.”””

Ezekiel does not record the question or questions the elders asked of God, but we can ascertain them from God’s reply. They seem to have been something like, “Why are we having all this trouble? Why are we in captivity? When can we expect to return to Jerusalem?” God specifically names part of the problem when He says that He commanded them to get rid of “the abominations which were before their eyes.” These things, obviously abominations to God, were a delight to the Israelites because they did not cast them away.

God clearly shows that part of the answer is that they were committing idolatry. In verses 12-13, He involves the Sabbath in their problems:

Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. Yet the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes; they despised My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them; and they greatly defiled My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them in the wilderness, to consume them.

Please see page 19

*The first of the Ten Commandments revealed after God freed Israel from slavery is the one intended to keep them free—the Sabbath. It is a wonderful gift.*

# CONTEND EARNESTLY

**T**he book of Hebrews, traditionally thought to be authored by the apostle Paul, was written around the year AD 63, a year or so before Nero's persecution began. Paul, weighing the signs both in Rome and in the church, knew that trouble approached, and the church was unprepared to face it. This epistle served as his attempt to stir God's people to renew their zeal and dedication.

The apostolic age was ending. In just a few years, the Romans would martyr both Peter and Paul, and the true church would begin to scatter as a result of persecution. Some elders still faithfully preached God's Word to the church, but many—even long-time members—were neglecting their wonderful calling. It seems that some were not really striving to study and comprehend God's way. They were relaxing their efforts in keeping His laws, Sabbath and holy days.

Perhaps they thought, "The Lord delays His coming. All things are as they were." Maybe the leadership of the church was changing, and the body, confused by it, was divided by slightly different beliefs. Whatever it was, their vision of God's purpose had been clouded or lost, and instead of being filled with excitement and zeal for God, members were letting down, endangering their salvation.

We can get the flavor of what Paul attempts to get across in Hebrews 2:1-3.

Therefore *we must give the more earnest heed* to the things which we have heard, *lest we drift away*. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we *neglect so great a salvation?*

He continues his theme in the next chapter:

"Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, proved Me, and saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief *in departing from the living God*. (3:8-12)

Also in chapter 4:

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear *lest any of you seem to have come short of it*. . . . Let us therefore be diligent to enter into that rest, *lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience*. (4:1, 11)

And again in 5:12-14:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, *you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God*; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Paul wrote this epistle to people who had become feeble, frail, helpless, impotent, powerless and fragile concerning the ways of God. They had let down in keeping the laws of God and begun taking the mercy, grace and love of God for granted. These people were slowly losing their

zeal for God. The era described in Hebrews sounds remarkably like the one we find ourselves in today.

## Encouragement & Instruction

In Hebrews 10, Paul gives us much encouragement when he describes Jesus Christ, our High Priest:

For by one offering He has perfected *forever* those who are being sanctified. . . . "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." . . . Therefore, brethren, [we can have] boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus Christ. (verses 14, 16-17, 19)

Then, in verses 22-25, he gives us five things to do both personally and collectively:

1. Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water. (verse 22)
2. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. (verse 23)
3. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, (verse 24)
4. not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some,
5. but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (verse 25)

## LET US DRAW NEAR

God always encourages us to draw close to Him in prayer. Here Paul

instructs us to do so with unwavering confidence, fullness of faith, without any doubt, because the sacrifice of Jesus Christ has cleared our conscience and paved the way into God's presence.

Today, some no longer feel the need to pray and study daily. They make the excuse that they do not have enough time. There is not enough time NOT to pray and study! The Day is approaching! Paul writes in Romans 13:11-14:

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly. . . . But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

If we fail to use these very vital tools of prayer and study—which will help us “walk properly” and “put on the Lord Jesus Christ”—we will find ourselves separated from God. That is the last thing we want as the Great Tribulation approaches!

### LET US HOLD FAST THE CONFESSION OF OUR HOPE

This is Paul's reason for writing the epistle. They were enduring great pressure to relax their standards. Some

were beginning to return to their former beliefs and to the world. Apostasy had begun to set in.

Today in the confusion of the times, we can allow our foundations to be chipped away by listening to the myriad of differing opinions and beliefs. So many voices babble incessantly, each one trying to get our attention, that they can nearly drive us mad with confusion! Confusion not only affects what we believe, but also our zeal for God's way of life. It is imperative we “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

Jesus gives us this warning in His messages to the Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia churches:

But *hold fast* what you have till I come. . . . Remember therefore how you have received and heard; *hold fast* and repent. . . . Behold, I come quickly! *Hold fast* what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Revelation 2:25; 3:3, 11).

It is of paramount importance to keep a firm grip on the true teachings of God's Word.

### LET US CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER

Has there ever been a time in our calling when we need to excite one another for the work of God more than now? We all need to be motivated to “stand tall” in the Word of God. We ought to have great love for

God's laws and each other. We should be performing the appropriate works attendant to our calling. In the greater church of God today, with its many differing attitudes, motivating to love and good works is very difficult to do.

Adam Clarke provides a paraphrase of Hebrews 10:24 that should help us to understand what Paul meant: “Let us diligently and attentively consider each other's trials, difficulties, and weaknesses; feel for each other, and excite each other to an increase of love to God and man; and as proof of it, to be fruitful in good works.”

In reality, this is just another way of saying, as Jesus did, “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). Such love manifests itself, not only in feeling for others in their troubles, but also in edifying and encouraging each other to do what is godly. In this way, we share our burdens.

### NOT FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER

The Revised English Bible renders this verse: “We should not stay away from our meetings, as some do, but rather encourage one another, all the more because we see the day of the Lord drawing near.” Since the New Testament church observed the Sabbath, it is evident that Paul is saying, “We need to be attending church services, especially since the end is coming soon!”



A good friend of mine and I were talking about how the church keeps the Sabbath. He commented that, generally, church members baptized before the mid-1970s seem to have a greater zeal for making sure they always get to services on the Sabbath than those baptized later.

This may or may not be true, but there does seem to be a trend not to consider assembling on the Sabbath as important as it used to be. In the past, we would never think of missing church services to attend a wedding or visit with family coming into town. We would never stay home because we were tired. When someone became ill, the whole family did not stay at home; we thought that everyone else should still go or at the very least one of us should represent the family at church. Since it was the most important event of the week, we would always plan to be at services, even if we “ruffled the feathers” of relatives or neighbors.

When first called, our family with our little children would drive thirty miles to Bible study on Friday nights, and the next morning, we would drive the same 60-mile round trip to go to services. In my thirty years as a member, I can hardly remember one of us not being at services each week. Later, we moved my mother to a cabin in the San Bernardino mountains, giving us a place to get away from it all occasionally. We would leave home before Sabbath started, early Friday evening, and return to our home Sunday night. But we would always make the 150-mile round trip back to services each Sabbath.

I am not trying to toot my own horn here, but to show how differently we considered the Sabbath and church services in earlier days. Paul implies that such a high regard for them is proper and very good for us. Why is it so important?

We obediently honor God in coming before Him at services. Each Sabbath is to be “a holy convocation” (Leviticus 23:3), meaning we are “called together” to worship Him. In a way, it is like a weekly Family reunion to pay homage to our Father, and in turn, He instructs us further in His way of life.

In addition, we partially fulfill

some of the points we discussed above. The Sabbath allows us to draw near to God and strengthen our faith. It helps us to hold fast our belief in doctrine through the messages we hear. And through fellowship with the brethren, assembling on the Sabbath enables us to know and consider others’ needs, showing us how we may aid them.

In the Church of the Great God, and in other churches of God, we have very few “large” congregations. Many number 50 or less. When five members are absent, 10% of the congregation is missing! It can be discouraging in a small congregation to have members absent, but it can be very encouraging to all when everyone really works to be there each week.

Are there reasons to stay home on the Sabbath? Of course. Personal or family sickness, as when a child is ill. Business trips and family vacations will interfere occasionally with attending services, but we can take tapes or articles and booklets. We may have put in an especially difficult, exhausting week, but even here, we can plan and prioritize to avoid these situations so we can attend services. In fact, having a difficult week is all the more reason to make sure we make it to Sabbath services.

Our former church affiliation says that keeping the Sabbath is just a tradition, not a law. It is interesting that the only part of the Bible that God did not inspire to be written by a human being is the Ten Commandments. God wrote them Himself with His own finger. He did this because the commandments are His mind, the foundation upon which everything else stands. Thus, the keeping of the Sabbath is not a “tradition.” It is a direct, eternally binding command of God, and thus we should do all we can never to forsake the assembling of ourselves on it.

### EXHORTING ONE ANOTHER

*Exhort* means “to aid, help, comfort, encourage and beseech.” In the Babylon of this world—with all its pulls and distractions to neglect our calling—every one of us needs exhortation to strive harder to stand.

We live in what can best be described as a Laodicean environment,

just as did the Hebrews to whom Paul wrote. Many today challenge the foundation laid by God through Herbert Armstrong, and sadly, many call into question even the commandments of God. In such an atmosphere of doubt and distrust, we all need exhortation to be faithful in all we have learned.

In the next several verses, Paul pens a sober warning to us not to let down:

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. . . . Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? . . . It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. . . . Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. . . . But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. (Hebrews 10:26-27, 29, 31, 35, 39)

The apostle continues on to recount the heroic tales of our brethren who have gone on before us, standing through trials the likes of which we have never had to face. Then in Hebrews 12:1-2, he encourages us to settle down and run our race with patience and faith in God.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.

Now is the time to stir the embers, to fan the flame, to be zealous in our love and obedience to God, for the finish line is so much closer than when we began. Let’s not give up with the goal in sight!

—John Reid

# WHY DID JESUS HAVE TO DIE BY CRUCIFIXION?

Crucifixion shows up in movies depicting Christ or people in Christ's time meeting horrible deaths: *The Robe*, *King of Kings*, *Quo Vadis?*, *Spartacus*, *Ben Hur*. These movies never even come close to depicting the horror of crucifixion. Modern capital punishment seems humane, almost gentle, in comparison to the real thing.

Movie producers usually depict a "cross" as a T-shaped implement. Over the years, the Church of God has often written about "the Cross," many times to debate whether Jesus died on a traditional cross or on an upright stake or pole in the ground. A few in God's church would not even utter the word "cross," replacing it with the word "stake" or "tree" instead. Perhaps we focused on the technical data too much, as we tried to distance our Savior from any pagan symbol or shape. Maybe we began to lose sight of the larger picture: that our Savior HAD TO DIE for us.

Our English Bible translations say He died on a "cross." The original Greek word used is *stauros*. In researching the topic, we find some experts report that a *stauros* was simply a stake, pole or post upon which the victim was either nailed, strapped or impaled. *Strong's Concordance* (#4716) defines it as "a stake or post . . . a pole or cross." *Vine's Expository Dictionary* takes the much stronger opinion that the "cross" the Romans crucified Jesus on was nothing like

today's crucifix, but just an upright beam. Several Bible dictionaries take both sides—that the "cross" was originally an upright beam with cross beams added later, and they give supporting evidence. The exact shape is unimportant. A stake both with and

***"And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified Him."***

without a cross bar is used in pagan symbolism. Is a church steeple any less pagan because it has no cross bar? It is still a phallic symbol.

Without a doubt, the "cross" we know today looks very much like the symbol used by worshipers of Tammuz. It is equally certain that we should *not* be using a "cross" as a part of worship. (Request our reprint article, "The Cross: Christian Banner or Pagan Relic," May, 1996; see also Vine's article "cross, crucify.")

## The Greater Issue

However, we must not forget the greater issue: Our Savior died a most horrible death on a *stauros* or "cross." For me. For you.

The Romans made an art form of crucifixion as a means of capital punishment after borrowing the idea from

the Greeks and Phoenicians. The Babylonians, Persians and Assyrians also used various forms of crucifixion, including impaling. The Jews thought it a most disgusting form of death. It was gory and very painful, often lasting for days. Roman citizens were usually exempted from crucifixion; they were beheaded for capital crimes.

In Jesus' day, crucifixion was considered so gruesome that it was reserved for slaves and the worst criminals or enemies of the state. Death usually took days unless the victim had been severely beaten or scourged first, which

was often the case. To maximize the impact, crucifixions often occurred along public highways or other very visible areas, as lessons for all of what would happen to enemies of the state or incorrigibles.

The Romans usually left the bodies to rot or be eaten by scavengers. No doubt Jesus had seen the remains of many crucifixions as He traveled up and down Galilee and Judea. He knew He would someday experience it firsthand.

Why did Jesus have to die *that* way? Was there not a more humane way for Him to die for our sins? Were He an ordinary man, such questions might be relevant, but to be our Savior, He had to die in such a way. The Father had planned for specifically this type of execution because it so perfectly depicts so many things nec-

## A Ready Answer

"Be Ready Always To Give An Answer" – I Peter 3:15 (KJV)

essary for a full comprehension of sin and its horrors.

## Death by Execution

Today we execute criminals by a variety of means: lethal injection, gas, firing squad, hanging or electric chair. In Jesus' time, the Romans preferred crucifixion.

A primary factor in Jesus' death is that it was substitutionary. For each sin we commit, we earn the death penalty. This penalty cannot be paid by dying a natural death of old age, by accident or by disease, for this is the way everyone dies as a matter of course. Hebrews 9:27 says, "It is appointed for men to die once." If "merely" dying any old way were the payment for sin, idolaters, murderers, rapists, thieves, liars, adulterers and other sinners would be completely absolved of their sins upon their deaths. Cleared of all guilt by death, they would legally qualify for entrance into God's Kingdom.

However, we must remember the rest of verse 27: "... but after this the judgment." Thus, even after a person's physical death, he is brought under judgment. This means the penalty for sin is something more than "just" death. Verse 22 helps to clarify this: "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." Sin cannot be forgiven until someone pours out his blood to cover the transgression. The penalty for sin is therefore death by execution.

So, as a substitutionary sacrifice, Jesus had to die the way we would have, by execution. He could not have paid the penalty for our sins by dying any way other than by execution. He could not have died by suicide or even "euthanasia," as these forms of death would have been sin, disqualifying Him as Savior. He would then have had to die for His own sin.

Remember also that Jesus' death resulted from a pronouncement of Pilate, when he handed Jesus over "to be crucified" (John 19:13-16; Matthew 27:26). Though Pilate literally washed his hands of the whole affair by saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it" (Matthew 27:24), he made the judgment and sentenced Him to death.

Of course, Jesus was not guilty of

any crime or sin. *Our* sins brought on us the death penalty. In taking the penalty on Himself, Jesus had to die by execution, and crucifixion was Rome's preferred means.

## The Shame of Crucifixion

God also allowed His Son to suffer crucifixion because it was a very shameful way to die. It was the death of criminals and incorrigibles, for those considered "the scum of the earth." No one in Jesus' day would have bragged that his uncle had been

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*As a substitutionary sacrifice, Jesus had to die the way we would have, by execution. He could not have paid the penalty for our sins by dying any other way.*

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crucified any more than we would be proud of a relative who was executed by electric chair. To make matters worse, Jesus was crucified between two robbers (Matthew 27:38). The typical passerby would have judged Jesus guilty by association.

Why and how does shame enter the picture? Why did Jesus have to die a shameful death? Sin *causes* SHAME. Sin *is* shameful. Jesus died a shameful death to depict the shame brought on by our sins. It is shameful to be known as a thief, a pervert, an adulterer, a liar or a murderer. It *should be* shameful to be known as an idolater or one who takes God's name in vain, breaks the Sabbath or disrespects his parents. Sin does not make us look good, nor does it make our family proud of us. *Sin is shameful*. We should be ashamed to sin!

Crucifixion was shameful not only as a *penalty*, but also as a *process*. In most cases, the victim was stark naked—allowed little or no loin cloth. The Bible in many places discusses the shame of nakedness (Isaiah 47:3; Revelation 3:18; 16:15). Imagine being a sinless person, having commit-

ted no crime or sin, yet exposed to all who passed by. Being a modest man, Jesus was ashamed to have to be exposed to His mother and the other women, the apostle John and a multitude of spectators, male and female. What humiliation our Savior endured for us!

The theme of "the *shame* of the cross" is discussed in Scripture. Notice two passages in Hebrews.

... looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him *endured the cross, despising the shame*, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (12:2)

... if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they *crucify* again for themselves the Son of God, *and put Him to an open shame*. (6:6)

## The Agony of Crucifixion

Jesus also had to die a death that was excruciatingly painful. Why? To depict the horrible pain that sin causes. It would not have served God's purpose if He had died a painless death. The picture would have been incomplete.

Any criminal of that time would have despaired to learn he was to be crucified. Crucifixion was not only an execution, but also a method of torture. The Romans usually gave the victim an excruciating scourging first. Jesus was no exception. Before He ever touched His cross, He was scourged, beaten and insulted.

Over the years we have heard quite a bit about the Roman lictor, the soldier charged with dispensing this dreaded punishment. He used a whip, often with imbedded pieces of metal, bone or other sharp objects. Romans did not limit their lictors to the Israelite practice of "forty stripes save one," nor to striking just the victim's back. He would let the whip strike and wrap around every inch of the person's body until he was within an inch of death.

The prophet Isaiah prophesies how Jesus appeared after the scourging: "Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage [*appearance*, margin]

was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men” (Isaiah 52:14). He goes on to say that He was “wounded [*pierced through, margin*] for our transgressions, He was bruised [*crushed*] for our iniquities” (53:5). Is it no wonder that the apostle Paul writes in Philippians 2:8, “And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, *even the death of the cross.*”

Imagine yourself in Christ’s situation, with the skin flayed off so that you could count all your bones. Add to that the searing pain of huge nails being pounded into your hands and ankles as soldiers pinned you to the stake. Now add the emotional pain of being denied and forsaken by all your friends. Thank God for the many

women who stood by Jesus at that moment of horror—Mary His mother, Mary Magdalene and others (Matthew 27:55-56). On top of everything else, He had to endure the taunts and ridicules of those for whom He was dying.

Then Jesus experienced yet another horror for the first time: being forsaken by God in heaven. God dumped all the obnoxious sins of the world on Jesus and had to turn His back on Him who became sin for us (Isaiah 53:6, 10-12; I Peter 2:24). How hauntingly mournful it must have sounded to hear Jesus cry out, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, ‘My God, My God, WHY have You forsaken me?’” (Matthew 27:46-47). At this point, Jesus learned what it felt like to be cut off from God because of sin.

The pain grew so great that when

Jesus said He thirsted, the Roman soldiers at the foot of His cross offered Him a brew of “vinegar” or sour wine mixed with myrrh as a sedative (John 19:28-29; Mark 15:23). Jesus refused it, knowing He had to suffer pain as part of the picture of what sin does in our lives: *causes a lot of gruesome pain!*

After a while on the stake, the condemned person found it difficult to breathe, He could help himself a little by bracing his body upward with his legs and knees, but once he could no longer do this, he slowly died by asphyxiation. To hasten death, the Roman executioners would sometimes break the victim’s legs with a club—which they did to the two robbers (John 19:31-32). When they came

Please see page 19

## Was Jesus Stabbed Before or After He Died?

Diligent study of the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus Christ can lead to a host of questions, especially about the timing of events. One question bound to surface concerns the Roman soldier who “pierced His side with a spear” (John 19:34). Did this occur before or after His death? A simple reading through the gospel accounts would seem to answer this question conclusively. The three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) do not mention the incident, while John addresses it *after* Jesus “gave up His spirit” (19:30). Where is the controversy?

The contention arises from a *verse that is not even there!* The King James Version leaves out the last part of Matthew 27:49, though it is present in the most ancient manuscripts: “And another took a spear, and thrust it into His side, and out came water and blood.” The Moffatt and Fenton translations both include this additional material. What makes it controversial is where these words appear: just *before* Jesus “yielded up His spirit” (verse 50). Which is right?

They both are! The problem is in the translation of John 19:34: “But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.” The culprit is a common Greek tense called the aorist tense.

Spiros Zodhiates, in *The Complete Word Study New Testament*, explains:

The Aorist Tense is used for simple, undefined action. In the indicative mood, the aorist tense can indicate punctiliar action (action that happens at a specific point in time) in the past. . . . With few exceptions, whenever the aorist tense is used in any mood other than the indicative, the verb does not have any temporal significance. In other words, *it refers only to the reality of an event or action, not to the time when it took place.* (Emphasis ours.)

Modern translators, however, often render the aorist tense into English as simple past tense. Granted, most of the time this is correct, but in John 19:34 it is an error.

The missing portion of Matthew 27:49 supplies the timing; the soldier thrust his spear *BEFORE* Christ died. In John 19:34, the apostle John describes an event that had happened previously as proof that Jesus had fulfilled the prophecies of Psalm 34:20 and Zechariah 12:10. Thus, a correct translation of this verse is, “But one of the soldiers *had pierced* His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water *had come out.*”

How do we know this is correct?

1. Matthew 27:50 records that Jesus suddenly “cried out again with a loud voice” and died. The spear thrust, acting as a *coup de grace*, neatly accounts for His scream of pain, as well as His quick death.

2. Dead bodies do not bleed. Doctors jump through hoops trying to explain how “water and blood” could pour out of a corpse, saying that “in rare instances” such a thing is possible. However, if the spear thrust was pre-death, no such explanation is necessary.

Jesus was stabbed *before* He died.

## ISRAEL: *FUTURE*

The descendants of Israel, scattered from their God-given homeland by war, captivity and migration, eventually found a home in northwestern Europe. From there, some of them took to the seas, colonizing distant lands across vast oceans. These colonies became great nations themselves—the United States, Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand. Most modern Israelites have no idea who they are and what is in store for them in the coming years and beyond.

The nations of Israel lead the world in numerous categories—the good as well as the bad. Though they are among the wealthiest nations, they are also near the top in crime, addiction, divorce and sexual disease. Though Israelite nations define the cutting edge of technology, they also head the list in using these technologies for pornography, fraud and espionage. As we heard so often in the past, this world, especially the Israelite world, is a paradox of astounding progress amidst appalling evils.

Where will this lead? James writes, “Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? . . . Thus no spring can yield both salt water and fresh” (James 3:11-12; see Haggai 2:11-14). This illustrates a principle apropos to the future of Israel. Their “spring,” in generating such quantities of evil, defiles whatever good they also produce. Such an excess of sin invokes another principle, found in Deuteronomy 28:15, 20:

But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments . . . , that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you. . . .

The LORD will send on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the wickedness of your doings in which you have forsaken Me.

Leviticus 18:24-25 puts it a little more colorfully:

Do not defile yourselves with any of these things [sexual sins]; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants.

Just as the Assyrians drove the ancient people of Israel from their land, so again will modern Israel reap the whirlwind for its sins (Hosea 8:7).

### War, Captivity and Exile!

An objective observer of the world scene might scoff at such a pronouncement, saying, “These nations are too strong and wealthy to fall, even with all their problems!” Such an observer fails to consider how involved God is in world events; He makes and breaks nations to suit His purpose, and He will do so with His people, Israel. The fall of Israel will not be prolonged either:

Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel: “Because you despise this word, and trust in oppression and perversity, and rely on them, therefore this iniquity shall be to you like a breach ready to fall, a bulge in a high wall, whose breaking comes

*suddenly, in an instant.* And he shall break it like the breaking of the potter’s vessel, which is broken in pieces; He shall not spare. . . .” (Isaiah 30:12-14)

The most severe part of God’s punishment for sin begins with war:

But you are those who forsake the LORD. . . . Therefore I will number you for the sword, and you shall all bow down to the slaughter; because, when I called, you did not answer . . . , but did evil before My eyes, and chose that in which I do not delight. (Isaiah 65:11-12)

Jeremiah 5:15-17 adds more detail:

“Behold, I will bring a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel,” says the LORD. “It is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know. . . . They are all mighty men. And they shall eat up your harvest and your bread, which your sons and daughters should eat. . . . They shall destroy your fortified cities, in which you trust, with the sword.”

The church has long thought that this “mighty . . . ancient nation” is modern Assyria, known today as Germany, which will lead the revived Holy Roman Empire in the end time (Isaiah 10:5-11; Daniel 11:40-12:1; Revelation 17:7-18).

War is not the only calamity the nations of Israel need to fear:

Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could

not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth. . . . Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity. (Jeremiah 15:1-2)

Ezekiel 5:12 gives a rough estimate of the proportions of the devastation God pours out on his rebellious people:

One-third of you shall die of the pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst; and one-third shall fall by the sword all around you; and I will scatter [into captivity and exile] another third to all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them.

As sins and perversions mount, the outlook for our nations is dim. There seems little hope of avoiding this terrible punishment from God—unless, like Nineveh in Jonah’s day—the people repent. Then God would turn

his anger:

‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’ (Ezekiel 33:11).

However, unless the peoples’ attitudes change drastically, repentance seems highly unlikely.

## A Second Exodus

If this were the end, this would be a terribly tragic story! The good news is that God loves Israel and does not punish them without cause. He, as a wise Father, disciplines His children to cause them to change, to repent! Yet Israel is so stiff-necked, so stubborn (Ezekiel 2:3-7), that they refuse to yield to God until they have suffered terrible devastation and death.

Hosea describes what God must do to get their attention:

For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion

to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear them and go away; I will take them away, and no one shall rescue. I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; in their affliction they will diligently seek Me. (Hosea 5:14-15)

Once He gets their attention and they turn to Him, God is quick to help them:

Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days [years (?) of Jacob’s Trouble] he will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight. (Hosea 6:1-2)

Jeremiah 30:7-11 speaks further of Jacob’s Trouble and God’s deliverance of Israel:

“Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the



time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day," says the LORD of hosts, "that I will break his yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds; foreigners shall no more enslave them. But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them. Therefore do not fear, O My servant Jacob," says the LORD, "nor be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet, and no one shall make him afraid. For I am with you," says the LORD, "to save you; though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, and will not let you go altogether unpunished."

Once Israel has learned its lesson, God will regather the people and bring them back into their land:

Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "O LORD, save Your people, the remnant of Israel!" Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the ends of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and the one who labors with child, together; a great throng shall return there. . . . Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, . . . and say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock." (Jeremiah 31:7-8, 10)

This will truly be a SECOND exodus:

It shall come to pass in that day that the LORD shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people who are left, from Assyria and Egypt [and other nations]. . . . He will . . . assemble the outcasts of

Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. (Isaiah 11:11-12)

God will not regather them just for old times' sake; He has a specific reason for assembling Israel after their punishment:

I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face. . . . I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they sojourn, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD. (Ezekiel 20:35, 37-38)

All of this takes place so God can bring Israel to conversion (Ezekiel 36:24-28)! This is a very important step in God's plan because He again desires Israel to be the model nation, showing the rest of the world how to live God's way (Isaiah 60:3; 61:11-62:5,12; 66:19; Ezekiel 28:25). Finally, Israel will do what God originally intended them to do from the beginning!

## Millennium and Beyond

With Israel back in its own land and fulfilling its role as a model nation (Ezekiel 37:22-28), the earth will have peace, prosperity and security (Ezekiel 28:26). The land will be cared for as God instructs, and it will produce bountifully.

"Behold the days are coming," says the LORD, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them." (Amos

9:13-14; see Ezekiel 36:28-30; Joel 2:18-19, 21-26; 3:18)

As Amos mentions, Israel will rebuild the ancient cities and repair the ruins to make them habitable again. Ezekiel writes:

On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. . . . So they will say, "This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited." (Ezekiel 36:33, 35; see Isaiah 58:12).

This remnant of Israel, living according to God's ways, will not only assist in the conversion of the rest of the world, but they will also be rearing their children in righteousness (Isaiah 49:22-25; 54:13; 59:21; 65:23). God will give them a pure language so they can truly worship Him (Zephaniah 3:9). Everything about Israel will be cleansed and purified as befits a holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6; Zechariah 13:9; Malachi 3:2-3).

As we saw in Jeremiah 30:9, God will resurrect David to be king over all Israel under Jesus Christ (see Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Hosea 3:5). Under King David, the twelve apostles will each rule over one of the tribes (Luke 22:29-30). The land will be divided among the tribes (Ezekiel 48:1-29), with "a district for the LORD, a holy portion of the land" (45:1) and for "the city" (verse 6) and "the prince" (verse 7).

This section of Ezekiel (chapters 40-48) shows that a new Temple will be built, and the priests and Levites will conduct the rituals,

...and they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. In controversy they shall stand as judges, and judge it according to My judgments. They shall keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed meetings, and they shall hallow My Sabbaths. (Ezekiel 44:23-24)

God's way will be followed with great care, and those who do not follow it will be excluded and punished (verses 5-9; Zechariah 14:16-19).

These conditions will continue into the time beyond the Millennium. The tribes of Israel will remain prominent in God's government, for their names will be written on the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:12). God says of that time:

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying. . . . For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me,” says the LORD, “so shall your descendants and your name remain.” (Isaiah 65:17-19; 66:22)

Israel will be a joy to God throughout eternity, and they will help Him in creating forever!

### All Israel Saved

Though the coming days are dark and terrible, the people of Israel have a glorious future to anticipate and prepare for! God is working out His marvelous purpose to bring Israel into His Family and give them eternal life in His Kingdom. Paul says, “And so all Israel shall be saved” (Romans 11:26).

Yet for now, “God has committed them all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all” (verse 32). Before it is all over, Israel will be chastened severely for its sins. Many—maybe 90%—will die! But those who remain will be humbled and ready to submit to God and His law (Jeremiah 50:4-5). They will WANT and PLEAD FOR God's forgiveness, redemption and salvation, and He will give it to them gladly (Hosea 2:14-23)!

We, too, must be ready for the return of our Savior and His Kingdom to this earth, for we will be instrumental in helping humbled Israel repent and learn God's way. We

may be the ones spoken of in Isaiah 30:20-21:

And though the Lord gives you [Israel] the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,” whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.

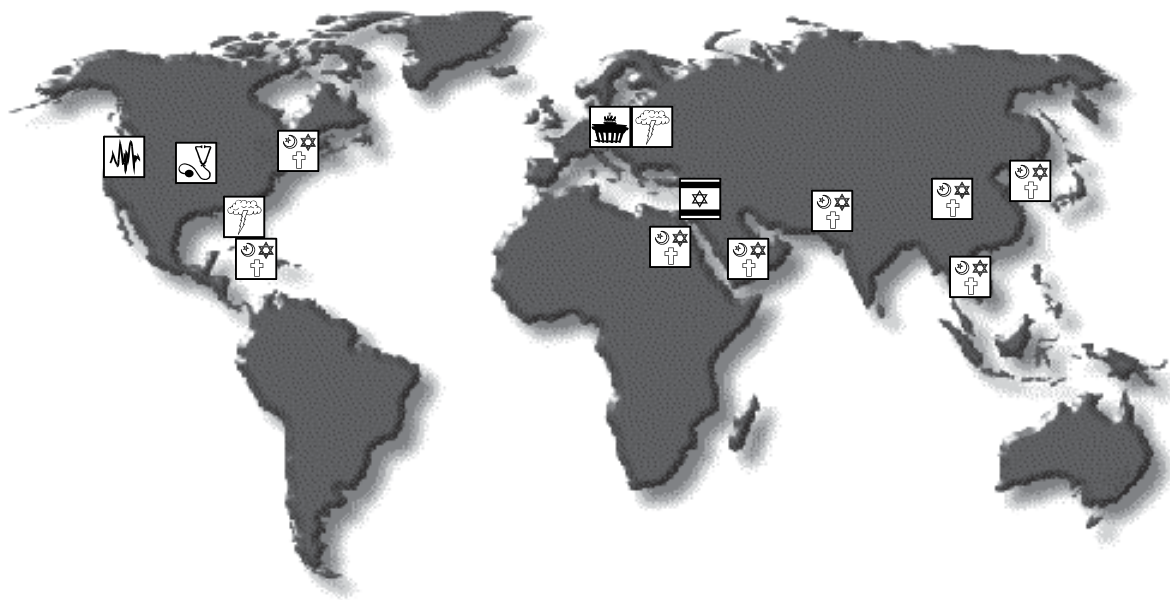
As Isaiah 52:7-8 seems to imply, the resurrected sons of God will be the ones to bring the good news of God's salvation and reign to His people.

For this reason and many others, we need to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (II Peter 3:18), purify ourselves as He is pure (I John 3:3) and seek His Kingdom and His righteousness first (Matthew 6:33). Thus we will be preparing to assist our Savior in making Israel's future truly wonderful!

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh



# World Watch



## Earthquakes



A federal scientist has discovered two new faults under Puget Sound that are capable of generating quakes of 6.5 or greater in the Seattle, Washington, area. Another known fault under Seattle is moving faster than scientists had estimated, meaning it could be more dangerous than previously thought.

## Weather



◆ In late January, a three-night freeze in Florida killed the bean, corn, zucchini and squash crops for some of the biggest winter vegetable growers, resulting in at least \$10 million damage. Dade County produces more than half of the nation's winter fruits and vegetables.

◆ Two geologists say the 1995-96 winter was a "mini ice age" in the northern reaches of Germany. *Geo* magazine reported that the Baltic Island of Rugen had the coldest winter of the past century and a half, with 126 days of sub-freezing temperatures.

## Religion



◆ Liberal Roman Catholics in New York called on the church's leadership to "catch up" with its members and relax its position on ordination of women, celibacy and homosexuality. Members of We Are Church are calling on the church to give lay people a voice in the selection of pastors and bishops and to allow them to exercise their judgment on issues like birth control—because a silent majority are doing this already.

◆ Because of communist and/or Islamic political ideologies, China, Sudan, Pakistan, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Egypt, Nigeria, Cuba, Laos and Uzbekistan are

actively persecuting Christians. The 500 known imprisonments are, according to experts, only "the tip of the iceberg."

## Israel



A U.S. Congressional Task Force report warns that Syria, Iran, Iraq and the Palestinian Authority are cooperating in preparation for imminent war with Israel. The PLO is rapidly building a chain of well-fortified command centers, ammunition and weapons-storage areas underground in Gaza. They are also stockpiling anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons and missiles, though these are forbidden by the Oslo Accords.

## Disease



Of the ten most frequently reported infectious diseases in 1995, five of them were sexually transmitted diseases (STD), accounting for 87% of newly reported infections. Annually, 12 million new cases of STDs are reported, 3 million of them among teens. The Centers for Disease Control found that two-thirds of young women have little or no knowledge of STDs, and 72% say they are not concerned about contracting one, though they comprise the group with the highest risk.

## Germany



The defense ministers of Germany, France and Poland signed an inclusive defense and security agreement. A coordinating committee will draft proposals for common military and security policies. The presidency of the committee will rotate among the three nations annually, beginning with France.

— Andy Benedetto

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# THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

continued from page 7

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Six times in this one chapter, God links idolatry and breaking the Sabbath as causes of their captivity. It is accurate to understand Sabbath breaking as just another form of idolatry. God gave the Sabbath to Israel and to us that we might know the true God, be sanctified, fulfill our purpose in witnessing of Him before the world and be changed and inherit His Kingdom. Israel failed utterly. God cut them off, and they went back into slavery and captivity.

Hebrews 10:25-31 gives a New Covenant version of the same scenario:

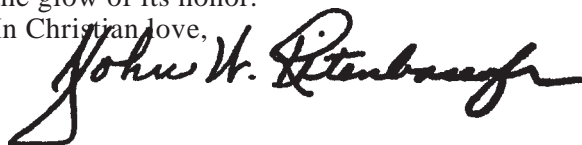
... not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Considering Ezekiel 20 and what happened with Israel, that God's rest is introduced earlier in Hebrews 4 and that assembling is mentioned here make an inference of the Sabbath in these sobering verses seem inescapable. The Sabbath commandment is just as important as any of the other nine.

Why have the Sabbath? Because we are human; because we need physical rest; because without it we are so bound up in the physical world; because we need a frequently recurring reminder of God's spiritual creation; because God is working out a specific purpose. We need time to fellowship with God—time to be taught God's way of life, to contemplate its meaning and application, to evaluate our progress, to fellowship with those of like mind and to escape the social inequities of this world.

No other commandment so identifies with God's purpose. What a blessing it is! Let's celebrate this memorial to our Creator and His purpose that we might also share in the glow of its honor.

In Christian love,



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# WHY DID JESUS HAVE TO DIE BY CRUCIFIXION?

continued from page 13

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to Jesus, they found Him already dead and so did not break any of His bones (verse 33; Psalm 34:20).

Jesus did not die of a broken heart, as Protestants believe. He bled to death from dozens of wounds from the scourging, the spikes driven through his limbs and a gaping spear wound in His side, out of which flowed blood and water. He truly poured out his blood like water to cover our sins (Psalm 22:14; Ephesians 1:7; I John 1:7).

Jesus gasped, "It is finished" (John 19:30), and finally to the Father, who gave Him to us because He loved us so much, our Savior prayed, "Into your hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46). So Jesus died with a quiet confidence that He had finished the work His Father had sent Him to do.

## Appreciating the Crucifixion

So Jesus died, but not just any death. He died the death of a convicted criminal, put to death by execution in the most painful and shameful way man could devise. He had to die this way to remind us that sin is not painless. It is not shameless. Sin does not remain hidden in a corner.

The crucifixion showed the horror, the ugly and disgusting shame, the heaviness and the suffering caused by sin. All sin. Every sin. Even "tiny" sins. Even "secret" sins. Your sins. My sins. All of them.

It is so easy to sin and think, "I can repent later." This comes perilously close to taking the crucifixion for granted as we put Jesus to open shame, pain and a slow gruesome death. Let's understand and appreciate what He did for us more than ever. Perhaps it can help us become more aware of sin and more determined to resist it!

At the moment the sharp point of the Roman spear sliced open Jesus' side, the veil of the temple tore in two (Matthew 27:50-51). Jesus, our High Priest, opened the way for all of us—any time we wish—to enter the Holiest of all, the very presence of the Father. The Captain of our salvation gave us this access by His torn body and shed blood to cleanse us of all sin (Hebrews 10:19-22). The cross or stake became the symbol of what He did for us: die in our stead so we can be forgiven of all sin.

After His resurrection, as Mary Magdalene was about to embrace Him (John 20:17), Jesus made a very meaningful comment: "I am ascending to My Father *and your Father*, and to My God and your God." Wow! Because of what He had just done, this statement was possible. We now have the same Father Jesus has! And we gained one awesome big brother—Jesus Christ!

As we drink the wine and eat the broken bread this Passover, let us praise God in gratitude for giving us His Son, and thank Jesus who willingly gave Himself in our behalf. We can now appreciate more than ever why He had to be crucified.

—Staff

# BIBLE STUDY: THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

The third commandment deals with God's name, His character, His office, His position as the great sovereign Ruler of the universe: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11). In biblical terms, personal names have a meaning, for they usually describe some aspect of the person's character. So it is with God's name. The Bible reveals Him under different names, each given with a purpose: to set forth some distinct virtue or characteristic of His nature.

In this commandment, the Hebrew word rendered "guiltless" may also be translated "clean." A person is clean or unclean according to how he uses the name of God, whether in truth or in vanity. A person who continually talks about God but denies Him in his daily life is unclean; he is guilty of breaking the law of God, a sinner. If we use God's name in a way that denies the true meaning and character of God, we break the third commandment. As we can easily see, God is greatly concerned about how we use His name.



1. What was one of the abominations practiced by the heathens who possessed Canaan before the Israelites arrived? Leviticus 18:1-3, 21b. Had these nations defiled themselves and the land because of this? Verses 24-27. Did God warn Israel not to repeat this sin? Verses 28-30.

**COMMENT:** God said these other nations had defiled themselves and the land because they had violated the third commandment, "taking the name of God in vain." We break this commandment, not only in speech, but also by using or bearing His name in an unworthy, profane way in our conduct.

2. How has Israel profaned God's name? Malachi 1:11-14. Should we pray for humility and for God to do His will in our lives to avoid profaning His name? Proverbs 30:7-9. How can we properly fear His name? Deuteronomy 28:58.

**COMMENT:** Israel profaned God's name by giving offerings in a lying and deceitful attitude, as Ananias and Sapphira did (Acts 5:1-11). They kept the best animals for themselves while offering blemished ones to God. We fear God's name, not only by keeping all of God's law—including the statutes and judgments—but also by giving God our best effort in doing His will.

3. Should we hallow God's name when we pray? Matthew 6:9.

**COMMENT:** To hallow God's name means to make it holy or set it apart for holy use, respecting it greatly. We hallow His name by obeying Him in all our conduct. Conversely, prayer without obedience is a form of blasphemy (Matthew 7:21, Mark 7:6-7), as is praise offered to God in the attitude of rebellion against His way. It is vain or vanity—useless and contemptible.

4. Should we exalt, praise and love God's name? Psalm 34:3; 54:6; 69:36; 92:1. Do the faithful put their trust in Him or just his name? Psalm 9:10.

**COMMENT:** The attributes that God's names express reveal His character and affect the way we worship Him. God names Himself what He is. The faithful do not trust in what God is called, for this would be mere superstition. Their faith is in what He is, His character and nature,

which they have experienced by seeking to live His way. 5. What happens if we blaspheme or curse God's name? Leviticus 24:16. Is it appropriate to swear by His name? Matthew 5:34-35. Is it enough to mention God's name at our convenience? Isaiah 48:1-2. Will frequent repetition of God's name help us to enter His Kingdom? Matthew 6:7; 7:21.

**COMMENT:** God's name is so sacred and holy that Jesus commands us not to invoke it to back up our words or our oath. A simple affirmation by a God-fearing Christian is far more reliable than thousands of oaths by a liar. Those to whom this prophecy applies in Matthew 7:21 use God's names, but fail to obey His revelation of Himself contained in them.

6. Did Jesus come to reveal and declare the name of the Father? John 17:6, 26. What role does God's truth play regarding His name? Verses 11-19.

**COMMENT:** Notice that Jesus never mentions how to pronounce the Father's name. Salvation is not based on its pronunciation! Far more important is doing the will of God, an absolute necessity in truly fearing His name. The Father's name guards us from evil by the Word of God which is truth.

7. Is a good name important? Proverbs 22:1. What is our obligation regarding God's name? Isaiah 43:6-7, 10-12.

**COMMENT:** A good name can be a great asset. God often gives "for My name's sake" as the reason He acts (Isaiah 48:9-11). He is simply preserving His reputation. And since from baptism we bear His name (Matthew 28:19), we have a profound duty to uphold all that His name represents. We are witnesses that our God is God. If we fail to live up to that name's reputation, we break the third commandment and profane the name of God.

8. Will those who are faithful in obeying God receive the name of God themselves? Revelation 3:12.

**COMMENT:** When God resurrects us into His Kingdom, He will give us names to designate our existence, nature and responsibility in the Kingdom. We are assured of carrying God's own name if we overcome sin. What a tremendous reward to bear His name for all eternity!